Livelihood Implications of Large-Scale Land Concessions in Mozambique

A case of family farmers' endurance

Juliana Porsani

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To Lina, Clara, and Theodor

Abstract

This thesis examines the process and the implications of large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) for local livelihoods, especially the livelihoods of those who make a living from farming. These individuals were historically known as peasants and are now more commonly referred to as smallholders, small-scale farmers or family farmers. What happens to their livelihoods as land under their control is allocated to investors?

Promoters of LSLAs stress that when land acquisitions are preceded by community consultations, there may be synergism between investors' activities and local livelihoods. Accordingly, local farmers are expected to gain from, for example, closer ties to the market and new livelihood alternatives such as formal employment. Differently, critical voices contend that despite sound legislation on the matter, in practice LSLAs constitute drivers of dispossession, being therefore disguised land grabs. This research seeks to fill a knowledge gap on the immediate local livelihood implications of LSLAs. By employing a case study design in Mozambique (one of the countries targeted by recent LSLAs), this thesis adds empirical evidence that is crucial to the above-named theoretical debate involving LSLAs.

The analyzed case is pivoted by a Chinese company that in 2012 was granted 20,000 hectares in the lower Limpopo region. Despite legislation that asserts the legality of customary land occupation, in practice, land was seized without adequate consultation and compensation. Consequently, local farmers lost the most fertile areas. Nonetheless, farmers were able to regain or maintain access to farmland that was more peripheral and of worse quality. Concomitantly, the company generated a small number of jobs and created a contract farming scheme that, despite bottlenecks, benefited farmers who were able to handle risk. In general, families who lost land and those who entered the contract farming scheme strive to keep a foothold on farmland – a strategy that is partly explained by the economic rationale of seeking to meet the consumption needs of current and future generations. Additionally, family land is embedded with symbolic value (illustrated, for example, by individuals' relations with ancestors buried in family land). The existence of symbolic and thus immaterial values that land embodies poses insurmountable challenges to the idea that it is possible to achieve fair compensation for the loss of land and the environment in general.

This study shows the renewed pressure (now through the hands of private actors backed by public efforts) placed on family farmers, derived livelihood trends (i.e., the overall precarization of family farming, the widening of economic inequality, and the feminization of poverty), and family farmers' continuous endurance. Ultimately, this study illustrates local processes and livelihood implications of LSLAs in Mozambique, and likely also in contexts marked by similar democratic deficits and renewed incursions over valuable land that is intensively used.

Keywords: Large-scale land acquisitions, land concessions, land grabs, livelihoods, family farmers, peasants, gender, community consultations, popular deliberation, cultural ecosystem services, Mozambique, Lower Limpopo Valley.

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Stockholm, 10 September 2020

Juliana Porsani

Contents

List of Articles

This thesis is based on the following articles referred to in the text by the Roman numerals (I–V):

Article I:
Porsani, J., Börjeson, L. and Lehtilä, K. 2017. Land Concessions and Rural Livelihoods in Mozambique: The gap between anticipated and real benefits of a Chinese investment in the Limpopo Valley. Journal of Southern African Studies, 43(6):1181-1198. DOI: 10.1080/03057070.2017.1377932.

Article II:
Porsani, J., Caretta, M. A. and Lehtilä, K. 2018. Large-scale land acquisitions aggravate the feminization of poverty: Findings from a case study in Mozambique. GeoJournal, 84:215–236. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-017-9836-1.

Article III:
Porsani, J. and Lalander, R. 2018. Why Does Deliberative Community Consultation in Large-Scale Land Acquisitions Fail? A critical analysis of Mozambican experiences. Iberoamerican Journal of Development Studies, 7(2):164-193.
DOI: 10.26754/ojs_ried/ijds.274.

Article IV:
Porsani, J., Börjeson, L., Lalander, R., Lehtilä, K. and Martins, A. (forthcoming). Enriching perspectives – experienced ecosystem services in rural Mozambique and the importance of a gendered livelihood approach to resist reductionist analyses of local culture. Accepted in Ecology and Society.

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Applicable to all of the above articles:

Main author; acquired funding for fieldwork; conceptualized and planned the study; conducted fieldwork; analyzed the data; drafted and reviewed manuscript. Co-authors provided feedback on conceptualization and planning; conducted fieldwork referent to article IV; performed statistical data analysis; and reviewed and edited manuscripts.

Introduction

Since the 2007-2008 food and financial crisis, reports on a wave of large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) in developing countries have gained media and scholarly attention (De Schutter 2011; Grain 2012; Edelman et al. 2013; Hall 2013). Scholars noted investors' interest in land for agricultural purposes, particularly in places deemed to have high and underutilized agricultural potential (Deininger and Byerlee 2011).

On the one hand, these acquisitions embodied the promise of win-win deals firmed between investors and local inhabitants. This line of argumentation asserted the efficiency of business-oriented large-scale farming and suggested that the allocation of land to private investors, under the right legislative framework, could be synergistic with local inhabitants' livelihoods (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009; Deininger and Byerlee 2011). On the other hand, concerns mounted that these acquisitions were in fact land grabs, concealed by overoptimistic legal or voluntary frameworks that envisage mutually beneficial partnerships (Li 2011; Moyo et al. 2012; Hall 2013). Understanding if and how livelihoods are being affected by LSLAs is instrumental to this debate. Previous studies have therefore expressed the need for empirical evidence to fill the knowledge gap concerning the implications of LSLAs to local livelihoods (Edelman 2013; Oya 2013).

A large share of LSLAs occurred in sub-Saharan African countries, where a substantial part of the population is rural and has livelihoods directly reliant on farmland (Deininger and Byerlee 2011). Historically, these individuals have been called peasants and comprised most of the world's population. Today, they are more commonly referred to as "smallholders", "small-scale farmers", or "family farmers". These are relative terms that, despite accommodating considerable variations, indicate substantial differences from large-scale commercial farms that are capital-intensive and hire most of their labor (Moyo 2016). Worldwide, it has been estimated that there are at least 500 million small-scale family farms[1] (FAO 2014; Lowder et al. 2014). In Sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that at least 60 percent of the population relies on small-scale family farming (Livingston et al. 2011).

I focus on Mozambique, which is one of the countries that has been intensively targeted by land investors since the 2007–2008 food and financial crisis (Nhatumbo and Salomão 2010; Deininger and Byerlee 2011; Edelman et al. 2013). A central object of analysis of this study is the livelihoods of so-called peasants, smallholders, small-scale farmers, or family farmers. I use these terms in different analytical contexts as translations to those who, in Mozambican literature, are usually called camponeses.

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[1] Of a total of at least 570 million farms, see Lowder et al. 2014.

In Mozambique, camponeses comprise a heterogeneous group of people among whom farming is usually done with family labor (even if hired day labor is also used to different extents); in a labor-intensive manner (although some level of mechanization exists and is aspired); usually in small fields of up to two hectares where intercropping instead of monocropping prevails (although there is variation of field sizes with some fields being considerably larger); and attentive largely to consumption needs (although commercial exchange and other ends, such as donation, exist and are aspired) (Mozambican Government 1995; Mozambican Republic 2015). They comprise approximately 70 percent of the approximately 28 million inhabitants (Mozambican Government 2015). In fact, of the approximately 4 million agricultural fields of the country that are estimated to occupy around 4.7 million hectares – of a total of 36 million hectares of arable land (Mozambican Republic 2013, p. 17) – 84 percent were less than 2 hectares, and 14 percent were between 2 and 5 hectares (Mozambican Government 2015).[2]

Building on a case study design, this thesis seeks to provide empirical data from the ground and to contribute therefore to fill the knowledge gap on the ongoing livelihood implications of recent LSLAs. According, it seeks to answer whether, how and why local livelihoods – especially camponeses' livelihoods – are affected by LSLAs in Mozambique. In answering these questions, this thesis focuses on a case in southern Mozambique, where a private Chinese company (Wanbao Africa Agriculture Development LLC) was granted a land concession in December 2012.

This thesis comprises four articles and this summary text (or "kappa" in Swedish). The articles make use of partly different theories, bodies of literature, and concepts (which I considered pertinent for interpreting and analyzing the findings), namely, livelihoods, feminization of poverty, popular deliberation, and ecosystem services. Altogether, the articles speak of the past, the present, and the prospects of individuals striving to make a living directly from family farming. Their findings contribute to a greater understanding of how current LSLAs are shaping family farmers' present and future livelihood alternatives. They show, among other things, renewed pressures that reinforce the precarization of family farming and increase local economic and gender inequalities. Furthermore, and despite this overall precarization, findings stress the endurance of family farmers, the explanation for which transcends the material economic rationale of meeting consumption needs and encompasses also the existence of immaterial values embedded in farmland and the environment in general.

Since there are robust bodies of literature and long-standing discussions on peasants, to more coherently contextualize my findings historically and in relation to wider experiences, I have anchored this kappa on the theoretical views and debates surrounding the peasantry. The understanding of how peasants have been con-

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[2] How much arable land is indeed used or available has nonetheless been a matter of debate. Some sources state that only 10 percent of the 36 million ha are used (Mozambican Republic 2011, p. 13); other studies state that there is virtually no idle or empty land in Mozambique (Norfolk et al. 2020).

ceptualized and approached is important since such conceptualization underscores mainstream strategies directed at the agricultural sector and rural spaces (which include current LSLAs).

This thesis is structured as follows. In the next subsection, I list my research aims and research questions. Then, I explain and justify my methodological choices. Subsequently, I provide an overview of the main perspectives on the peasantry. I then provide a historical overview of Mozambique since colonial times focusing on agricultural strategies and rural livelihoods. Next, I explain Mozambique's current efforts that hold land investors essential in consolidating commercial large-scale agriculture. Following the theoretical and contextual backgrounds, I present the area of study, the lower Limpopo valley. Thereafter, I provide the summary of each article and discuss the main findings, thereby answering the research questions. Finally, the articles are presented integrally, thus concluding this thesis.

Research aims and research questions

Having in mind the recent wave of LSLAs in sub-Saharan African countries – where a substantial part of the population relies on small-scale, partly family driven, labor-intensive, and consumption-oriented farming – the overall aim of this thesis was to understand and explain the implications of these projects for the directly affected livelihoods. The specific aims of this thesis were to 1) describe past and current livelihoods in the study area; 2) describe and analyze ongoing livelihood changes and trends driven by recent LSLAs; 3) explain these changes and trends; and ultimately 4) assess these changes and trends vis à vis claims that LSLAs can include and benefit or, alternatively, jeopardize, local livelihoods.

Accordingly, the overarching questions orienting this thesis are as follows:

1. How and why are local livelihoods affected by LSLAs?

- What are the implications of LSLAs for local livelihoods, specifically for family farmers' livelihoods?
- Are implications homogenous and widespread? If not, who experiences positive versus negative implications, in which ways, and why?
- What are the main livelihood trends, particularly in relation to expectations of new livelihood alternatives vis à vis family farming?

2. Is it accurate to say that LSLAs are mainly championing processes of livelihood improvement or, on the contrary, of impairment from a local livelihood perspective? Why?

To answer the above questions and thus meet the above aims, I have conducted four studies that became four different articles. Altogether, by focusing on different themes,

making use of partly different theories, and addressing complementary questions, the articles seek to provide comprehensive answers to the above overarching questions.

Methodology

This section explains aspects that were not addressed in the articles mainly due to lack of space. Here, I present the research methodology, describe the research process and explain my efforts to maximize the accuracy of the data. Last, I reflect on and explain central ethics-related decisions, that concerned myself as the researcher, the respondents, and research assistants.

In this research, I utilize a case study design, which is justified by my focus on contemporary real-life processes (i.e., capturing people's experiences in relation to LSLAs). I use Yin's definition of case study: "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin 2003, p. 13).

To answer the research questions and thus achieve the goals of my research, which are both descriptive and explanatory, I employed a mixed-methods approach that combined qualitative and quantitative methods, i.e., review of scholarly and grey material, direct observations, focus groups, interviews, informal conversations, and surveys (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Teddlie and Yu 2007).

The methods were performed in a sequential manner, starting with more open-ended and thus qualitative methods and, when I deemed it appropriate, ending with more closed-ended surveys. This order was adopted for two reasons: first, surveys did not aim primarily to gather new information but served as a means to triangulate and double-check some of the central findings obtained through the qualitative methods (Mathison 1988; Seale 1999); and, secondly, because it felt impractical to administer a meaningful survey without first acquiring a thorough understanding of the local perspectives on the issues under investigation.

Although I utilize quantitative data in a mixed methods approach, my case study design relies primarily on qualitative data since the latter had analytical prominence. Furthermore, data were analyzed continuously and not only afterwards, through what Merriam and Tisdell call an "emergent" research design (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, p. 195). In other words, decisions about who exactly I was going to interview and which exact questions I was going to pose were taken as new data were obtained and analyzed.

This emergent and flexible research design is also apparent in the choice of methods and respondents, and in the choice of theories and concepts used to analyze findings (Maxwell 2009). Thus, neither methods nor theories were set in stone beforehand. Instead, they were subjected to constant review as new findings were obtained.

For example, the composition of groups was decided when it became apparent that women were more often single vis à vis men. Additionally, the decision to perform a survey was made after I had conducted a range of qualitative methods and deemed important to double-check findings one extra time.

Furthermore, prior to the initial fieldwork, I reviewed literature and theories closely related to the topic of large-scale land acquisitions. When doing so, I tried to keep a position as neutral as possible, reading articles and grey literature that spoke for and against these processes based on different theoretical perspectives. This initial literature review was instrumental to my first fieldwork, since it helped me to make sense of what I observed. Initially, I also reviewed the broad literature on Mozambican history, culture and current news, which provided me with a general understanding of the overall context. However, as the study advanced, I had to go back to literature several times, both broadening and sharpening the theoretical lenses used to interpret and analyze the findings (Collins and Stockton 2018).

Accordingly, flexibility was instrumental to my research, which is illustrated by the combination of deductive and inductive thinking in relation to theories, i.e., 1) I started off with literature on land acquisitions; 2) conducted initial fieldwork and understood that the theoretical scope went beyond what literature on LSLAs addressed (and beyond the material dimension of livelihoods); 3) reviewed additional literature on other theoretical fronts (depeasantization; deliberation; feminization of poverty; ecosystem services); 4) conducted second fieldwork and was able to analyze findings as they were collected and afterwards, in relation to additional theoretical fronts. A flexible research design allowed me therefore to search and use additional literature and theories with better descriptive and explanatory power. This flexible design explains why the different articles relate to different theories. Furthermore, it also explains why the unit of analysis of each article is not limited to livelihoods.

Accordingly, it was increasingly clear to me that, for a holistic understanding of how livelihoods were being affected by LSLAs, the enumeration of general livelihood implications was insufficient – particularly when gender contributed to shape differences in outcomes (as addressed in article II). Furthermore, it also became apparent that as individuals lost land, they were increasingly deprived of not only an important economic resource but also of the right to the environment that embodied additional material and immaterial values – some of which are irreplaceable and therefore not amenable to compensation (as addressed in article IV). Thus, if I had set in stone the theories being used beforehand, I could not have followed the leads that seemed to me the most appropriate to provide an accurate and fair understanding of meaningful aspects concerning the livelihood implications of LSLAs.

Due to several aspects of the case in question, my study ended up being a single-case study. My initial idea was to include at least two sites in Mozambique – a country figuring in the reports as strongly affected by LSLAs and a country where Portuguese is the national official language (which is also my first language). When I first arrived

at Maputo, I met representatives from NGOs (namely, UNAC or National Union of Mozambican Peasants; ORAM or Rural Association for Mutual Help; and Afrika-grupperna from Sweden) to discuss possible cases. Some of the cases had been ongoing for decades (such as the cases of Maragra and Xinxavane), and many of them had not yet been completely launched (such as several cases within the ProSAVANA initiative in the north). Nonetheless, one case involving a private Chinese company (i.e., Wanbao Africa Agriculture Development LLC), had been launched a few months before my arrival, and was relatively close to Maputo so it was of easy access and in an interesting region historically, the Limpopo Valley close to the town of Xai-Xai. In fact, I also visited another site where a land concession was being negotiated near South Africa's frontier, close to Massingir and farther from the capital (Maputo). However, the complexity of the Xai-Xai case made me stay on it for longer than initially planned.

