

MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Resistance without a movement? (Quiet) Food Sovereignty in
Central Asia

verfasst von | submitted by

Sophie Gleitsmann BA

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien | Vienna, 2024

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 066 589

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium Internationale Entwicklung

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dipl.-Ing. Dr. Kristina Dietz

Special and eternal thanks to

all the wonderfully kind Kyrgyzstani who have helped, supported, and shared their knowledge with me, invited me into their lives, and remain my friends

the Germans, Austrians, Dutch, and Americans, who helped organize this research and provided me with feedback and valuable insights

my all-in-one supervisor, employer, and friend

my fabulous friends, of whom the unfortunate (my favourites) were asked to proofread parts of this thesis – forgive me

my mama for drying my tears and paying my rent

myself for pushing through despite being on the verge of a breakdown

Abstract (English)

The past decades have seen new types of rural social movements emerge, which demand socially just and environmentally sustainable trajectories of agrarian change, many based on the principles of food sovereignty. Transnational agrarian movements, such as La Vía Campesina, fight for peasant's rights worldwide and aim to unite peasants in a shared class interest and global coalition. Although a growing body of literature focuses on the trend of food sovereignty movements across the globe, limited attention has been granted to regions that are absent from respective networks, especially the post-Soviet space. Previous attempts of explanations remain superficial and ignorant to alternative, muted expressions of resistance and food sovereignty.

Based on qualitative research involving 20 interviews, this study explores challenges to the emergence of food sovereignty movements in the post-Soviet countries, with a focus on Kyrgyzstan. This study has revealed a set of intertwined and overlapping factors which challenge the emergence of rural bottom-up mobilization. While NGOs and international organisations aspire to facilitate peasant collective action, (non-)violent threats emanating from the state, persisting Soviet legacy, and mistrust among the population weaken civil society. Instead of politically articulated protest, resistance to the system is shown in practices of 'quiet' food sovereignty, which relate to self-sufficiency efforts, historically entrenched patterns of community and family networks, as well as nomadic culture.

Abstract (Deutsch)

In den vergangenen Jahrzehnten haben sich neue Formen sozialer Bewegungen im ländlichen Raum etabliert, die einen sozial gerechten und ökologisch nachhaltigen Wandel in der Landwirtschaft fordern. Dabei berufen sie sich vielfach auf die Prinzipien der Ernährungssouveränität. Transnationale Agrarbewegungen wie La Vía Campesina engagieren sich weltweit für die Rechte von *peasants* und zielen darauf ab, diese in einem gemeinsamen Klasseninteresse und einer globalen Koalition zu vereinen. Obwohl sich ein stetig wachsender Teil der Literatur mit Ernährungssouveränitätsbewegungen weltweit auseinandersetzt, wurde bestimmten Regionen, wie dem post-sowjetischen Raum bisher nur wenig Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt. Bisherige Versuche, die Abwesenheit des post-sowjetischen Raumes in transnationalen Netzwerken zu erklären, bleiben oberflächlich und ignorieren alternative, stille Ausdrucksformen von Widerstand und Ernährungssouveränität.

Anhand von 20 Interviews hat diese qualitative Studie untersucht, welche Faktoren die Herausforderungen für die Entstehung von Ernährungssouveränitätsbewegungen in post-sowjetischen Ländern erklären, wobei der Schwerpunkt auf Kirgistan liegt. Die Studie hat eine Reihe von miteinander verflochtenen und sich überschneidenden Faktoren aufgedeckt, welche das Entstehen ländlicher Graswurzelbewegungen erschweren. Während Nichtregierungsorganisationen und internationale Organisationen bestrebt sind, bäuerliches kollektives Handeln zu erleichtern, führen (nicht-)gewaltsame Drohungen seitens des Staates, das fortbestehende sowjetische Erbe sowie das in der Bevölkerung vorherrschende Misstrauen zu einer Schwächung der Zivilgesellschaft. Der Widerstand gegen das System manifestiert sich nicht in Form von politisch artikuliertem Protest, sondern in Praktiken der "stillen" Ernährungssouveränität. Diese basieren auf Selbstversorgungsbemühungen, historisch verankerten Mustern von Gemeinschafts- und Familiennetzwerken sowie auf der nomadischen Kultur.