Ultimately, I deemed appropriate to focus on the Xai-Xai case since the findings seemed revealing and telling what is possible in most other cases (see Yin 2003). In other words, this case unfolded not on an isolated region but on a historically famous site, along the national road, only 220 km away from Maputo. I think that what we see in this case is the accepted, the everyday, and likely a euphemistic version of the contemporary local dynamics of land concessions in Mozambique – dynamics that are likely harsher n more isolated parts of the country, away from the media, away from the criticism of NGOs and activists, and away from the analysis of academics. Therefore, I selected and focused on this case.

When investigating different topics, I continued collecting data until findings stopped surprising me, or until I reached what has been called the "data saturation" moment (Marshall 1996). In the initial fieldwork in the middle of 2013, I was alone and expanded my stay one month, staying a total of three months in Mozambique, to reach this data satiation point. During the second fieldwork in the middle of 2017, I stayed in Mozambique for roughly two months; for part of this period, I was accompanied two other researchers, namely, my main supervisor Dr. Kari Lehtilä, and Dr. Angelina Martins, both of whom are cowriters.

Thus, the fieldwork comprised approximately five months of intensive work, usually collecting data from Monday to Saturday, and spending evenings (and usually Sundays) processing part of the data and preparing for the coming days. Through observation; review of grey and scholarly literature (including literature in the archives at the Center of African Studies in Eduardo Mondlane University, documentation and material on the study area and on the land concession available online or shared by the public company "Regadio do Baixo Limpopo" or RBL); interviews with NGO officials, government and RBL officials, individual interviews with local inhabitants, focus groups of different compositions with local inhabitants, surveys, and continuous informal conversations, I think that the investigated topics were comprehensively covered.

To increase the validity and reliability of findings, I relied on triangulation by addressing matters through different methods and by using different sources (i.e., asking about the same matter to different individuals and groups, and continuously discussing ideas and findings with research assistants who were familiar with the study area) (Mathison 1988; Seale 1999; Yin 2003). Furthermore, and having in mind other experiences presented in the literature on Mozambique, I regard the findings from this research as fairly theoretically (or analytically, see Yin 2003, p. 33) generalizable within the Mozambican context and in contexts with similar characteristics.

Nonetheless, it would be inaccurate to say that my research exhausted the topics related to LSLAs in Mozambique. In fact, many other relevant topics could have been covered, which for several reasons (e.g., lack of time, funding, and issues of access) were not. One additional topic that is central to understanding the implications of the analyzed LSLA comprises the experience of individuals who entered a contract farming scheme set up by the company. Through interviews and focus groups during the second fieldwork, I collected data with the intention of writing a fifth article on the theme. This article is still being drafted, but the main findings were advanced in the other articles (see postscript in Article I), in this summary text (under the section "main findings and contributions), and in my chapter for the book "Transformations of Rural Spaces in Mozambique" (Porsani, forthcoming).

Other relevant topics in relation to LSLAs, that could be the focus of additional research in the study area, include, although not only 1) the experiences of the urban population whose food access has likely also worsened (since oftentimes they received agricultural produce from family members who cultivated land in the valley); 2) the implications to the local economy with links and spillover effects from Wanbao's enterprise; 3) the environmental implications of landscape change to local inhabitants but also to the flora and fauna (not less the fauna of the Limpopo River that crosses the land concession); 4) the broader institutional and national level processes that enabled the concession to take place; and 5) the views and experiences of the representatives and workers from Wanbao, as well as governmental officials, including RBL officials, which I attempted to cover without much success.

During the first fieldwork, I obtained rather shallow information from my interviews and conversations with officials from the government, RBL, and representatives from Wanbao; during the second fieldwork, none of them were willing to speak to me which prevented me from transiting through Wanbao's fields and facilities, and from accessing updated official information. Fortunately, my research permit, signed by governmental authorities from Maputo and Xai-Xai during the first fieldwork, was still valid, which enabled me to conduct interviews. A well-positioned contact explained to me that while I was away, other scholars had criticized the project openly, which had led RBL and Wanbao to avoid researchers.

The above topics could be the focus of additional years of study. The ones dependent on interviews with authorities would have to, nonetheless, be conducted by a researcher

with substantially stronger political influence than myself, i.e., a researcher able to successfully negotiate with strong "gatekeepers" (Campbell et al. 2006; Clark 2011).

Throughout the research, I reflected upon eventual implications of my positionality, as a foreigner, a white Latin-American young woman, trying to understand processes that I had no personal experience of, and in a setting in which I resembled the colonizer (Kobayashi 1994; Gold 2002). I reflected upon my own theoretical, methodological, and analytical biases. To maximize my objectivity (and the validity and reliability of the study), when reviewing literature, I actively searched for alternative views and explanations; I tried to address eventual implications of cultural gaps and power dynamics in relation to the methods; and when analyzing data, I constantly searched for additional or alternative clarifications.

On the theorical front this search for objectivity meant that I reviewed literature that was optimistic and literature that was critical to LSLA (by some called land investments whereas by others called land grabs). The possibility existed that those who lost land had gained employment or other livelihood opportunities that were locally perceived as even better ways of making a living. Nonetheless, as the findings mounted, my research became more value-laden on the theoretical front since my voice was more positioned in the land-grabbing debate on the side of those who lost land, who were not consulted, on the side of women, and defending the impossibility to completely compensate for the loss of land that detains multiple material and immaterial values. Still, I have remained open to being contradicted (which is illustrated by my effort to elucidate the somewhat positive experience of contract farmers, as I will explain later in this summary). If LSLAs continue to advance in Mozambique, I hope to be completely contradicted in the future by other studies that find more positive than negative implications for local livelihoods.

Prior to starting fieldwork in the valley, I became affiliated with the Center of African Studies at Eduardo Mondlano University and obtained research permission from the agricultural department in Maputo and in the nearby town of Xai-Xai. In each village, I explained the purpose of the research and started working after receiving the approval from the village leader.

Prior to every interview or focus group, people were re-informed about the research and asked if they would like to participate. I always introduced myself as a curious student in a friendly and open way; I apologized before-hand if they perceived any question as obvious or silly; I asked them to please not answer if they found the question uncomfortable or inappropriate; and I explained that all I knew from Mozambique and livelihoods there came from books that may or may not have been valid. In my experience, exposing myself to respondents in a welcoming and humble way was an effective first step to mitigate eventual feelings of distrust and cultural or power gaps as well as to increase the accuracy of responses (see also Funder 2015).

I undertook fieldwork in the middle of 2013 and in the middle of 2017, when most households had finished the main harvest (the harvesting period in southern Mozam-

bique is from March to May). The interviews and focus groups were guided conversations that revealed many times more than I expected about the issue under investigation (findings that were welcomed by my emergent and flexible research design). Most respondents had never met a researcher and had only answered strict questions from the national census. In contrast with their previous experiences, our interviews and focus groups consisted of long and friendly conversations. To facilitate a relaxed atmosphere, I always served food and soft drinks. Furthermore, I made sure to welcome all questions and wonders (which included aspects over the research and over my own life and background). At the end of interviews and focus groups, respondents received a small gift such as a package of tea or a kilogram of sugar whose price were equivalent to how much an individual would had earned working half a day with farm work.

I reflected on the pros and cons of providing what may be perceived as a payment for participation, and I decided that to compensate people for their time was the fair thing to do (Thompson 1996; Head 2009). The more I learned about local livelihoods (and thus of how people would had spent their time if they were not participating in my study), the more convinced I was that my decision was not only beneficial to my study (since it motivated participation) but it was also an ethical one, which was also confirmed by my research assistants.

I believe that my Brazilian background facilitated the study due to several reasons. First, my fluency in Portuguese which many of the respondents spoke or at least understood enabled conversations. Additionally, being Brazilian contributed to detach me from their experiences of colonial oppression narrated by elders. Additionally, central to pleasant and productive meetings was the work of my assistants who strived to find the right words to translate to respondents who did not fully understand Portuguese, and to explain what was not self-evident to me and to them, decreasing thereby the cultural distance between us (see Caretta 2015). I will not name my assistants here nor in any of the articles since this research ended up taking a critical stance against LSLAs in their current form (and thus against the government that endorses them), having their names associated with it may be counterproductive to their careers. To maintain the anonymity of respondents, when data were computer typed, the material was anonymized.

Overall theoretical background: Peasants, family farmers, smallholders, small-scale farmers

In this section, I contextualize this study theoretically under the overarching and long-standing view on individuals that farm with family labor, in a labor intensive manner and largely for consumption, also known as peasants. I show here that a pejorative perception of these individuals has prevailed historically. This perception is not unanimous but is still dominant. It asserts the phasing out of peasants as a progressive process that transforms them into wage workers or commercial farmers.

Transient and subjugated peasants

Throughout the last century, there have been several withstanding definitions of peasants (currently more commonly referred to family farmers, smallholders, or small-scale farmers). In common, these definitions attribute a transient and often pejorative connotation to individuals that farm in a labor-intensive manner, usually with family labor, and largely for consumption; these individuals have been called peasants, smallholders, small-scale farmers and family farmers.

They have been described as neither primitive nor modern but as an anachronist social group in transition between evolutionary phases, or a segment of mankind that stands "midway between the primitive tribe and industrial society" (Wolf 1966, p. vii), or even as reminiscent from past societies in opposition to the "uppermost stratum of a highly refined civilization" (Kroeber 1948, p. 190 and 742). This mid-way characterization is in line with the understanding of the peasantry in opposition both to tribes (who are perceived as self-sufficient) and to modern industrial society (which is perceived as highly differentiated, interlinked and interdependent).

According to Krober's seminal definition, "peasants are rural – yet live in relation to market towns; they form a class segment of a larger population which usually contains urban centers, sometimes metropolitan capitals. They constitute part-societies with part-cultures" (Kroeber 1948, p. 284). Following Kroeber, Redfield (1956) emphasized the cultural subordination of illiterate peasants towards the literate urban stratum (i.e., of a "folk"), or peasants' "little tradition" in relation to a "higher" or "great tradition". Additionally, Wolf (1966) emphasized peasants' economic and political subordination. In his words, in primitive societies, "surpluses are exchanged directly among groups; peasants, however, are rural cultivators whose surpluses are transferred to a dominant group of rulers that uses the surpluses both to underwrite its own standard of living and to distribute the remainder to groups in

society that do not farm but must be fed for their specific goods and services in turn" (Wolf 1966, p. 3-4).

An aspect that has been emphasized in definitions of peasants is therefore their subordination to more powerful others (e.g., other classes or groups, the State, urban areas, etc.) (Shanin 1971). In the words of Shanin (1971, p. 15), "peasants, as a rule, have been kept at arms' length from the social sources of power. Their political subjection interlinks with cultural subordination and with their economic exploitation through tax, corvée, rent, interest and terms of trade unfavourable to the peasant". Peasants are therefore not considered to be isolated groups working solely for subsistence but are considered to be integrated into larger hierarchical societal wholes. Although they produce for their own consumption, they also produce to fulfill outsiders' demands and for market exchange to purchase what they do not produce. According to Chodak (1971, p. 33), an individual "has to be considered a peasant as long he continues to be dependent for his own consumption primarily on products of his own making, in other words, until the work for the market has not become a full-time job".

Thus, although peasants are not isolated from markets, they are deemed to operate households and not enterprises with a main goal of profit maximization (Wolf 1966, p. 2). Hence, the family farm has been described as a "multi-functional unit of social organisation" (Shanin 1973, p. 64), and a peasant's land and house have been depicted as "not merely factors of production; they are also loaded with symbolic values" (Wolf 1966, p. 15). Accordingly, Chodak (1971, p. 343) affirms that, to peasants, land is not merely a productive resource, but also a "source of life, the mother of humankind. […] It contains the ashes of ancestors and hence the rots of the present."

Notwithstanding the above views about common features of the peasantry, its heterogeneity and internal hierarchies have also been highlighted. In Mintz's (1973, p. 95) words, "peasantries are never homogeneous, and […] their internal differentiation plays a critical role in the ways they are (and became, and may remain) peasants". Or even, "it may appear that they consist entirely of the prey; in fact, some are commonly among the predators. […] Part of the difficulty, then, is that in observing how external groups may profit by controlling the peasantry, one may overlook how members of different sectors of the peasantry profit – and, often, remain culturally conservative – by controlling each other" (Mintz 1973, p. 94)

As Roberts (2006, p. 1256) sums up, the current widely held view is that the peasantry is "found throughout Latin America, Asia, Africa, and in parts of Europe […]. Though most commonly associated with Europe of the Middle Ages, peasants have been around for thousands of years, since the origins of the state. […] Compared to the capital-intensive, highly mechanized operations of large-scale farming in industrial societies, peasants utilize relatively simple technology and labor-intensive production methods. The family is the basic unit of production and consumption. […] The terms of their incorporation into this wider system are mostly disadvan-

tageous. Peasants grow food that supports urban dwellers, and their taxes sustain the government; however, they usually do not receive commensurate rewards in return."

The progressive disappearance of peasants

The above long-standing view on peasants has not been exclusively to specific political or economic standpoints. Instead, it has cross-cut disciplines and political economic stances.

For Marx and Engels, for example, peasants were a constituent part of feudal societies, doomed to disappear due to the advancement of the forces of modernity, industrialization and capitalism that concentrate production in ever larger units. In Engels' words, "our small peasant, like every other survival of the past mode of production, is hopelessly doomed. He is a future proletarian" (Engels [1894] 2000, p. 9). This is because "as the capitalist mode of production's seizure of agriculture, the transformation of the independently operating peasant into a wage labourer, is in fact the final conquest of this mode of production" (Marx [1894] 1981, p. 789). This view thus presupposes "the progressive deterioration of the conditions of production" through the consolidation of capitalism (Marx [1894] 1981, p. 943-944). Peasant agriculture cannot escape this imperative, which leads to the "expropriation of the rural workers from the soil and their subjection to a capitalist who pursues agriculture for the sake of profit" (Marx [1894] 1981, p. 751).

Although deemed cruel, the process is assumed to fulfill progressive functions in the development of societies, among which is the consolidation of clearly capitalist classes through the concentration of the means of production in the hands of the bourgeoisie leaving in the possession of workers nothing else than their labor to exchange. Wage workers, or the proletariat, therefore, end up in unequal and exploitative conditions vis à vis the bourgeoisie, though one must remember that their previous condition as peasants is not described as comfortable either. In fact, peasantry production is seen as inefficient and vulnerable due to, among other things, lack of division of labor in smallholdings and little application of science (Marx [1852] 2006). Thus, "the peasant only needs one of his cows to die and he is immediately unable to repeat his reproduction on the old scale. He falls prey to usury, and once in that position he never recovers his freedom" (Marx [1894] 1981, p. 734). Consequently, according to Marx and Engel's view, the dissolution of the peasantry through the expropriation of their means of production, with the subsequent establishment of wage labor, is an imperative that although tough on the masses comprise a step towards their ultimate emancipation.[3]

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[3] This positive closure is deduced also from the belief that the revolution that would bring capitalism to an end required a strong class-consciousness which the peasantry was deemed to lack (i.e., peasants, attached to private property, were held to have a petty-bourgeois mentality (Marx [1852] 2006).

Lenin – also writing at the end of the 19th century – endorsed the Marxist view, arguing that under capitalism, the peasantry disintegrates, though not homogenously. Lenin referred to this process as the "depeasantizing" of the rural milieu (Lenin [1899] 1960, p. 173 and 181), which entails the transformation of better-off or well-to-do peasants into agricultural entrepreneurs, and of worse-off peasants into wage workers, i.e., rural proletariat. In his words, "the old peasantry is not only 'differentiating', it is being completely dissolved, it is ceasing to exist, it is being ousted by absolutely new types of rural inhabitants – types that are the basis of a society in which commodity economy and capitalist production prevail. These types are the rural bourgeoisie […] and the rural proletariat – a class of commodity producers in agriculture and a class of agricultural wage-workers" (Lenin [1899] 1960, p. 174). According to Lenin, under capitalism, we should therefore see the polarization of the rural inhabitants into opposite classes. Meanwhile, a middle class of peasants may remain but only temporarily. This middle peasant who "cannot make ends meet without […] seeking 'subsidiary' employment on the side […] fluctuates between the top group, towards which it gravitates but which only a small minority of lucky ones succeed in entering, and the bottom group, into which it is pushed by the whole course of social evolution" (Lenin [1899] 1960, p. 181).

Lenin agrees with Marx that the depeasantization process, although fulfilling a historical progressive role, is particularly cruel in the short term with those joining the ranks of the proletariat. Thus, in his own words "the decline in the well-being of the patriarchal peasant […] is quite compatible with an increase in the amount of money in his possession, for the more such a peasant is ruined, the more he is compelled to resort to the sale of his labor-power, and the greater is the share of his (albeit scantier) means of subsistence that he must acquire in the market" (Lenin [1899] 1960, p. 42).

In line with the above views, Kautsky maintains that in the long run, peasants will vanish by the forces of industry (capitalist or socialist), though small farms may persist in the short run. Such persistence is not understood as a positive sign but rather as the result of peasants' self-exploitation that leads their families to increase pauperization. In his words, for peasants, "the need to exploit family members as young as is feasible, and as productively as is possible, represents an immovable obstacle to the need for a higher level of knowledge. […] The more agriculture becomes a science, and hence the more acute the competition between rational and small-peasant traditional agriculture, the more the small farm is forced to step up its exploitation of children, and undermine any education which the children might acquire" (Kautsky [1899] 1988, p. 111). Furthermore, "it is the proletariat, not the peasantry, which is the bearer of modern social development: elevating the peasantry at the expense of the proletariat means arresting social progress" (Kautsky [1899] 1988, p. 328). Thus, supporting the peasantry would imply extending their suffering and delaying social progress.

Contrasting somewhat with the above view, Chayanov, also writing in the late 1800s, notes that the peasantry gave no sign of being dismantled; instead, it provided signs of being a very malleable social group not endangered by class differentiation, at least in the short run. He has been referred to as "the only one who has offered a coherent theory of the phenomenon of small-scale peasant production as regards its internal structure and its capacity for survival in a capitalist system" (Heynig 1982, p. 113).

Without defending the permanence of the peasantry, Chayanov tried to explain this observed phenomenon and ultimately proposed the establishment of farm cooperatives as a means of consolidating large-scale farm industrialization. As an explanation for peasants' permanence, he argued that peasants followed a family farm logic that allowed them to self-exploit labor and allocate resources in ways that could be deemed irrational through a profit-maximization logic but that were perfectly rational for meeting the demands of the family and reducing the burden of labor (Chayanov [1925] (1966), p. 81). Chayanov's arguments resonate Kautsky's who also raised the overexploitation of peasant labor as an explanatory factor for their permanence, at least in the short run. Thus, Chayanov argued that peasants' reasoning violates market entrepreneurial rules since it is not the objective calculation of the highest possible net profit that determines how peasants act but the subjective evaluations of values obtained by labor (Chayanov [1924] (1966), p. 13; Chayanov [1925] (1966), p. 41, 81). Chayanov is often considered an "agrarian populist" for proposing peasant-centered alternatives aimed at transitioning agrarian economies to socialist industrial economies or, in other words, proposing noncapitalistic modernization paths (Kofi 1977, p. 93).

The above derogatory views on the peasantry were not exclusive to scholars committed to a particular political economic stance. Instead, these views are compatible with the mainstreaming hailing of modernity and the Enlightenment idea of progress – which encompasses the increase of societies' productive capacity and thus output (see Veltmeyer 1997; Rist 2008).[4] Such an increase has been, following Western experience, associated with industrialization, which on the one hand led to a shift in the allocation of labor (from rural agricultural to urban industrial sectors), thereby boosting the consumption demand of the urban workforce and the demand for input in the agricultural sector (e.g., of machines and agrochemicals) (see Woodhouse 2010, p. 428). In other words, underpinning the relegation of the peasantry to a moribund status is its contrast to modern agriculture and the industrial milieu (characterized by wage labor and profit-oriented market relations deemed efficient and rational). This mainstream view is endorsed by the idea of an unfolding evolution of societies from more primitive to more sophisticated forms – perspective which is in line with

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[4] According to Rist "Even if 'development' – and growth – have never ceased to be regarded as 'natural' and positive within Western tradition, they were for long kept in check by the awareness of a limit, of a kind of optimum level after which the curve necessarily moved downward to comply with the laws of 'nature' and God's plan" (Rist 2008, p. 37).

equating modernization to development and perceiving the modern in opposition to the traditional (Redfield 1956).

It is not the objective of this text to go into the origins of the modern thought on development as the building up of societies' productive forces through industrial progress, but I think it is appropriate to cite at least a few examples of influential thinkers whose ideas have corroborated this mainstream view in different disciplines, and therefore the perception of the peasantry as a transient group – their dissolution been a synonym to societies' evolving or climbing a development ladder.

In what is often considered one of the founding texts of economics and liberal economic thought, published in 1776, Adam Smith argued that the improvement in the productive powers of labor, skill, dexterity, and judgment coincide as part of the natural course of societies' evolution. According to him, these improvements in human and social qualities follow the increasing division of labor which, in its turn, derives from intrinsic human characteristics, namely, "the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another […] common to all men, and to be found in no other race of animals" (Smith [1776] (2011), p. 6). Thus, the most civilized nations were those producing manufacturers (Smith [1776] (2011); and had achieved not only a higher economic position but also a higher cultural stage in relation to "savages and barbarians" (Smith [1776] (2011), p. 182).

Later, writing in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Émile Durkheim, considered one of the founding fathers of sociology, elaborated on the causes and implications of the increasing complexity of societies. According to Durkheim, modern industry "advances steadily towards powerful machines, towards great concentrations of forces and capital, and consequently to the extreme division of labor […] [and] the principal branches of the agricultural industry are steadily being drawn into the general movement" (Durkheim [1893] 1933, p. 39). Accordingly, Durkheim states that the "agricultural phase is as short as societies are elevated" (Durkheim [1893] 1933, p. 259). And that the evolution from rural to urban life, or from primitive to elevated stages "comes from the very nature of higher social species" which, through conforming to the natural law on the division of labor, form societies that are increasingly specialized and dense (Durkheim [1893] 1933, p. 259-260). In the process, as productive forces are built, "cerebral life develops" (Durkheim [1893] 1933, p. 273). Thus, Durkheim continues, "on this point, it is only necessary to compare the worker with the farmer. It is a known fact that the first is a great deal more intelligent despite the mechanical nature of the tasks to which he is often subject. […] Now, a more voluminous and more delicate brain makes greater demands than a less refined one. Difficulties and privations the latter does not even feel painfully disturb the former. […] Rough explanations no longer satisfy more perspicuous minds. Fresh insights are needed and science holds these aspirations together at the same time that it satisfies them" (Durkheim [1893] 1933, p. 273). Hence, according to Durkheim, in a process that emulates the biological evolution of

organisms, societies were meant to industrialize, specialize, become more complex and thus "elevated" transforming humans from simpler to more sophisticated beings.

Max Weber, also considered a central thinker within sociology, writing in the first half of the twentieth century, likewise endorsed this progressive view of social change – which for him was directly linked to the consolidation of capitalism, the bureaucratic organization of societies, and of rationality as the prevailing logics of social action. For him, whereas societies considered primitive were characterized by social actions oriented by habit or emotion, in modern societies, social action motivated by rationality and the desire to reach efficiency prevailed. A central driver in this transformation was what he called the "spirit of capitalism", whose origins he dated back to the work and salvation logics of protestant ascetism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[5] Nonetheless, as societies evolved, the capitalistic economic system acquired a disciplinary vogue of its own, detached from any religious links. In other words, "the capitalism of today, which has come to dominate economic life, educates and selects the economic subjects which it needs through a process of economic survival of the fittest" (Weber [1905] 2003, p. 55). To him, capital accumulation (propitiated by the inclinations of Protestantism), "favoured the development of a rational bourgeois economic life […] [and enabled the emergence] of the modern economic man (Weber [1905] 2003, p. 174). In the process, specialized and highly productive labor replaced backward precapitalistic labor.

This scholarly view on the development of societies from rural to urban-based is consolidated in peoples' imaginaries through, for example, bestsellers such as Jeffrey Sachs' "The End of Poverty", where Bangladeshi women working in sweatshops are portrayed as having succeeded in climbing the first rung in the ladder of development, away from peasantry agriculture and towards the modern economy marked by urbanization, manufacturing, and high-tech services (Sachs 2005, p. 11 and 18).

In common, the idea that peasants (or family farmers, working on small plots with little mechanization, and largely consumption-oriented) should disappear (thereby providing space and resources to the expansion of modern agriculture held synergistic with the manufacturing industry) has prevailed across disciplines. What has nonetheless been widely debated, particularly among Marxist scholars, is whether the peasantry is in fact disappearing or not, and why.

The debate: Reasserting peasants' disappearance vs. permanence

Scholars maintaining that the peasantry is indeed disappearing usually rely on the observable historical trends of relative population shift from rural to urban sites, and

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[5] Thus, according to Weber ([1905] 2003), "This worldly Protestant asceticism, […], acted powerfully against the spontaneous enjoyment of possessions; it restricted consumption, especially of luxuries. On the other hand, it had the psychological effect of freeing the acquisition of goods from the inhibitions of traditionalistic ethics. It broke the bonds of the impulse of acquisition in that it not only legalized it, but […] looked upon it as directly willed by God" (p. 170-171).

of increasing diversification of family farmers' livelihoods towards more reliance on nonagricultural income and less reliance on farm produce. In other words, not only is the rural population noted to become relatively smaller in relation to the urban population, but its decreasing dependence on own farming is emphasized.

Several terms have been used to describe the above trends, such as the original depeasantization referred to by Lenin ([1899] 1960), but also deruralization, i.e., the decline in rural population (Araghi 1995); commoditization, i.e., the increase reliance of peasants in petty-commodity production (Bernstein 2018); and deagrarianization, which alludes several combined trends such as "a diminishing degree of rural household food and basic needs self-sufficiency, a decline in agricultural labor relative to nonagricultural labor in rural households and in total national labor expenditure, [and] a decrease in agricultural output per capita in the national economy relative to nonagricultural output" (Bryceson 1996, p. 99).

In line with these arguments, the historian Eric Hobsbawn (1992, p. 56) states that the 20th century has experienced spectacular changes in ordinary human life and the societies in which it takes place illustrated by the radical decrease in the population living off the land and its animals (i.e., from agriculture) in the greater part of the Earth's surface. This observation reverberates data showing that the rural population went from approximately 66 percent of the world population in 1960 to approximately 45 percent in 2017 (World Bank 2018a). In the least developed countries during the same period, the rural population went from approximately 90 percent of the total population to 67 percent of the total population (World Bank 2018b).

Explanations for these trends vary and comprise both the original modernist thesis on the higher efficiency of large-scale farming – commonly understood as "capitalized agricultural enterprises operating as businesses often of a corporate nature, using wage and salaried labor, deploying intensive agricultural techniques to maximize commercial output" (Bryceson 2009) – that irremediably outcompete smallholder farmers, but also on historical observations on a lack of support to the latter in relation to agribusiness (Feder 1976a, 1976b; Araghi 1995).

As already mentioned, the modernist thesis imputes "irreversibility to the process of centralization and concentration of agricultural capitalism" (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001, p. 96), and leads to the conclusion that peasants will eventually become either wage workers or entrepreneurial farmers. Accordingly, Collier (2008) argues that since "large organizations are better suited to cope with investment, marketing chains, and regulations […] the remedy for high food prices is to increase supply […] [by replicating] the Brazilian model of large, technologically sophisticated agro-companies that supply the world market". Likewise, Bernstein (2014, p. 1056, 1057) contends that it is utopic to believe that low-input and labor-intensive peasant agriculture can feed current and projected world population; and that small family farming is incompatible with the increase of agriculture productivity since it "denies the advan-

tages of economies of scale, development of the productive forces, and the technical division of labor" (Bernstein 2001, p. 26).

These assertions rely on empirical trends that seem indicative of the superiority of industrial large-scale agriculture, namely, "the inverse relationship between a nation's per capita gross domestic product and the percentage of the workforce in agriculture; enhanced yields, most importantly in grains and oilseeds and their conversion to meat, milk and eggs; the aggregate and per capita growth in the global food supply led by the world's temperate-industrial breadbasket; falling real food prices in world markets (with a few blips); and the tight linkage between rising meat consumption and rising affluence" (Weis 2010, p. 316).

These empirical trends are explained in terms of the existence of economies of scale that larger farms can more easily harness, which enables them to use resources and technologies more efficiently and to therefore be better positioned in the market (Ellis and Biggs 2001, p. 440). Smallholdings are consequentially deemed inflexible, without withholding power, unable to implement competitive improvements in agriculture, and therefore economically unviable (Wolf 1966, p. 43-44; Brass 2015, p. 189).[6] In addition to central arguments on the lower efficiency of peasant agriculture, peasants have also been accused of depleting soil nutrients due to inappropriate cultivation methods combined with a propensity to sacrifice long-term gains to guarantee short-term subsistence (Sachs 2015, p. 6).

Embedded in these arguments is not only the view that the peasantry is being outcompeted and disappearing but also that it should be – views that have oriented action towards the consolidation and expansion of large-scale industrial agriculture. Concerted efforts towards the modernization of agriculture through the expansion of the so-called Green Revolution are illustrative.[7]

In contrast to scholars reasserting that the peasantry is disappearing, others maintain its permanence anchored, among other things, on data that show that, in absolute terms, rural population still comprises a significant share of the total – having in fact increased throughout the decades. Accordingly, in the entire world, the rural population increased from 2.012 billion in 1960 to 3.401 billion in 2017 (World

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[6] Ideas postulated already by Marx who held that whereas improvements in agriculture lead to a fall in prices of agricultural products, "the agricultural smallholding, by its very nature, rules out the development of the productive powers of social labour, the social concentration of capitals, stock-raising on a large scale or the progressive application of science" (Marx [1894] 1981, p. 943).

[7] The Green Revolution consisted in "massive transfers of capital and technology from the industrial nations, particularly the USA, first to the landed oligarchy and subsequently to agriculture-related industries and services" mainly during the 1960s and 1970s (Feder 1976a, p. 532). Its results in terms of agricultural productivity were enormous in countries such as Mexico and India where agro-chemical use, mechanization, improved water control (through irrigation and drainage), and the selection of crop varieties were combined (Woodhouse 2010, p. 438). Notwithstanding continuous attempts to expand the achievements of the Green Revolution throughout the less developed countries, such as those located in sub-Sahara Africa, industrial agriculture has been targeted by substantial criticism in the latest decades, both in terms of its social and environmental implications – issues which I will return to.

Bank 2018c), and in the least developed countries during the same period, the rural population tripled, from approximately 217 million to approximately 671 million (World Bank 2018d).

Several explanations for the permanence thesis have been raised by different scholars, some of which kept unaltered the negative connotation associated with the peasantry – emphasizing its subordination and lack of alternatives – whereas others shed new light on the merits and agency of the peasantry. Among the first set of explanations, the instrumentality of the peasantry to capitalism is emphasized. The reasoning can be summarized as follows: since peasants are able to obtain food from their own agricultural production, they can afford to accept very low wages to top up their sustenance, and therefore, they offer cheap and flexible labor (i.e., subsidized by peasantry farming) to agro-industrialists as wage workers or as contract farmers, for example (Wolpe 1972; Feder 1976a, 1976b).

Feminist scholars have added to the above thesis by shedding light on the gender division of labor and showing, among other things, women's contribution to peasant households; the differentiated return to gendered labor; the overall intrahousehold inequality linked to differences in bargaining power; and the importance of women's productive and reproductive work for subsidizing men's engagement in alternative, off-farm, productive activities (Folbre 1986; Deere 1976; Deere 1995). Thus, women's unwaged contribution in peasant households has been approached by feminist scholars as crucial in production and reproduction processes and therefore as a determining factor explaining the persistence of the peasantry.