Abbreviations

ADI	Agency for Development Initiative
AFC	Agriculture and Food Consulting Group
AUCA	American University of Central Asia
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
DONGOs	Donor-Organized NGOs
ECVC	European Coordination Vía Campesina
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GIZ	Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit
GONGOs	Government-Oriented NGOs
INMIP	International Network of Mountain Indigenous People
IPC	International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty
LVC	La Vía Campesina
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NLKDF	Nomadic Livestock Keepers Development Fund
UCA	University of Central Asia
TAM	Transnational Agrarian Movement
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Relevance for the field of Development Studies.....	4
1.2	State of research	5
1.3	Food sovereignty as a precondition to food security.....	11
2.	Theoretical framework.....	14
2.1	Context, structures, and actors: Social movements and political opportunity structures	15
2.1.1	Defining opportunities	17
2.1.2	Defining threats	18
2.1.3	The role of state-related actors: NGOs and civil society.....	20
2.1.4	Limitations and application	21
2.2	Theoretical approaches to the mobilization of peasants.....	22
2.2.1	Classical agrarian Marxism	24
2.2.2	Peasant studies.....	26
2.2.3	Everyday forms of resistance as a political act.....	29
2.2.4	Quiet food sovereignty.....	31
2.3	Synthesis.....	33
3.	Methods	35
3.1	Research design and case study.....	35
3.2	Data collection methods	39
3.3	Conducting the research	41
3.3.1	Access to the field and its limitations.....	41
3.3.2	Sampling strategy and size	42
3.3.3	Interview guide.....	43
3.4	Data analysis: focused interview-analysis	44
3.5	Conducting research in authoritarian contexts and further limitations	46
4.	Background and context.....	49
4.1	Historical outline of resistance movements in Kyrgyzstan	49
4.2	Post-soviet times	52
4.2.1	Land reforms and agricultural development.....	53
4.2.2	The emergence and development of NGOs and civil society.....	55
4.2.3	Political development of the country and region.....	56
5.	Challenging factors for the emergence of food sovereignty movements.....	57
5.1	Unperceived and/or unused political opportunities.....	57
5.1.1	Volatile political opportunities	58

5.1.2 Stable political opportunities	62
5.1.3 Discussion – A weak state produces a weak civil society	63
5.2 Threats.....	65
5.2.1 Suppressive tactics: restrictive laws, distraction, and elite influence	65
5.2.2 Repressive tactics	69
5.2.3 Discussion	70
5.3 Weak civil society	72
5.3.1 Soviet legacy, lack of trust, and cultural logic	72
5.3.2 Development stages and development aid.....	75
5.3.3 Trans-, inter-, and national actors.....	77
5.3.3.1 Transnational Agrarian Movements: La Vía Campesina	77
5.3.3.2 Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society.....	80
5.3.4 Economic marginalization	82
5.3.5 Discussion – “Peasants do not fight for food sovereignty”	83
5.4 Cooperatives as top-down enterprises	85
5.5 Local understanding of food sovereignty as a concept.....	89
5.6 Everyday practices of resistance and quiet food sovereignty.....	92
6. Conclusion	100
7. Bibliography.....	103
Appendix.....	117

„Understanding Kyrgyz culture and politics was akin to peeling an onion. Each time you thought you understood what was happening, who was supporting whom, why the government made the decisions and took the actions it did, you would find your assumptions had been based on an outer layer, not the core.“

Eileen A. Malloy, first US-ambassador to Kyrgyzstan

(Malloy 2020)

1. Introduction

In many parts of the world, different forms of social mobilisation have been and are currently emerging in response to unjust and unsustainable trajectories of agri-food system change (Friedmann 2005; Andrée et al. 2019). New rural social movements have even been referred to by some academics as a „global food sovereignty movement“ (Woods 2003; Holt-Giménez/Shattuck 2011) and a „worldwide phenomenon“ (Sevilla Guzmán/Martinez-Alier 2006). These movements have been surging in the recent decades due to several factors. Globalization and new ways of communication have simplified transnational connections, made peasant struggles more visible, and strengthened solidarity links across the globe (Roth 2001: 60). In addition, climate change and the subsequent climate crisis as well as the rising financialization of agriculture are turning food into an increasingly political topic (Clapp et al. 2017; Clapp/Isakson 2018). Also, the ongoing Russian war of aggression in Ukraine since March 2022 has once again shown the consequences of trade dependencies in value chains across the globe and associated access to food (Ben Hassen/El Bilali 2022; Mamonova 2023). National rural social movements have localized and at the same time transnationalized their actions and work in recent years. As a result of transnationalization processes, polycentric and more horizontal rural social movements have emerged, which at the same time continue to work in vertical structures (Borras 2010: 772). This apparent contradiction of localization and transnationalization is the basis for the emergence of transnational agrarian movements (TAMs), which have increasingly become vocal and connected in recent decades and have therefore been growing into an academical field of study (Borras and Edelman 2010). In the realm of international development, TAMs serve as crucial agents of change, advocating for peasant's and small-scale farmer's rights worldwide. Demands for social and economic justice are paired with environmental claims, mainly articulated against neoliberal globalization and its current model of agriculture. One of the first and major transnational agrarian movements is La Vía Campesina (LVC). The establishment of LVC was a direct outcome of the resolute stance to make the class of poor peasants and small farmers heard as a distinct class voice, with LVC representing that class interest (Borras 2023: 693f.) La Vía Campesina can be described as an amorphous coalition of groups and organizations that are united as an international movement and localized in the sphere of peasant right's activism, while comprising 180 organisations in 81 countries (LCV n.d. a). The main aim of this global coalition is to achieve food sovereignty, which is defined as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and their right to define their food and agriculture systems” (ibid.) and is generally considered to be an extension to the better-known food security concept.