Overall, the thesis on peasantry farming subsiding wages implies that capital's vested interest in what the peasantry can offer contributes to preserving the peasantry and its smallholdings. This line of reasoning relies somewhat on Kautsky's view on the exploitation and functional significance of peasantry labor to capitalism, and on what Chayanov advanced, namely, that the peasantry is very malleable since they do not follow the logics of profit maximization but mainly of reproduction. In addition, according to this line of reasoning, reliance on nonagricultural income (as on any type of livelihood diversification) is not new (White 2018, p. 708), but rather an established strategy utilized by peasants to persist. Accordingly, diversification by no means should be understood as depeasantization – instead, it should be seen as a condition for peasants' permanence, particularly in the face of the strengthening of commodity relations in the neoliberal era.

Another explanation for the "permanence thesis" is the lack of alternatives faced by those who may leave their smallholding, willingly or by force. This observation has been made by several scholars who note sharply different conditions between the context in which agricultural modernization took place in the current industrialized countries and the context in which agricultural modernization is being promoted, particularly in the less developed countries. Accordingly, Li speaks about the in-existence of a "pathway from country to city, agriculture to industry, or even a clear

pathway into stable plantation work that pays living wages" (Li 2011, p. 296). Similarly, Veltmeyer (1997, p. 154) explains that "the urban crisis and unemployment do not provide peasant youth with a promising avenue for escape", and Edelman (2000, p. 19) states that "until a model of development offers sustained employment at adequate wages or a stable and remunerative insertion in the urban informal sector, their [peasants'] dreams will […] continue to focus on land and the countryside".

These assertions are not based on hypothetical claims but rather on empirical observations of past and current alternatives for the rural masses in developing countries, particularly in the less industrialized ones. In such a context, peasants are believed to persist since they are blatantly aware of the alternative, i.e., a landless condition combined with unemployment or underemployment, and consequently further overall deprivation. Thus, one can say that both arguments – the instrumenttality of peasants for capitalist enterprises and their lack of better alternatives – tend to keep the view that being a peasant is not exactly an active choice but rather a condition that is perpetuated due to the absence of structural changes in societies.

Nonetheless, new arguments that not only try to explain but also defend the permanence of the peasantry have gained traction in recent decades, particularly in the face of externalities derived from industrial agriculture. In different ways, these arguments shed new light on the merits of peasant agriculture and attempt to redefine the peasantry in more positive terms. In what is now a well-established line of reasoning, scholars in direct opposition to the "large-scale efficiency" thesis have posited that peasant farming is in fact very efficient if accounting for all inputs used and associated social and environmental externalities. Accordingly, a reassessment of the peasantry has been put forward by scholars who defend that being a peasant is not a destiny but a choice (one that seems to be gaining popularity in industrialized countries).

In line with the above view, the thesis known as "agricultural growth based on small-farm efficiency" started to gain terrain in the mid-1960s. This thesis relied on an observed "inverse relationship" between farm size and efficiency (Sen 1962; Saini 1971; Carleto et al. 2013). Based on this thesis, small farms (usually run with unwaged family labor) can achieve higher efficiency vis à vis large farms because they utilize their access to more abundant, reliable, and cheaper labor to circumvent their limited access to capital (Sen 1966). This seemed to be particularly accurate in places marked by incomplete markets and in contexts where family farmers strived to decrease the risk of not reaching enough production to satisfy consumption needs (Feder 1985; Barrett 1995).

According to this line of reasoning, peasants' struggle to make a living is not due to their essential inefficiency or backwardness but rather prejudicial conditions to which they are exposed – as corroborated by scholars who have noted that an "urban bias" contributed to perpetuate poverty in rural areas (Lipton 1977). Accordingly, an uneven allocation of infrastructure and resources mainly in urban areas, the taxation of rural producers, and unfavorable terms of trade for agricultural products in

relation to manufactured products would have contributed to creating and sustaining a bias against farmers and in favor of the urban population (Lipton 1977). It is worth noting that the defense of peasants based on the "small-farm efficiency" argument emerged in the capitalist context,[8] and instead of the term "peasant", scholars following this line of reasoning gave predilection to terms such as small-scale farmers or smallholders.

Another increasingly popular line of reasoning, postulating a high efficiency of the peasantry, relies on a holistic view of agricultural outcomes when all inputs and outputs, including externalities, are accounted for. Embedded in this line of reasoning nonetheless is the embracement of the peasantry not only as a short-term alternative but also as a long-term choice due to its more social and environmentally sustainable character vis à vis industrial agriculture. Scholars sustaining such arguments extrapolate the economic field to shed light on the direct and indirect implications of large-scale industrial agriculture to humans and the environment, thereby questioning its long-term appropriateness.

This latter thesis does not deny that industrial agriculture has been responsible for an exponential increase in food supply in the world, thereby counteracting potential increases in food prices following an ever-higher food demand due to population growth.[9] In fact, cereal yield per hectare has more than doubled since the 1960s, whereas land under cereal cultivation increased by approximately 30 percent. Thus, intensification, through the growing reliance on agricultural inputs and machinery, rather than extensification, characterizes the process. Nonetheless, despite the yield gain propitiated by industrial (input and machinery intense) agriculture, critiques advocate instead smaller-scale and more labor-intensive production mainly due to the formers' numerous unaccounted costs, which include:

> the contribution to chronic epidemiological problems (e.g. obesity, cardiovascular disease) and the extensive burden on health-care systems; the costs of managing and responding to disease threats such as swine and avian flu, listeriosis, E. coli and mad cow; the diffuse impacts of fertilizer, chemical and other waste runoff from industrial monocultures and factory farms on terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and human health; the associated costs of water treatment; an assortment of workplace health concerns (e.g. high rates of repetitive stress and accidental injuries); the psychological violence associated with factory farms and industrial slaughterhouses; chemical-laden environments; and the immeasurable suffering of rising populations of animals reared in intensive confinement, along with the unquantifiable ethical issues that this entails. […] [And] soil erosion and salinization; the overdraft of water and threats to its long-term supply; the loss of biodiversity and crucial 'ecosystem services' (e.g. pollination, soil formation); and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Weis 2010, p. 316).

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[8] This argument has been utilized in the advocacy of land reform from the economic perspective of efficiency (and the political perspective of making an appealing capitalist front against socialism).
[9] World population went from approximately 3.04 billion in 1960 to over 7.5 billion in 2017.

In addition to the abovementioned costs, scholars also underscore efficiency in terms of energy use. Industrial agriculture's strong reliance on fossil fuel is deemed not only a hazard in terms of climate change but also an economic peril since it exposes a large part of the world's food production to fluctuations in oil prices (Bryceson 2009; Woodhouse 2010). Another aspect of vulnerability includes the reliance on fewer plant and animal species with uncertain resilience in the face of climate chance (Bryceson 2009).

Finally, social distributional costs within and between places are also noted. Accordingly, the advancement of industrial agriculture in the developing world, fomented by the Green Revolution, has been noted to have driven a massive dispossession of peasants and the concentration of land ownership, followed by unemployment and the furthering of poverty (Feder 1976a, p. 532). In addition, agricultural subsidies in industrial countries are also deemed to depress food prices, rendering farmers in the less industrialized countries less competitive in relation to their counterparts in the industrial world (Weis 2010, p. 317). These two trends point to the expansion and prevalence of industrial agriculture as a driver of social inequality within and between places. Furthermore, since these trends are not accidental but the fruits of concerted efforts, industrial agriculture is deemed to have an artificially maintained productivity over peasant farming – an advantage that can only be harnessed following large social and environmental costs.

It is largely based on the above-noted shortcomings of industrial agriculture that a more positive view of the peasantry has gained terrain in recent years. As explained by Harriet (2018, p. 701), this recast is based on "the revaluation of peasant as part of a wider revaluation of farming as part of social and ecological sustainability". This reappraisal is largely derived from the view that now, more than ever, we need to harness agriculture's "unmatched potential to generate autonomous, skillful, experimental, healthy and meaningful work, or what might be understood as dignified labour" (Weis 2010, p. 335).

Despite the recognition of prevailing unfair economic structures, and due to such structures, peasants' agency is emphasized. The peasant condition is seen by scholars embracing this line of reasoning mainly as a choice rather than as an unfortunate fate. This choice encompasses the partial decommodification of relations of production as a means to enhance autonomy (Ploeg 2008, 2010, 2018). Accordingly, peasant agriculture distinguishes itself because, by resisting the subordination to capital, it refuses to become strongly dependent on markets. Accordingly, scholars emphasize peasants' choice to rely mainly on internal resources such as skilled labor, knowledge, savings, networks, patterns of reciprocity, and so-called living nature "embodied in the land (and the soil biology it contains), in crops, water, animals, and the local ecosystem" (Ploeg 2018, p. 16, 20). Peasant farming is thus deemed to be "built upon a relatively autonomous flow of resources produced and reproduced within the farm unit itself" (Ploeg 2018, p. 35).

By emphasizing the peasantry's quest for emancipation, through self-employment somewhat unsubordinated to markets, this line of reasoning maintains that peasantry farming belongs to the future – a perspective that is diametrically opposed to the dominant perspective common both to traditional Marxist and liberal views. Accordingly, White (2018, p. 708) contends that the peasantry is not only composed of continuers (i.e., "men and women who grow up on the parental farm and help with the farm, and then take it over") but also returnees (i.e., "men and women who grow up on the parental farm, […] go off to do something else, and later when land becomes available, or their parents become too old, they […] come back"), and new entrants (i.e., a group that has no farming background but which will become increasingly more important in the future).

Similarly, Ploeg claims that repeasantization represents a double movement, i.e., both the augmentation of the number of peasants and the augmentation of their autonomy through strategies that further their distance from markets (Ploeg 2018, p. 25-26, 87, 96, 98-100). Ultimately, McMichael (2006, p. 414) argues that the peasantry represents the "reassertion of local forms of social reproduction […] in the context of the chronic failures and instability of broader mechanisms of social reproduction as constituted by global circuits of capital". This line of reasoning that reasserts the permanence of peasants has been called agrarian populist or even romantic since it holds that depeasantization and large-scale industrialization are not necessary conditions for the increase in societies' material well-being Kitching (1982, p. 2-3).

Although a substantial part of the empirical material anchoring this reassertion thesis is brought from industrialized countries, particularly but not exclusively from Europe, expressions of repeasantization are also brought from developing countries, where for example, proletarians have become peasants (Edelman 2000, p. 18). In addition, repeasantization can also be illustrated in the impetus of the landless people's movement in Brazil (or Movimento dos Sem Terra), by rural movements such as La Vía Campesina, and in general by new social movements in rural settings that proclaim principles such as food sovereignty and land sovereignty (Desmarais 2007; Borras 2008; Pimbert 2009; Borras Jr. and Franco 2012).

Although emerging relatively recently, the view and arguments above, emphasizing agency and autonomy, resonate some ideas already put forward by previous scholars such as Wolf, who noted that "land and labor [are] the two factors which grant him [the peasant] a measure of autonomy in a context of asymmetrical relationships" (Wolf 1966, p. 48), or Chayanov, who wrote that "the peasant and the artisan manage independently; they control their production and other economic activities on their own responsibility. They have at their disposal the full product of their labour output and are driven to achieve this labour output by family demands" (Chayanov [1924] 1966, p. 13).

As the above-explained debates and ideas show, although some scholars and activists reassert the permanence of family farmers, over the last century, a main-

stream view on the imperative of depeasantization has prevailed. This mainstream view has oriented policies and strategies in colonies and postindependence countries such as Mozambique, as the following section will show.

Historical background: Mozambique since colonial times

In this section, I contextualize the study by presenting relevant aspects of the historical background of Mozambique. Here, I show how peasants have been incorporated into larger exploitative relations since the colonial period. Although the types of pressures have changed, they remained unfavorable to Mozambican peasants during the post-independence period (the socialist and, more recently, the liberal). In theory, the government has historically endorsed the transformation of peasants into commercial farmers or wage workers. In practice, however, little has been done to enable such transformation. Instead, concerted governmental efforts have favored large-scale comercial farming to the detriment of small-scale family farmers. Current LSLAs fall into this context of favoritism, which is currently explained by the formal expectations that investors' activities shall do what previous strategies failed to do, i.e. drive the progressive transformation, and thus dissolution, of peasants.

Colonial Mozambique

The area that today is Mozambique prior to the arrival of the Portuguese was largely, but not solely, agrarian and was not only subsistence-based. As Newitt (1995, p. 4, 6, 12, 13) describes, even before the 1500s, several trading centers on the coast and along the main rivers ensured dynamic commerce links not only internally but also externally fueled by merchants from the Gulf and India.[10]

The Portuguese first reached Mozambique through Vasco da Gama's excursion in 1498. They gained successive control of the region, first relying on prazos (land grants), then relying also on private companies (e.g., Mozambique Company, Zambezia Company) that received concessions to exploit certain areas and sectors (e.g., agriculture, communications, social services and trade), and ultimately – following the rise of Mozambique's importance to Portugal – through Portuguese direct rule. Accordingly, whereas large parts of the colony had been under the administration of prazos and private concessionary companies (which acted similarly to feudal seigneurs and derived profit not only from the control of taxation and labor but also from the possession of commercial monopolies and the right to lease subconcessions),

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[10] Exchanged items included, among other things, boat-building, ivory, gold, turtle shells, pearls, cloths, cotton, foodstuffs, salt, woven mats, baskets, worked iron as parts of hoes, spears, axes, and hooks and chains for fishing, and slaves.

Salazar's ascension to power in Portugal in the 1930s inaugurated a period of increased direct control of Mozambique and Mozambicans (Newitt 1995, p. 449, 450, 459).

There is a prevailing understanding that, as colonization strengthened its grips, sub-Saharan rural cultivators started to resemble peasants elsewhere. This understanding is built upon, inter alia, the intensification of political, economic, and cultural subordination through, for example, the spread of private land ownership, of a market orientation, the increasing influence of urban centers, and the institutionalization of forced labor and of taxation (Fallers 1961, p. 110; Chodak 1971, p. 337, 342; Goldschmitd and Kunkel 1971; Derman 1972; Saul 1974, p. 45).

Although charging tributes from the population was not a Portuguese invention in Mozambique,[11] under Portuguese rule taxation became systematic in the entire territory. A widespread type of taxation was the hut tax, which in 1908 took 84 days of labor in Lourenço Marques (today the capital Maputo) to earn the equivalent (CEA 1977; Newitt 1995, p. 411). The establishment of fixed prices for agricultural produce (which were usually below international prices) also worked as an indirect form of taxation (World Bank 1988, p. 3). A third and likely the cruelest form of wealth extraction was forced labor (or chibalo). Chibalo could be imposed upon individuals who were deemed idle or not fully employed in agriculture or elsewhere, individuals who failed to pay taxes, or individuals caught drunk or improperly dressed (Newitt 1995, p. 410, 472, 501). Ultimately, chibalo allowed the government to access cheap labor for public infrastructural projects and served the private needs of plantation owners seeking to fulfill labor requirements (Isaacman 1996).

Finally, cash crop cultivation was introduced in 1935 and inaugurated a potential livelihood alternative but also a new facet of subornation with its compulsory character. It fomented the spread of crops such as cotton and rice in schemes through which farmers were assigned production quotas, received seeds, and sold the produce at preset prices. By the mid-1940s, in some parts of the country, every adult, man or woman, single or married, was legally obligated to cultivate one-half hectare of cotton or rice, making them less self-sufficient and more vulnerable to changes in food prices (Roesch 1991; Isaacman 1996).

Governmental control applied differently to different groups of people. It was the non-assimilados indigenous people who were submitted to chibalo and to the strict rules of compulsory cash crop production, whereas the assimilados together with Portuguese settlers had full citizen rights. The status of assimilado relied on the knowledge of Portuguese language and culture, a Western education and profession (Newitt 1995, p. 442).

The obligation to make cash to meet taxation requirements and purchase a larger part of foodstuff that individuals increasingly could not produce due to their engage-

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[11] As Newitt informs us, the Gaza empire in the nineteenth century demanded payments in diverse forms which "creamed off much of the surplus produced by the peasant communities" (Newitt 1995, p. 483).

ment in cash cropping, combined with the oppression of chibalo, served as incitement for male migration. Although male migration was already a trend during the nineteenth century when a popular destination was the Natal sugar plantations, it was after the discovery of gold in South African mines, late in the nineteenth century, that migration acquired a tremendous proportion (CEA 1977; Roesch 1991; Isaacman 1996). On average, between 1902 and 1977, 25 to 30 percent of Mozambique's labor was exported (CEA 1977, p. 3).

Most miners were from the southern provinces of Gaza and Inhambane. Consequently, their migration generated labor shortages in these areas.[12] At the same time, labor shortages reinforced the importance of chibalo and the compulsory element in cash crop cultivation. Nonetheless, wage labor from mining enabled the payment of taxes, the payment of 'bride-price' (or lobolo), the survival of families in hard times, and the reproduction and production of households through the purchase of basic items such as food and clothes, production means such as hoes, plows, and oxen, services such as the construction of houses, granaries, and wells (CEA 1977; Roesch 1991). Whereas taxes owed in Mozambique were collected by a Portuguese curator stationed in the mining area, many of the products purchased with mining wages were done so in Mozambique since a proportion of the mining wage was deferred until the men's return (Newitt 1995, p. 490).[13]

With the growing importance of Mozambique to Portugal and the consequential Portuguese effort to effectively occupy the territory, the strategy to bring in Portuguese settlers and establish white population centers was embraced by the government. To support the establishment of these settlers, irrigation schemes were constructed, and grants and loans were made available. This is how the Limpopo colonato was set up in 1954 in the Limpopo Valley (i.e., my study site).

After the Second World War, Portugal started to experience increasing pressure for granting independence to its colonies. It was not enough to officially replace the term "colony" with the term "province" or "state". As a means to gain popularity, Portugal granted all Mozambicans full citizenship rights in 1961 and eased the labor regulation – legally prohibiting chibalo and compulsory cash crop cultivation in 1962 (Newitt 1995, p. 528). Nonetheless, external pressure joined Mozambican internal pressure through the formation of Frelimo (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique or the Mozambique Liberation Front) in 1962, who declared war on the Portuguese colonial government in 1964.[14] The war took place mainly in the northern zones and came to an end after the 1974 coup in Portugal by MFA (Movimento das Forças

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[12] Xai-Xai, the town nearby our study-case, had one of the twelve South African recruitment stations in Mozambique, see CEA 1977, p. 7.

[13] The Portuguese government also benefit from mining migration through the payment of annual fees by mining recruiters, the payment of capitation fee for laborer, and the payment of fee for the issuing of migration permit (Newitt 1995, p. 490).

[14] Salazar who had been in control of Portugal and its colonies since 1932, was succeeded by Marcello Caetano (after a stroke in 1968) who continued the war.

Armadas or Armed Forces Movement), who signed a peace agreement (the Lusaka accord) with Frelimo in that same year. The agreement predicted a transitional government by the end of which the independent Mozambican flag was hoisted.

Independent, socialist-oriented, Mozambique

Frelimo acknowledged family farming as pervasive in the lives of Mozambicans – a "traditional" activity that nonetheless did not exclude the undertaking of "modern" activities. Thus, in the words of Marcelino dos Santos, Frelimo's then vice-president (1973, p. 29):

> […] Where do those people who work in the plantations come from? All those people who work within the capitalist sector come from the traditional sector. And most of them do not remain permanently outside the traditional society because, for instance, many of them go to work on the plantations for a maximum period of two years and they then come back to the village and to the traditional system. So that is the main link – going back and forth. Then there are people who do not become absorbed into the capitalist system but who are nevertheless related to it. For instance, the people who produce for themselves must sell their produce in the market, mainly food like grain, cashew nuts. They are forced into the market system to find the cash for colonial-imposed taxes and to purchase commodities which they do not produce themselves. So these two societies are linked and on many levels the persons comprising the two societies are the same. But there is a process of change in that the capitalist sector is growing more and more, and the traditional system is naturally declining.

Independence raised high hopes among Mozambican family farmers – of increased freedom in face of their recent memories of compulsory labor requirements, of the liberation of land that had been appropriated by colonial initiatives, and of overall improvements in their living conditions. Nonetheless, in the aftermath of independence, their alternatives were being curbed.

In 1976, Frelimo closed most of the mining recruitment stations in the country, which led to a dramatic drop in migration (Newitt 1995, p. 497-498). Furthermore, the abrupt departure of Portuguese[15] traders (also called cantineiros) and of a large part of private commercial farmers[16] suddenly deprived family farmers not only from potential wage labor opportunities in plantations but also from rural market outlets where consumer goods and agricultural implements could be purchased and agricultural produce could be sold (World Bank 1988; Cravinho 1998).

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[15] Which was partly because "The Lusaka Accord left many matters unsettled: the position of the settlers and their property received no guarantees; no decisions were made about Portuguese assets or about compensation" (Newitt 1995, p. 540).

[16] Prior to independence there were approximately 4,500 Portuguese private commercial farmers in Mozambique, averaging over 500 hectares each. Most of these farmers left the country after independence (World Bank 1988, p. 45).

Prior to independence, approximately 6000 traders (cantineiros) were responsible for distributing agricultural inputs and consumer goods and for collecting surplus produce from family farmers (Tarp 1984, p. 14). With the sudden departure of these traders, "for the smallholder sector, the whole structure for crop purchasing and transportation, and the distribution network for consumer goods and agricultural inputs was virtually destroyed" (World Bank 1988, p. 46). The collapse of the private trading network justified Frelimo's government involvement in all stages of agricultural production through the regulation of prices, direct support for certain forms of production, investments and disbursement of credit and resources (World Bank 1988, p. 3).

In 1977, Frelimo declared its Marxist-Leninist orientation, committing itself to centralized planning (Newitt 1995, p. 542-543; Bowen 2000). Accordingly, independent Mozambique's first Constitution nationalized all land and natural resources, and its first Land Law banned land transactions considered alienating, such as the selling, renting or mortgaging of land. The active redistribution of private commercial plantations and colonato land among Mozambican farmers in most cases did not occur. Instead, many colonial fields were turned into state farms or communal fields where Mozambican farmers were expected to work as wage laborers or together following the assumption that these settings countered the fragmentation of landholdings, favoring the division of labor, mechanization, and economies of scale in line with Marxist-Leninist reasoning (O'Laughlin 1995; Mosca 2009, p. 60). Furthermore, the State created farmers' cooperatives and communal villages, which were in principle easier to reach and provide means of production and basic services due to the agglomeration of people and production in specific places. Whereas state farms seemed to mirror a Marxist-Leninist strategy of fomenting wage labor as a replacement for peasant labor, cooperatives sought to modernize peasant farming from below in line with Chayonov's line of reasoning.

Nonetheless, in practice, agricultural production continued to be largely family-based (Tarp 1984, p. 8). As reported by a World Bank study (1988, p. 17), "in 1986, there were about 320 cooperatives located in all the provinces, but concentrated in the south with over one hundred in Maputo and Gaza provinces. […] cooperatives only cultivated about 4,700 hectares and produced less than one percent of total marketed production. Approximately 1.8 million people are currently [in 1988] estimated to be living in some 1,350 communal villages. However, little of the agricultural production in these villages is actually communally organized as families prefer to farm their own plots, albeit sometimes at considerable distances from the villages."

The observations above likely derive from the fact that in practice, the state investment that was made in rural settings was largely devoted not to family farmers or cooperatives but to large-scale state farms. Mechanized state farms were deemed the fastest and most appropriate way to increase production, whereas the family sector was perceived as anachronic and doomed to disappear (World Bank 1988, p.

2-3). In other words, since "individual farmers would become members of cooperatives or laborers on state farms within a matter of a few years […] it has been considered that there was no real justification for giving priority to family farmers" Tarp 1984, p. 10). According to Mosca (2009, p. 110), in 1986, only 2 percent of the total credit devoted to the agrarian sector went to cooperatives and peasants.

Additionally, in line with a centrally based economy, the prices of agricultural inputs and outputs were set by the Estate, which in practice subsidized consumption as a means of keeping food prices low and responding to escalating food shortages in urban areas (Tarp 1984, p. 14; Mosca 2009, p. 137-138). Thus, governmental intervention in the agricultural sector was, to a large extent, a continuation of the preindependence system under which most agricultural commodities had their prices fixed at all stages of production and distribution (World Bank 1988, p. 3).

In the Mozambican context, it is difficult to say whether this strategy ever stood a chance of success as Marxist-Leninist rationale asserted (i.e., in the sense of modernizing and industrializing the economy and thereby phasing out family farming), since parallel to its implementation, an intensive civil war, typical of the Cold War period, was taking place between Frelimo and the oppositional group Renamo (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana or Mozambican National Resistence). Renamo had substantial support from traditional chiefs (régulos) whom Frelimo accused of having collaborated with the colonial regime (Slovo and dos Santos 1973, p. 43; Newitt 1995, p. 544). Moreover, RENAMO was also supported by the neighboring "white economies" of Rhodesia and South Africa, which viewed independent Mozambique as a threat. The civil war that lasted between 1977 and 1992 between Frelimo and Renamo generated a large contingent of displaced people, mainly families from rural areas who fled to urban areas deemed safer. Approximately 1 million people (of the total of 12.8 million) were displaced by 1986 (World Bank 1988, p. 2).

In practice, the focus on large-scale centrally managed state farms continued to subject family farmers to unfavorable conditions and did not benefit agricultural production as intended. Inefficiency characterized these farms due to a series of aspects, such as the wrong timing of operations set by common and centrally made schedules, the availability of expensive and imported inputs and machinery, and inexperienced management (World Bank 1988, p. ii; Dinerman 2001; Mosca 2009, p. 111). Ultimately, the ongoing civil war, which directed the bulk of 'resources to defense rather than development' (Lunstrum 2008, p. 340), combined with the lack of support to family farmers (and to cooperatives) and the emphasis on difficult to manage large-scale state farms, meant that by the early 1980s, Mozambique's agricultural production had collapsed (Mosca 2009).

Turning to a market orientation

Mozambique started to change its economic orientation in the 1980s – a period that was significantly different from the earlier postindependence period of most Sub-Saharan countries that received foreign support by Western donors such as the World Bank. In the Western-supported postindependence period, a somewhat neo-Keynesian package for rural areas was available. Accordingly, it was then common for programs to support the provision of infrastructure, the subsidizing of agricultural inputs (including fertilizers and seeds, inspired by the ongoing productive achievements of the Green Revolution), and the establishment of national enterprises that marketed the fluctuating stocks produced by farmers (Bryceson 2009).[17]

In the 1980s (a period that is seen as representing a break-up of the neo-Keynesian consensus), Mozambique started to firm ties with the Western donor community. During this period, not only global aid to agriculture declines dramatically but also its character changes (von Braun et al. 1993; Delgado 1998). As noted by Eicher 2004 (p. 7), "the pendulum of professional opinion about aid effectiveness and modalities has swung away from an original concentration on project-based assistance to new programmatic forms, most notably budget support and associated modalities of debt relief". This is largely a consequence of the macroeconomic reforms that were launched in the 1980s through structural adjustment programs pushing forward market liberalization, privatizations, general devaluation of currencies, fiscal austerity, etc.

In Mozambique, a process of liberalization and market-led policies was initiated in 1983. In 1987, a formal program promoting the market economy was approved – The Program of Economic Rehabilitation, which "focused on several central macroeconomic policy issues, including the exchange rate and trade policies, pricing policies, the budget and credit, and on policy and institutional reforms in the key sectors of agriculture, industry and transport" (World Bank 1988, p. 5). Accordingly, the Mozambican currency (metical) suffered dramatic devaluation, going from 25.55 meticais per dollar in 1975, to 43.18 in 1985, and to 404.00 in 1987 (World Bank 1988).

In the agricultural sphere, these reforms comprised the constriction of the role of State in all phases, including production (subsidies, provision of inputs, extension, research), storage, processing, marketing, and pricing, along with the liberalization of imports and exports. The idea behind these reforms was basically to make prices responsive to markets and therefore that monetary devaluation combined with liberalization and the downscale of the state apparatus would increase overall economic efficiency, stimulating agricultural productivity (Mosca 2009, p. 113, 122, 141).[18]

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[17] Nonetheless, it has been widely acknowledged that the benefits of these programs were harnessed mainly by the better-off peasants, with larger land holdings who were able to access credit, input supplies, extension advice, etc. (Beckman 1977; Delgado 1998; Eicher 2004).

[18] The effects are debatable, but Grabowski (2018) shows that prior to these reforms the agricultural sector had been taxed beyond the nonagricultural sector which had been extra subsidized. Mosca

Market "conditionalities" – largely imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which oftentimes threatened to discontinue loans (Mosca 2009, p. 122) – along with the non-concretization of their expected trickle-down effect gave rise to a wave of criticism contending that "cutbacks in rural health, education, and especially agricultural support programs produced a widespread malaise" (Bryceson 2009, p. 51). As a response, a second generation of structural adjustment emerged, and this time, more attention was paid to political and institutional issues such as governance, decentralization, an enabling legal framework – and therefore with a supposedly more "humane" face that is lenient to, for example, "safety-nets" and "market-smart" subsidies[19] (Jolly 1991; Delgado 1998; Byerlee et al. 2008). It falls outside the scope of this thesis to discuss whether these more recent aspects of still market-led programs constitute in fact a significant break from the original neoliberal stage. However, what is central here is that the promotion of private LSLAs in Mozambique takes place in this context – in which an important role of the State is "to facilitate the release of market forces and the unchaining' of the private entrepreneur" (Havnevik et al. 2007, p. 16).

The role of commercial large-scale agriculture

In Mozambique's liberal era, private investors are perceived as essential in the historical task of increasing production and productivity. In this "new phase of economic development characterized by a market economy" (Mozambican Republic 1995b, p. 1), the government counts on the private sector – which, according to the Mozambican government, comprises not only producers but also traders and providers of services and credit – to improve access to inputs (e.g., seeds, fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides), machinery, financial services, technical assistance, marketing channels, agro-processing services, and infrastructure, such as facilities for storage and conservation of agricultural output (Mozambican Republic 1995a, 24 iv a; 24 vii d; 35 I; Mozambican Republic 2011, p. 62; Mozambican Republic 2013, p. 20, 55).

Accordingly, investors are held as central actors in the task of increasing agricultural production directly through the expansion of their activities as producers (in and beyond established plantations of, e.g., cotton, tobacco, sugar, tea, rice and horticulture) but also indirectly through engagement in areas that enhance production and productivity of family farming. Ultimately, the goals are multifold and comprise national economic strengthening through the increase in exports and the decrease in

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states nonetheless that it was the large agricultural companies or commercial dealers that marketed peasants' production who benefited directly from the reforms (Mosca 2009, p. 113).

[19] See for example the 2008 World Development Report (Byerlee et al. 2008), where 'market-smart' producer subsidies, comprising mainly fertilizers are described as justifiable for stimulating new demand for fertilizers (pp. 151-152).

food imports,[20] as well as the augmentation of food security and the combat of poverty, which are commonly cited goals in public documents addressing agriculture (Mozambican Republic 2011; 2013).

These goals are justified by data that show that family farmers' households often endure periods of hunger (FAO 2019). Food insecurity and rural poverty are attributed not only to a small agribusiness sector (Mozambican Republic 2013, p. 58), but also to low crop yields attained by family farming.[21] The latter is seen as a consequence of several limitations, such as a lack of information on prices; a lack of access to agricultural extension; a low application of chemical inputs (i.e., fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides); a low utilization of tractors and modern machinery; low access to irrigation; and overall high crop vulnerability due to, for example, too little or too much rain, floods, pests, or wild animals (Mozambican Republic 2011, 2013; FAO 2019).

The emphasis on businesses' direct engagement in agriculture is accompanied by the view "that government's proper role in the agricultural sector is in providing a guiding regulatory framework for the private operators – farmers, processors, retailers of agricultural inputs and outputs, agribusiness, etc. – to be able to function in an environment characterized by sound property rights and limited distortion of incentives. The view proposes that government should refrain or at least limit engaging in direct productive activity, or the provision of those goods and services that the private sector would be incentivized to offering if the business environment is sound" (Mogues and Rosario 2016, p. 35; see also PricewaterhouseCoopers 2007; Cabral 2009).

Accordingly, the public sector is deemed instrumental in ensuring favorable conditions to producers of all scales so that they can carry out their activities in a so-called competitive environment. Among other things, these conditions involve not only ensuring the security of persons and property as noted above but also a stable macroeconomic environment, the provision of basic infrastructure, and an overall political and economic environment that is attractive to businesses and conducive to their activities (e.g., investment incentives, and easiness to acquire land access and to import productive equipment) (Mozambican Republic 2011, p. 39, 41, 61; Mozambican Republic 2013, p. 65).

An underlying assumption of Mozambique's market-oriented vision is that family farmers are essentially private actors who have the potential of acquiring a business

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[20] Mozambique is a food importer. The country imports rice and wheat, which are consumed usually in urban centers. It also imports the main cereal, maize, though usually not because it lacks domestic produce but because of the high cost to transport maize from the north and center (surplus regions) to the south where it is cheaper to import from South Africa. In 2019/2020, Mozambique utilized 2493 tons of maize, out of which 208 tons where imported; 899 tons of rice, out of which 656 tons were imported; 320 tons of sorghum, all of which was produced domestically; 63 tons of millet, all which was produced domestically; and 628 tons of wheat, out of which 617 tons were imported. It exported 20 tons of maize (FAO 2019).

[21] Maize, which is Mozambique most consumed cereal and family farmers' main crop, has a national average yield of 1.2 ton per hectare, a number much lower than neighboring South Africa that averages between 4 and 6 tons of maize per hectare (World Bank 2017b; FAO 2019; FAO 2020).

or commercial orientation under the right settings and following the right incentives. This assumption is not new; instead, it is in line with the view on the transience of family farmers. As asserted by Chodak (1971, p. 333), "African agricultural producers are in varying stages of transition from producers only for self-consumption to producers for the market […] [and therefore] under conducive conditions, as elsewhere in the world, it [the African peasantry] tends to transform itself into the business-farm economy". Thus, the crux of the matter is to establish these "conducive conditions" in places marked by unfruitful circumstances (i.e., countries torn apart by wars, lacking infrastructure, institutions, human capital, etc.).

Despite the potential contributions of the private and public sectors in creating these conditions, the government recognizes that a share of family farmers will not be able to undergo the expected transformation from producing in small plots, mainly with family labor, largely for consumption, relying on rainfall and with little mechanization, to producing on larger plots, with hired labor, mainly for the market, and using new technological packages (e.g., new machines and equipment, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides etc.).

Therefore, the government emphasizes the idea that family families should form groups, associations and cooperatives (Mozambican Republic 2004, article 105; Mozambican Republic 2013, p. 56), or join schemes such as contract farming as a means of acquiring improved access to technologies (Mozambican Republic 2011, p. 42). For peasants who do not take any of these routes, the government expects that the expansion of markets will boost employment opportunities. Accordingly, "the increase of production and the development of the agro-industrial sector will demand larger markets, additional transportation services, additional storage, additional credit for production and market, and additional financial and juridical services"[22] (Mozambican Republic 2011, p. 62). The process is therefore expected to amplify employment opportunities within the private sector. The creation of new livelihood opportunities is critical because the areas sought by investors are usually the areas with the highest agricultural potential that tend to be, unsurprisingly, intensively occupied by family farmers.

To shape harmonic relations between private investors and family farmers, an extensive body of legislation has been elaborated (see also article III). Mozambique's first Constitution of the postsocialist era, valid from 1990, kept land as State property and continued to forbid all perceived forms of land "alienation" (i.e., the selling, mortgaging or pawning of land) (Mozambican Republic 1990, article 46). Nonethe-

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[22] In Portuguese: A transformação da agricultura vai implicar um uso acrescido de mão-de-obra e insumos pelos produtores, o que deverá resultar em mais produção agrária a qual representara matéria-prima para o desenvolvimento do sector agro-industrial. Os aumentos de produção e o desenvolvimento do sector agro-industrial vão exigir mais mercados, mais serviços de transporte, mais armazenagem, mais embalagens, mais crédito à produção e marketing e mais serviços financeiros e jurídicos.

less, it stated that the national economic order was based, among other things, on the initiatives of economic agents and on market forces (Mozambican Republic 1990, article 41). Accordingly, it asserted that the State "promotes and support the active participation of national businesses in the development and consolidation of the country's economy" and that "foreign investments are authorized in all economic sectors, except in those that are reserved to the property or exclusive exploitation of the State" (Mozambican Republic 1990, articles 43 and 45).[23] Furthermore, it also affirmed that the State "incentivizes and supports family sector production" and "encourages farmers [camponeses] […] to organize themselves in more advanced forms of production" (Mozambican Republic 1990, article 42).

In 1995, the "Agrarian Policy" or AP (Mozambican Republic 1995a) and the "National Land Policy" or NLP (Mozambican Republic 1995b) emphasized the importance of, while securing the rights of the Mozambican people over land, promoting private investment as a catalyzer of agricultural transformation and thus as a means to increase in size and efficiency national agricultural production while combatting poverty. The NPL specified the need to define a regulation on the transfer of land use rights, and thus of legislation that obliges "any entity or person […] to negotiate with the local community. Thus, the community can become a partner in the investment, sharing the profits and benefits resultant from it" (Mozambican Republic 1995b, point 25).

These ideas started to materialize with the 1997 Land Law, which replaced the previous Land Law of 1979 and its Regulation of 1986. In line with its antecedent and the Constitution in force in the 1990s, the 1997 Land Law maintained land and natural resources under State property but went further to protect the rights of Mozambican farmers. Accordingly, it legally recognized customary rights and stated that individuals or collectives occupying land under customary norms were exempt from acquiring formal land titles,[24] known as DUATs – that literally means "the right to use and benefit from the land" (Mozambican Republic 1997, articles 12, 13 and 15; 2000, article 1). Nevertheless, to protect Mozambican family farmers, the Land Law specified that the acquisition of DUATs was compulsory for investors seeking to acquire land access. It further defined that if the targeted land was used, the emission of the DUAT should be conditional on the approval of communities using the land (Mozambican Republic 1997, articles 11 and 13). Community consultations, meant to define eventual terms of the concession, were therefore deemed central in the process of land allocation to the business sector (Mozambican Republic 1998, article 27; Mozambican Republic 2010).

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[23] These main messages reviewed above are in line also with the latest Constitution of 2004 – that affirms that the State incentivizes and supports peasants to organize themselves "in more advanced forms of production" (Constitution 2004, Article 105).

[24] Verbal testimonies were deemed sufficient to ensure their land tenure.

The endorsement of large-scale land acquisitions in Mozambique is one of the forms to attract investors into the agricultural sector. The term "acquisition" is somewhat misleading in principle but not in practice since although investors are not "purchasing" land, concessions can last for 50 years with an additional 50 years of renewal (Mozambican Republic 1998, article 18). Private large-scale land concessions were, as seen, enabled by Mozambican legislation in the 1990s. Nonetheless, the phenomenon only gained significant international attention – from scholars, organizations and media – following the financial and food crisis in 2007-2008 (see Nhatumbo and Salomão 2010; Deininger and Byerlee 2011; Edelman, Oya and Borras 2013).

Different sources have reported different numbers and sizes of land concessions, a mismatch that is partly due to diverse methods but also to the lack of governmental transparency regarding land concessions. For example, it has been estimated that between 1986 and 1994, the Mozambican government received requests amounting to 35.3 million hectares (Myers 1994); a World Bank study stated that 2.67 million hectares of land were conceded to private investors between 2004 and 2009 (Deininger and Byerlee 2011); the NGO Grain accounted for 1.58 million hectares between 2006 and 2012 (Grain 2012); and the Land Matrix database accounted for 2.43 million hectares between 2004 and 2014 (The Land Matrix Global Observatory 2014). Regardless of their (in)consistency, these values are all significant, having in mind their potential to directly affect a large share of the Mozambican population, i.e., approximately 70 percent of inhabitants with livelihoods reliant on family farming (Mozambican Government 2015).

Area of study:
The lower Limpopo valley

In this section, I present a short historical background of the study area. Here, I show that the LSLA examined in this study is not unique from a historical perspective. Instead, it falls into a continuum of top-down initiatives in the area that date back to the colonial period. In common, these initiatives dispossessed family farmers from customary land. In line with past efforts, in 2012, a Chinese investor received a concession of 20,000 hectares in the valley.

The area of study is part of what is known as the lower Limpopo valley (fig. 1), an area historically exposed to floods. It is located approximately 215 kilometers from the capital Maputo, nearby Xai-Xai, a town with 132 884 inhabitants (Mozambican Republic 2017). It pertains to one of the country's so-called agricultural development corridors,[25] where the government seeks to, through private partners, optimize agriculture (Mozambican Republic 2011, p. 43, 60; Mozambican Republic 2013, p. 58; Kaarhus 2018).

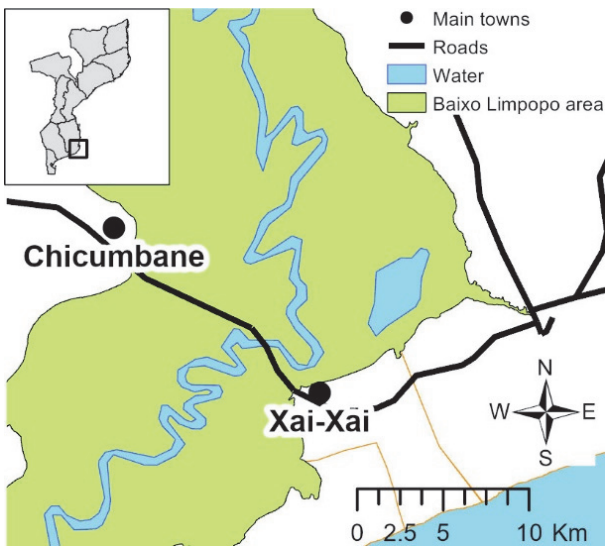

Figure 1. Map of the study area. Baixo (Lower) Limpopo Valley.

[25] The other agricultural corridors are Pemba-Lichinga, Nacala, Vale do Zambeze, Beira, and Maputo (see Kaarhus 2018).

From the early 1900s, the colonial government already had plans to utilize the hydrological potential of the Limpopo River for agricultural endeavors. In the 1920s, planning for the agricultural development of the valley was made, but the proposal was only implemented in the 1950s when an irrigation scheme was constructed, and Portuguese settlers started to arrive (Newitt 1995, p. 462, 466). The utilization of the hydrological potential of the region was meant to transform Mozambique into the "granary of southern Africa" and to safeguard colonial occupation (Roesch 1991; Isaacman 1992, 1996).

The Limpopo colonato was set up in 1954 and enabled Portuguese families (and successively also assimilados Mozambicans) to practice irrigated agriculture and access loans and grants (Newitt 1995, p. 462, 466, 467). This was the first large-scale land eviction in the area, by which Mozambican family farmers were forced to cede the best lands to external farmers and to initiatives such as cotton and rice monocultures (Roesch 1991). As seen in the section "Colonial Mozambique", migration to South African mines became frequent in the south – driven by, among other things, compulsory labor and the need to pay taxes. In the lower Limpopo, the situation was similar, and a large part of the male labor diverged from local agricultural work to mining, seeking income and escaping practices considered exploitative.

I would like to note here some particular aspects of this period: 1) the historical record of land eviction in the area goes back to the colonial period, reinforcing the idea that people have no official right over the land (see article III); 2) family farmers' reliance on cash income is not new but a well-established phenomenon in the region that originally gained traction mainly through men's migration; 3) as men entered the mines and women were left in fields, a gendered division of labor was reinforced – that remains up to today (see article II).

Following independence in 1975 and the nationalization of land, most Portuguese farms were abandoned. Whereas some farms could be reoccupied by Mozambican family farmers, others were turned into state farms under the control of the state company "Unidade de Produção do Baixo Limpopo" (Munslow 1984, p. 211).

As already explained in the section "Independent socialist-oriented Mozambique", agricultural production by the end of the 1980s was only a fraction of what it had been by the end of the colonial period. The reasons for this decay are still debated but include not only the civil war between Frelimo and Renamo but also formal predilection to state farms on detriment of cooperatives and family farmers' efforts.

In the postsocialist, liberal period, the Agricultural Policy of 1995 (point 34) noted the importance of "regadios" or systems of irrigation and specified the objectives of rehabilitating old regadios with public funds and promoting private investment in these zones to reinvest in other projects, concluding regadios in partnership with the potential users, and constructing new regadios by private partners who may profit from renting or selling the infrastructure. Following the catastrophic floods of 2000 that devasted the Limpopo valley, a project was launched to reconstruct the irrigation

and drainage infrastructure. Accordingly, between 2004 and 2008, the Massingir Dam Rehabilitation Project constructed pump stations, excavated canals, replace gates, etc. (African Development Bank 2007; Ganho 2013, 2015).

Regadios along with national development corridors (the former usually located within the latter) constitute areas with high agricultural potential that are often cited as ideal places for private investors to establish their activities (Mozambican Republic 2011, p. 32-33; Mozambican Republic 2013, p. 53, 55, 57-58). The Limpopo Valley in particular has been deemed to have ideal conditions for investments in rice, horticulture, cattle, and poultry (Mozambican Republic 2011, p. 43, 60; Mozambican Republic 2013, p. 18).

In 2010, the public company "Regadio do Baixo Limpopo" (RBL) was created by the decree 5/2010 of March 21 with the mandate to manage the land, water, and infrastructure in the 70,000 hectares that were put under its administration. Additionally, RBL is expected to operationalize the establishment of large-scale agricultural producers and other value-chain investors firming so-called "public-private" partnerships. Accordingly, in April 2007, a memorandum of understanding for technology transfer was signed between the Province of Gaza in Mozambique and the Province of Hubei in China, through which 300 hectares were conceded to the Chinese investor "Liafeng Overseas Agriculture Development Co., Limited" to test rice and maize varieties. In 2012, the "Liafeng Limited" ceded its "demonstration farm" to the private Chinese company 'Wanbao Africa Agriculture Development LLC'[26] (Wanbao), who, in December 2012, signed a contract with RBL that granted Wanbao a total of 20,000 hectares for the cultivation of rice.[27] The coming sections address and explain the implications of this concession to the local livelihoods, focusing on family farmers' conditions.

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[26] Some documents state that the contract was firmed between "China Wanbao Oil & Grain Co. Limited and Chai Shungong".

[27] Other companies with activities within RBL's managed area are the Portuguese company "Companhia Agricola de Fomento Algodeiro or CAFA (in English literally "Agricultural Company of Cotton Promotion"), and the Italian company IGO Sammartini cultivating rice and maize.

Summary of articles

In this section, I present the four articles that comprise this thesis in the order that they were written.

Article I was written with data from the initial fieldwork. It is an overview article of the study area, the project, (the lack of) community consultations, and livelihood implications. As I collected data for this article, it became clear to me that women and particularly female-headed households were the ones worse affected by the land concession. Article II thus focuses on some of the gendered implications of the land concession; it draws on data from fieldwork 1 but mainly from data collected during fieldwork 2. Article III was written somewhat simultaneously with article II and focuses on community consultations or the lack thereof. It also draws widely on other studies from Mozambique – since a central aim was to investigate whether the findings from our case were commonplace in Mozambique. In addition to secondary data, this article uses data mainly from fieldwork 1. During fieldwork 1, it also became apparent that losing land had more than economic effects on livelihoods – people described cultural and religious losses linked to the loss of land. Article IV therefore investigates these multiple values embedded in land and the nearby environment.

Article I – *Land concessions and rural livelihoods in Mozambique: The gap between anticipated and real benefits of a Chinese investment in the Limpopo Valley*

This article starts by exposing the debate between proponents and critics of LSLAs regarding their potential implications for local livelihoods. It seeks to provide primary local data able to orient this, largely theoretical, debate. We thereby make an overview of the study area as a form of contextualization – which shows a long history of previous agricultural strategies aiming at similar objectives: increasing production through large-scale mechanized agricultural initiatives on detriment of Mozambican family farming. On the sequence, the article exposes the case: a concession of 20,000 hectares to a private Chinese company, Wanbao, who started to occupy the area late in 2012. The study shows how the process was fast and disrespected legal procedures, particularly regarding the consultation of the affected communities. Land was taken without local consent, and most of the affected population was not compensated. A wide array of land-dependent activities was affected negatively. Women's livelihoods relied considerably on these activities and were therefore more adversely affected. The employment generated by the company was meager and temporary and engaged mainly young men. A contract farming scheme engaged a group of more "progress-

sive" farmers, deemed more educated or apt to learn the company's system of cultivating rice. All contract farmers faced losses in their initial season, caused by the flooding of the Limpopo (which could not be impeded by the incomplete infrastructure in place). At the time I met them in 2013, contract farmers were very disappointed with the results of their production. Nonetheless, four years afterwards, when I met them again (as well as new members of the scheme), the majority spoke of the profit of good years. They had managed to combine their membership in the scheme with family food cultivation through the help of family members and by hiring extra labor. The scheme had several bottlenecks (e.g., it represented a high-risk endeavor due to the lack of insurance, and it included mainly the already better-off farmers), but overall, the members did not want to leave it; instead, they wanted it to be further improved. Last, approximately more influential and well-to-do farmers entered an association (Arpone) through which they were offered credit and the opportunity to purchase the technological package from Wanbao. Due to a series of factors (such farmer's failure to pay back loans and conditions and fees perceived as too prejudicial), Arpone's potential collaboration with Wanbao never took off. Upon my return in 2017, employment was even more meager since construction work was largely concluded, and Arpone farmers had little importance. Contract farmers, on the other hand, had grown in number and were an increasingly important component of Wanbao's production. These updates were added to article I as a postscript since the article was about to be published. The article concludes that the overall livelihood implications of this project were largely negative for the majority who lost land without any compensation. Thus, this study added empirical evidence to the side of the debate that is critical towards the potential of LSLA to substantially benefit local livelihoods.

Article II – *Large-scale land acquisitions aggravate the feminization of poverty: Findings from a case study in Mozambique*

This article starts by providing an overview of the gendered division of labor in southern Mozambique, positing that women's predominance in farming is long dated, whereas the archetype of masculinity is linked to men's ability to provide the household with cash income. It investigates two nearby sites where people lost land and compares processes of land loss and implications to male-headed vis à vis female-headed households. We show how consultation was either absent or inadequate, and compensation when it took place was insufficient. These deficient processes led to the overall constriction of family farming in two ways: there was less arable land available, and the land available was either of worse quality or required some type of payment (cash, agricultural produce, or work). We assert that worse conditions for farming had more severe implications for individuals and households that were relatively more dependent on farmland, i.e., to women and, in particular, to female-headed households that lacked men's complementary income, furthering thereby the feminization of poverty. This is because as women are deprived from a central resour-

ce (i.e., farmland), they still face a multitude of extra barriers (vis à vis men) to access alternative livelihood sources. These barriers include not only the incipient and largely male-oriented formal wage market but also women's reproductive duties and the mindset in rural settings of looking down on women who work outside their homes or fields. Thus, we assert that LSLAs that follow an exclusive and gender-blind fashion, such as the one analyzed here, are responsible for eroding an important basis of women's livelihoods and thus impairing families' direct access to food as well as women's autonomy. In summary, differences between women's and men's ability to access alternative livelihood sources mediate the implications of LSLAs and imply the need for gender-attentive analysis of LSLAs. The creation of male jobs, although important, will likely not suffice to counter the impairment of women's livelihoods. Compensation that is attentive to everyday gender roles in productive and reproductive activities is critical to prevent the aggravation of pernicious poverty trends.

Article III – *Why does deliberative community consultation in large-scale land acquisitions fail? A critical analysis of Mozambican experiences*

This study seeks to scrutinize community consultations in relation to LSLAs in Mozambique by focusing on their everyday practices. We analyze these practices in relation to the theoretical basis of deliberative decision-making, which we observe to be increasingly institutionalized in international and national legislative frameworks. In other words, we compare the practice with the theory underpinning these potential encounters between investors and local inhabitants. We start by presenting the international framework and the Mozambican legislation on consultations regarding LSLAs along with the main ideas of, and criticism to, deliberative theory that underpins these legal frameworks. In the international sphere, this theoretical framework includes the "principles for responsible agricultural investment that respects rights, livelihoods and resources", the "voluntary guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forest in the context of national food security", and the "principles for responsible investment in agriculture and food systems". In Mozambique, it includes a vast legislation explained in the article, centered in the 1997 Land Law. We note that international and national codes do not question whether LSLAs should occur but how. They are in line with assumptions sustaining popular deliberation. These assumptions, we hold, constitute a normative basis that raises expectations of potential win-win outcomes from encounters between investors seeking land and local inhabitants who have the right over land. Based on secondary sources, we review a range of everyday practices that show that community consultations repeat some critical deliberative vices: treating communities as homogenous social entities; using deliberative spaces for the instrumental end of fabricating consent; and ignoring power in its multidimensional nature. Furthermore, our own case study emphasizes a) the weight and instrumentality of hegemonic discourses on the imperative of agricultural transformation and of the prominence of a

national good over local necessities in the noncompliance to legislation; b) the dismissal of critical voices as detrimental to this national common good (and as emanating from political opposition); and c) the difficulties of navigating the legality of land deals in a context where the government is either the violator of the law or the violator's partner. Overall, our findings corroborate previous findings that reiterate the view of consultations as processes in which formal or substantial exclusion prevails despite their sound theoretical and legal basis. In other words, in practice, consultations have been performative spaces in which voices have followed predefined scripts and top-down decisions have been legally ratified. Consequently, outcomes from consultations can be deemed highly illegitimate through the deliberative rationale from which these processes emanate. Thus, we conclude by stressing the need for theoretical and practical engagement with the challenges of achieving deliberation in places marked by deep structural inequalities.

Article IV – *Enriching perspectives – experienced ecosystem services in rural Mozambique and the importance of a gendered livelihood approach to resist reductionist analyses of local culture*

In this article, we focused on the livelihoods of a village located on the outskirt of the Wanbao land concession and show, through gendered livelihood descriptions, the multiple values that people obtain from the environment. We anchored our study to the literature on ecosystem services that has noted the different values of the environment, and we scrutinize from local perspectives if, by whom, how, and why the environment is experienced as valuable. In doing so, we showed how it is insufficient to look at land or any other part of the environment solely as a resource or economic asset. Farmland, trees, rivers, fish, etc. all embody immaterial value – as illustrated by the essentiality of sacred trees and fish in traditional ceremonies and by the generalized livelihood strategy of seeking the support of the spirits (embodied in sacred trees) of family and community ancestors to, for example, eradicate pests. Furthermore, we also showed how values obtained from the environment are not fixed but relative and gendered. Accordingly, wild plants were critical assets for most households during difficult times, and fish became a strategic asset, controlled mainly by fishermen with boats during floods and droughts. Moreover, men were able to derive additional value from the environment due to their better access to certain productive resources (such as cattle, plows, and boats), and farming held particularly critical value for women with fewer income-generating livelihood alternatives. We conclude by asserting that, considering the multiple and relative material and immaterial values revealed by gendered livelihood descriptions, full compensation for land or environmental loss is inevitably limited since incommensurable value is always lost.

Main findings and discussion

In this section I present and discuss the most important findings from the articles, answering thereby the research questions. Although I refer to the theories and concepts that were instrumental to each one of the articles, the findings here are mainly discussed in relation to the overarching perspectives on the disappearance versus the permanence of peasants. By doing so, I attempt to contextualize this thesis within, and contribute to, the long-standing discussion that has had, and still has, practical implications for rural livelihoods in Mozambique and elsewhere.

The endurance and precarization of peasants

This thesis shows how a recent large-scale land concession took place in Mozambique and its central implications for the directly affected livelihoods. Large-scale land concessions, as this one, epitomize market-grounded hopes on the potential of private investors to transform agriculture and the rural milieu in a depeasantizing fashion. Accordingly, as seen in the theory session, large-scale agricultural investors are expected to benefit from economies of scale, being therefore able to, for example, use resources and technologies more efficiently vis à vis small-scale family farmers (Ellis and Biggs 2001, p. 440).

In the current Mozambican context, in addition to these arguments, the espousing of land concessions also relies on the view that investors' activities, under the right legislative framework, can be synergistic with national development goals and contribute to the strengthening of family farmers' commercial orientation (through, for example, improved access to technological packages, inputs and machinery, technical assistance, infrastructure, and sales and processing channels) while also contributing to the creation of direct and indirect employment expected to absorb individuals exiting family farming. These general expectations – which, to some extent, imply making family farmers less vulnerable to environmental constraints and more dependent on the market, as seen in the theory session – are neither new nor held exclusively by market liberals. Instead, they have been held for over a century and also shared by adepts of a planned economy and by prominent scholars of different disciplines.

Accordingly, we observe the long-lasting view that asserts necessity to the phasing out of family farming by either transforming these farmers into larger-scale commercial farmers or by transforming them into wage workers. The rationale backing these transformations lies largely on the overall goal of increasing production efficiency and output based on the view of peasants as inflexible, without withholding power,

unable to implement competitive improvements in agriculture, and therefore economically inefficient and unviable (Wolf 1966, p. 43-44; Brass 2015, p. 189). Fighting rural poverty (through thus better livelihood alternatives in rural areas) and urban poverty (through, e.g., cheaper food prices) are some of the arguments that contribute to legitimizing this transformational quest.

Based on the findings of this research, I contend that using the term peasant in the current context of LSLAs contributes to cast light on the historical continuity of processes that once again dispossess individuals who strive to make a living directly from small-scale family farming. In other words, despite theoretical precepts of livelihood transformation (from peasants to commercial farmers or wage workers), in practice official efforts did not support (and, it could be argued, countered) such transformation in Mozambique. Furthermore, and importantly, referring to peasants sheds light on the historical endurance of these individuals. These two trends combined (historical dispossession and endurance) underscore what we could call a trend of "precarization of the peasantry" in Mozambique.

As seen in the historical background, Mozambican farmers suffered a wide range of pressures and unfavorable conditions in colonial times and in socialist times. In colonial times, when Portuguese grip was strengthened over Mozambique, several forms of direct land alienation took place. First, large-scale plantations were established throughout the country, and on the sequence colonatos were created in some of most fertile areas. Concomitantly, indirect land alienation took place in the form of compulsory cash crop cultivation, which forced Mozambican farmers to allocate part of their land to certain crops. Additionally, labor alienation was a constituent part of Portuguese rule not only through compulsory cash crop cultivation but also through chibalo. Furthermore, the institutionalization of monetary taxes and fees added another dimension of subordination that imposed regular monetary work upon families. These aspects underlie the subjugation of Mozambican farmers to a system that perceived them as backwards. Successively, in socialist times, state investment was mainly devoted to large-scale state farms, and the family sector as well as newly formed cooperatives were largely left to their own odds in face of a civil war (Tarp 1984, p. 10).

Thus, I contend that current land concessions represent a continuation of historical pressures on Mozambican family farmers that have historically endured subjugation and waves of dispossession. *In the current wave, their subjugation is reasserted not in principle (based on the formal land legal framework) but in practice vis à vis the government and private investors.*

The material precarization of livelihoods follows largely due to, as land is taken from family farmers, no substantial livelihood alternative is opened in exchange, which is aggravated by the increasingly monetized economic context. What we observe in the aftermath of the analyzed large-scale land concession is that family farmers hang on to fields that are usually of worse quality and smaller. Peasants' en-

durance resonates Chayanov's observation that the peasantry comprises a very malleable social group able to persist despite hardships.

It is likely that we also seeing a reduction of labor directed to own family farming since 1) in smaller fields, there seems to be even less of a reason for men to engage in farming, particularly in face of a stronger need for cash to purchase what was previously cultivated (a process that furthers the feminization of family farming); and 2) a widespread strategy for compensating worse family farming conditions is the selling of day labor in fields elsewhere. Nonetheless, I think that reading the process as one of depeasantization would be a misinterpretation. Instead, based on the findings from this research, I argue therefore that *this land concession (and other land concessions that are usually not attentive to local livelihoods and lifeworlds) is not phasing out peasants or family farmers but contributes to their further impoverishment by removing from their control a central productive resource, i.e., land (in quality and amount).*

Of course, individuals are not passive subjects, and in the face of lower returns from family farming, they look for alternatives with higher returns (see articles I and II). A central issue is that most of these alternatives are insecure (as illustrated by the boosting informal sector), meager (e.g., the formal private sector), or unattainable by the majority (e.g., formal public work). *Since individuals are blatantly aware of these shortcomings, they strive to keep farmland as (though not only) a form of insurance i.e., to safeguard at least some reproduction through food access*. In other words, part of the explanation for why family farmers hang on to farming despite inferior conditions comprises the even worse circumstances that would wait them in a livelihood without farmland – circumstances which were long ago advanced by Lenin who denounced the transformation of peasants into wage workers as a cruel one on living standards. Accordingly, parallel to family farming, individuals exercise differential agency to engage in a series of livelihood activities – thus reinforcing the diversification trend that has been widely written about under the theme of "rural livelihood diversity" (Bryceson 1999; Ellis 2000).

In our study area, livelihood diversity is nothing new, with men's engagement in migration and mining being over a century old, as seen in the historical background of this thesis. In other words, family farmers have never engaged in farming only, and they have actively responded to contextual opportunities according to their individual and household conditions. In my interviews, among different accounts, elders shared their experiences as outgrowers and as factory workers during the colonial period, and of working together in short-lived communal fields during the socialist period. Accordingly, neither women nor men have historically engaged solely in farming; instead, they continuously exercise differential agency to engage in additional activities that ensure households' differential production and reproduction.

Accordingly, the findings here support the view that farming and environmental resources in general (as shown in article IV) guarantee some autonomy from the market for current and future generations (see Ploeg 2008, 2018). However, we ob-

serve that instead of paving the complete disengagement from the market, these resources allow peasants' selective engagement with it (through, for example, eventually purchasing seeds, selling production surplus, and purchasing additional consumption items). This double movement of hanging on to farming and to the market is, as seen, not new but a constituent part of peasants' definitions (i.e., that they are not isolated but produce partly for the market). In the research area, it is also a consolidated livelihood strategy.

Thus, reliance on the market to different extents and livelihood diversification cannot be said to be synonymous with depeasantization; on the contrary, these are usually necessary conditions for complementing family farming in meeting production and reproduction needs. The reverse is also valid, i.e., family farming allows individuals to engage in activities with low return by subsidizing this engagement through food supply. In other words, and as advanced by previous scholars, including Kautsky ([1899] 1988), because food consumption is safeguarded by family farming, some household members can engage in activities that alone would not suffice to meet their subsistence needs.

Thus, this land concession, at least during the short period analyzed in this study (less than five years after the company had initiated occupation), can be said to have recasted light on the peasant condition and contributed to, in general, the precarization of livelihoods of family farmers.

Differentiation and a growing economic and gender inequality

In addition to the continuous dependence of households who lost land on family farming, it is interesting to note that individuals who entered the contract farming scheme (described in article I) did not want to abandon family farming. On the contrary, during good yield years, contract farmers experienced synergies between these activities, being able to rely on family labor and to hire extra family day labor, as well as actively looking for additional fields to rent or purchase to increase their family production. In other words, *the revival of contract farming (a type that appeared for the first time in the study area during the colonial period as outgrower schemes, as shown in the historical background) did not imply the depeasantization of engaged families; instead, it reinforced the capacity of local farmers, who were better able to manage risk, to reinvest in their own family production*.

Since the contract farming scheme is quite labor intensive and has been expanding over the years, it could offer good possibilities to engage an increasing number of family farmers, thereby serving as indirect compensation for those who lost land. For this to happen, the selection of members would have to change considerably since those entering the scheme have usually been the better-off and influential farmers. Additionally, the conditions of the scheme would have to be better tailored to the needs of the most deprived households. Such tailoring would involve, among other

aspects and components as explained in article I (and on Porsani, forthcoming), the addition of insurance that could make the scheme safer for those who are more vulnerable to large economic losses. Without insurance, in worse years (such as 2013 and 2017), individuals without large savings risk end up strongly indebted (which is the equivalent of having worked for negative wages). As explained in article I, production in family farming is also a risky endeavor, but financial investment is much lower in comparison to contract farming. In addition, crop diversity within peasant farming usually secures some production, which is not the case for rice monoculture (the contract farming crop). Regardless, without different settings, bringing in the most deprived farmers into the contract farming scheme can worsen their economic conditions depending on the severity and frequency of difficulties in the agricultural cycle.

Considering the minority of better-off contract farmers who joined the scheme in a project that dispossessed a majority of family farmers, it is likely that the analyzed land concession has furthered economic inequality among households. This heterogeneity manifests itself, among different forms, in varying means to exercise farming (e.g., size of fields, access to tractors, bulls, hired labor, and ability to obtain and commercialize production surplus).

In addition to the abovementioned economic inequality between better-off contract farmers and the dispossessed farmers, among the latter, this land concession was also a driver of gender inequality. As explained in article II, both due to the structure of the market and due to historical and cultural reasons, men are usually better positioned to obtain off-farm cash income. Consequently, *as farmland is taken from families and no substantial alternatives are created, women end up more dependent on men's income to meet households' reproduction needs. The precarization of family farming therefore contributes to reinforcing gender inequality and gender hierarchies within household*s – which has been shown by other studies to affect individual consumption due to the differentiated return and implications of family labor (Folbre 1986; Deere 1995).[28]

Furthermore, an economic gap between households that have male labor vis à vis households without male labor is also reinforced. Thus*, as farmland becomes increasingly constricted, the precarization of family farming goes hand in hand with the feminization of poverty* addressed in article II. Accordingly, in general, findings from articles I and II illustrate how, as land concessions take place, wealth and gender intersect to increase inequalities among the affected population.

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[28] See also Kaarhus and Dondeyne (2015) for additional example on increase gender discrepancy in the context of LSLAs in Mozambique.

Livelihood implications transcend farming and the material dimension

The strive to continue with family farming can partly be explained through the economic rationale of safeguarding food production for present and future family consumption having in mind meager and insecure livelihood alternatives, as also noted. Nonetheless, this economic rationale falls short on fully explaining individuals' reasons for enduring as family farmers. As shown in article IV, land is not only used by family farmers as an economic factor or productive resource. A wide range of values are embedded in land and in the environment in general. In fact, it has long been acknowledged that peasants' land should not only be understood as a production factor since it is loaded with symbolic value (see Wolf 1966, p. 15; Gallardo Fernández 2002).

The findings in article IV show that peasants' relation to the environment cannot be narrowed to farmland. Neither can it be confined and understood solely in the economic dimension. For example, and as shown by the livelihood descriptions in article IV, individuals exercise a web of relations with the environment deriving and exchanging varying outputs from it. Furthermore, in the study region, the spiritual world is perceived as a constituent part of the mundane world. Family fields, where ancestors worked and were buried, contribute to linking these dimensions and are therefore of inestimable value to families. Similarly, trees and fish species, for example, fulfil different material and symbolic roles that provide sustenance and meaning to livelihoods. Attention to this symbolic basis adds evidence to family farming being also a choice (and not merely a destiny, as also advanced by Ploeg). Accordingly, keeping a foothold in family farming is also a means of exercising identity and of nurturing for example meaningful relations such as spiritual connections with ancestors.

Despite these symbolic values embedded in the environment, the historical discussion on peasants, reviewed in the theory section, tends to emphasize the materiality of their livelihoods and to focus on the substitutability of one economic activity for another, e.g., peasant farming for wage labor. This eventual substitutability has largely been understood in terms of furthering material deprivation in the short run (by Marxists), or of increasing free choice (by liberals). Either ways, a materialist and economic analysis that imputes necessity to livelihood transformation has prevailed. This means that central arguments on expecting or not family farmers to endure or disappear are based on, for example, the efficiency of different production systems and the availability of alternative employment in different sectors – with livelihoods being therefore approached as comprising substitutable activities of material character.

The immaterial values involved in making a living directly from the land reveal the double cruelty of land concessions that deprive family farmers from a substantial material basis of livelihoods but also from a cultural and symbolic basis. Attention to this latter basis positions farmland dispossession as part of a wider environmental

dispossession and underscores that neither (i.e., farmland or environment) should be understood solely in the economic dimension. Furthermore, *attention to this cultural and symbolic basis is sine qua non to the discussion on compensation for LSLAs because, as we understand the richness and complexity of how humans relate to the near environment in the rural milieu, it becomes clear that some values embedded in the environment are irreplaceable*.

The impossibility of fully compensating farmers for land loss

A central question for the discussion about LSLAs in Mozambique and in general becomes thus not only how to compensate for land loss but whether it is actually possible to fully compensate for it. This question is relevant for the following reasons. 1) People use land differently and therefore experience different values from it (which, among other things, implies that values are gendered). 2) These uses and values vary across time. 3) There are many material values, and they comprise not only farming output but other land-based resources from, for example, domesticated and wild animals, trees and wild vegetation, the soil and water. 4) Material values feed into different relations that are not only related to one's own consumption but also exchange, thus having implications for other individuals and households. 5) Importantly, in addition to these material values, the environment is embedded with immaterial values that enable spiritual practices and local traditions, which underpin, among other aspects, a sense of home and identity. Altogether, material (more commensurable) and immaterial (less commensurable) values sustain particular lifeworlds, being therefore cultural. Consequently, land and environmental dispossession go hand in hand with symbolic dispossession.

Material and immaterial values addressed in article IV have been a matter of analysis of scholars studying ecosystem services. Although ecosystem services studies have been criticized for often relying on monetary and top-down valuation approaches, they increasingly utilize a combination of methods that seek to reveal the multiple ways through which the environment generates value to humans (see Kronenberg and Andersson 2019). Unfortunately, discussions on LSLA and on peasants tend to disregard the findings of ecosystem services studies. This is probably because proponents of LSLAs most likely do not want to emphasize additional costs caused by land deals, whereas voices critical to LSLAs are usually not keen on the traditional ecosystem services rhetoric.

By applying a livelihood perspective to ecosystem services reasoning, article IV shows *the importance of thinking holistically in terms of environmental loss and not only farmland loss in relation to LSLAs*. As we look holistically to the centrality of the environment in peoples' livelihoods, we understand that as land is taken from entire communities, it is not only their economic basis that is affected, entire lifeworlds are challenged.

Hence, the question that we then turn to now, already advanced above, is if it is possible to compensate for land and environmental loss in relation to LSLAs. I already mentioned that compensation is challenging and that it is likely impossible to fully compensate for immaterial values. However, is it possible to at least compensate for material losses? As explained in article III, and largely inspired by the fundaments of popular deliberation, it is possible in principle that two parts agree on a mutually beneficial deal. To family farmers in the study area, a deal that compensates for material losses would have to match or exceed the equivalent flows from farming output and of resources obtained from the environment. In practice, any compensation is nonetheless extremely difficult to achieve in a context such as the Mozambican context, as shown by the experiences depicted in article III.

The several bottlenecks hindering equality and inclusion in so-called community consultations have implied that these created spaces have in practice been used for the instrumental end of fabricating community consent, legalizing land concessions. These bottlenecks rest on power discrepancies within communities but also, and most importantly, between communities and investors backed up by the government. For example, consultations often never occur. Instead, investors may meet only the village chief who grants consent in exchange for some personal benefit (oftentimes because he is under the impression that refuting the concession was not a real choice). When inhabitants are invited to a meeting, the same dynamics are repeated: it is the voice of leaders that prevails, and refuting the investor does not seem to be a real alternative to individuals placed face to face with local and external authorities. Furthermore, these same individuals are usually unaware of their land rights (i.e., the legal recognition of customary occupation) and unable to dispute arguments backed by unfamiliar technologies.

Finally, even if we were to ignore the above asymmetries and envisage the making of an agreement perceived as beneficial to family farmers, there is little chance they could hold the investor accountable for fulfilling the agreement conditions in the Mozambican institutional context. These shortcomings, among others described in article III, have implied that Mozambican family farmers have usually not been compensated for material losses caused by land concessions. Material compensation, when it happened, was partial and to a few, as illustrated by this study and by other cases in Mozambique reviewed in article III.

Therefore, I assert that full compensation for land loss is inevitably limited since material (commensurable) value is usually lost, and immaterial symbolic (incommensurable) value is irremediably lost. These losses mean that family farmers' livelyhoods and lifeworlds have been affected mainly negatively by contemporary land concessions.

What is new about contemporary LSLAs?

What is therefore new about contemporary land concessions in Mozambique? Based on the findings from this study, we see that private land investors seem to be a relatively new component in the agricultural sector, particularly since the 1990s, when the country was veered towards a market-economy. In fact, private investors have received a large part of the blame as "land grabbers" in Mozambique and in other places. What we see nonetheless is that *private investors are only expected to follow the role that was once played by the public efforts of consolidating certain conditions* (e.g., making available inputs and machinery, providing technical assistance, processing agricultural produce, constructing infrastructure, creating direct and indirect employment, etc.) *deemed conducive in the transformation of family farmers into commercially oriented farmers or, alternatively, wage workers*. Private investors' current role is legitimized by theoretical precepts on the transiency of the peasantry and the necessity to establish large-scale commercial agriculture. Attempts during the colonial period and during the socialist period are illustrative. Accordingly, the current effort to increase agricultural production through the hands of private investors does not represent a significant rupture from past efforts; instead, they constitute a renewed attempt from above to phase out the peasantry.[29]

What is different now seems to be the expectations from such efforts. Whereas in the past peasants were overtly seen as a hindrance to agricultural transformation, now a combined liberal and democratic discourse underscores expectation on potential synergies that may lead to win-win outcomes for investors seeking land and family farmers exchanging land voluntarily. Accordingly, *now we observe the expectation that the process will be inclusive and immediately benefit family farmers since they are, in principle, brought to the negotiation table*. This expectation rests, inter alia, also on international voluntary codes of conduct and national legal frameworks that hold community consultations as the cornerstone of win-win deals. In contrast, family farmers were not consulted in colonial Mozambique prior to their eviction from some of the most fertile lands (as illustrated by the experience in the Limpopo valley). Likewise, after independence, Frelimo did not consult family farmers before allocating the best lands to state farms and directing most resources to these (Bowen 2000, p. 48-57). Now, in places marked by strong hierarchies and unreliable institutions, community consultations are expected to deliver inclusion and equality and ensure mutual gains.

Is it thereby possible to assert that the widespread negative livelihood implications of this land concession were due to the lack of appropriate community consultations? In other words, if consultations had occurred as they are envisioned and established

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[29] Compare with Lenin's predicament, that the peasantry would naturally differentiate (thus from below), leading to the "depeasantizing" of the rural milieu (Lenin [1899] 1960, p. 173 and 181).

in the legal framework, would the consequences had been the same? Based on the findings from this study, it is possible to speculate that if consultations had occurred in an inclusive and transparent manner, potentially affected individuals would have refused the concession since they would have understood the extension of the material and immaterial costs that were to be inflicted on them. If consultations had been more inclusive than they were, but not as inclusive to the extent of allowing affected individuals to reject the concession, it is likely that affected individuals could have at least bargained better material conditions such as continuous economic flows or a more even inclusion in the contract farming scheme along with better conditions in the same.

Thus, it is possible to assert that widespread negative livelihood implications followed inappropriate community consultations. However, this assertion does not imply that if only community consultations were to be improved, these deals could lead to win-win outcomes. I say this because *it is unrealistic to expect ideal precepts of consultations to fully work in the real world, particularly in places with long-standing democratic deficits* (as shown in article III). This realization should make expectations on consultations more modest.

Thus, considering the bottlenecks involved in making community consultations work in the real world, although they may be improved by concerted efforts aimed at enhancing equality and inclusion, we should remain skeptic on affected individuals' capacity to negotiate on an equal basis with investors or external authorities. Therefore, considering the value of land to local livelihoods, we may affirm that *if the targeted land is intensively used from a labor and values perspective, the concession will most likely jeopardize most livelihoods in commensurable and incommensurable ways*, regardless of what eventual minutes from consultations state.

Conclusion

Based on a case from Mozambique, this thesis has shown and explained central livelihood implications of a recent LSLA. In the analyzed case, land in the lower Limpopo valley was taken from the control of family farmers and allocated to a private investor for large-scale rice monoculture. As families lost land, their economy became more dependent on off-farm, typically male, income sources. Simultaneously, individuals strived to regain access to farmland and usually succeeded, although fields were smaller and of worse soil quality. Whereas family farmers experienced the deterioration of their access to an important livelihood source, a few individuals gained temporary employment, and a growing number of individuals entered a contract farming scheme. Whereas most employment was of temporary character, membership in the contract farming scheme was not. Despite several bottlenecks that made this scheme considerably risky for those without economic backings, in good years, members were able to profit.

Among dispossessed farmers, the precarization of livelihoods went hand in hand with the feminization of family farming and of poverty. These livelihood trends implied the widening of economic inequality (i.e., between households able to rely on male income and households lacking it, and between households of better-off farmers who profited from the contract farming scheme and households of dispossessed farmers). Nonetheless, increased economic inequality (and thus differentiation) cannot be said to lead to depeasantization since both better-off family farmers and worse-off dispossessed farmers strived to keep a foothold on their own farmland. The lasting importance of family farming can be explained by the economic rationale of securing part of households' consumption needs, though not only. Having farmland is also a means of securing access to additional environmental resources, and engagement in family farming is embedded with symbolic immaterial value illustrated by the nurturing of relations with spirits from ancestors usually buried in family fields.

Thus, in addition to material dispossession, large-scale land concessions are also driving symbolic dispossession, being dually cruel on the affected masses. Securing compensation for material losses in a context where institutions are deficient constitutes a major challenge. Considering the incommensurability of symbolic values, compensating for their loss is in practice unfeasible.

Although envisioning a deal that could be beneficial for family farming was not the focus of my study, I would like to share some thoughts on this matter in concluding this summary. As mentioned above, a concession that targets the land that is intensively used from material and immaterial perspectives is a priori doomed to

negatively affect local livelihoods that rely directly on land. Concessions that stand a change of leading to widespread and immediate benefits for local livelihoods would have to target land that is truly idle and plan for the creation of new livelihood alternatives such as jobs and contract farming schemes together with the local population – which would provide the investor with insight into critical issues such gender and wealth discrepancies, making it possible for new opportunities to tailor the needs of less privileged groups. Considering individuals' attempt to keep on with family farming, these created opportunities would have to be compatible with this activity, potentially strengthening it.

Strengthening family farming does not necessarily shift it into a commercial stage of profit-maximization direction, or at least not in the short run when economic, institutional, and cultural contexts remain unchanged – this is clear once we understand the multiple values of land in local lifeworlds. Selling more, although an important goal, is not the sole or main aspiration of family farmers. Consuming more, saving more, donating more (usually within the family but also within communities), ensuring the use of land (to avoid confiscation), and harnessing symbolic values embedded in land and the environmental are also aspired outcomes.

Finally, I would like to clarify that my findings espouse the permanence and support of family farmers from a livelihood perspective and not from an efficiency perspective since my study did not garner data on this matter. Family farmers continue however to endure prejudicial conditions in relation to large-scale initiatives – which is now illustrated with the forcible allocation of some of the best lands to investors. The current process resembles past pressures inflicted on Mozambican family farmers since colonial times. Nonetheless, despite sequential and concerted pressures and deprivations, family farming has persisted. Consequently, working for its disappearance is against concerned livelihoods and can only be justified from a top-down progressive view of societal change. Sincere and truly new attempts to enhance livelihoods would have to, together with the potentially affected individuals, shape alternatives that are locally aspired and deemed appropriate.

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Since the 2007–2008 food and financial crisis, reports on a wave of large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) in developing countries have gained media and scholarly attention. A large share of LSLAs occurred in sub-Saharan African countries, where a substantial part of the population has livelihoods directly reliant on farmland. On the one hand, these acquisitions embodied the promise of win-win deals firmed between investors and local inhabitants. On the other hand, concerns mounted that these acquisitions were in fact land grabs, concealed by over-optimistic legislation that envisages mutually beneficial partnerships. Understanding if and how livelihoods are being affected by LSLAs is instrumental to this debate.

This thesis focuses on Mozambique, which is one of the countries that has been targeted by recent land investors. It examines the process and the implications of LSLAs for local livelihoods, especially the livelihoods of those who make a living from farming. Its findings show the renewed pressure placed on family farmers, now through the hands of private actors backed by public efforts.

Juliana Porsani has a multi-disciplinary background in geography and environmental studies. She is specially interested in rural livelihoods in developing countries. She holds a Master of Science in geography and this is her PhD thesis.

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