Agrarian movements' political framework is often subject to social movement studies, but the agrarian structure in which the movements are rooted is rarely examined (Borras et al. 2008: 181). So, although

grievances of rural people can be found anywhere in the world, local answers to and handling of it differ greatly, depending on national contexts. Scholars have begun to notice, that certain regions of the world are missing from the social movement landscape (Borras et al. 2008: 180; Edelman/Borras 2021: 97). While a small number of transnational movements have achieved notable progress, many more marginalized groups and rural impoverished people have either been left behind or have chosen to focus on local and national contexts, disconnected from any transnational agricultural movements, for a variety of reasons. For example, even though La Vía Campesina articulates global aspirations, its geographical presence is uneven (LVC n.d. b). Besides the Middle East, especially movements from the post-socialist countries are strikingly absent from La Vía Campesina's network, including China, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia. Studying TAMs requires a critical examination of the question of representation for two reasons at least: (i) Movements and networks justify their issue-framing and demand-making actions by claiming to represent a group or groups of people; (ii) Movements make arguments about the significance, urgency, necessity, or justice of their cause and base their demands on their claims to represent specific groups of people (the oppressed or the peasants), which is their stated purpose in public (Borras et al. 2008: 182).

What unites most countries that are largely absent from the transnational agrarian movement's landscape are their (semi-)confined authoritarian regimes (Freedom House 2024). Authoritarian regimes can impede the emergence and international connection of social movements with repressive measures, although it cannot be clearly established that repression is the only reason for a lack of social movement building or weak civil societies. The proposition that a country's civil society is weak and lacks mobilization potential due to its strict authoritarian regime – like Edelman (2024: 64) suggests for the case of China – is open to criticism on the grounds that it presents a monocausal view of the matter. Opposition movement patterns in post-Soviet countries continue to puzzle as forms of contention seem to ignore predictions by institutional theories of political capacity (McGlinchey 2009: 124). Protest seems to be shaped by independent, socially produced norms of cooperation just as much as by state coercive capacities (ibid. 125). In direct comparison to f.i. Georgia and Ukraine – also former Soviet Union countries which both have a vivid protest culture and a history of open dissent towards Russia – Central Asian societies appear to be the least dissent-prone group among the post-Soviet countries (Rywkin 1981). These consistently low levels of organizational membership and mobilization are especially surprising given the well-documented increases in the number of existing organizations such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Central Asia since the collapse of communism (Howard 2003: 2). Oftentimes the issue of representation is simply assumed instead of empirically demonstrated, shown in the extent of representation that is equated with the degree of 'loudness' or visibility of movements (Borras et al. 2008: 183). At the same time, assumptions that attribute an absence of social movements or mobilization altogether to regions without partner

organizations or transnational presence are problematic and premature (ibid. 187). Alternative expressions of contention in post-socialist settings are often studied using concepts and analytical tools developed in Western¹ spaces for Western phenomena and its findings tend to replicate rather than challenge and extend knowledge production, easily misunderstanding or misinterpreting localized forms of contention (Fendrychová/Jehlička 2018). The concept of ‘situated knowledge’ warns against the application of such concepts on different empirical contexts, suggesting to build locally informed concepts in order to increase its cosmopolitan relevance (Larner 2011). This can be shown in examples like civil society, which refers to “the realm of autonomous voluntary organizations, acting in the public sphere as an intermediary between the state and private life” (quoted in Babajanian et al. 2005: 212), contention, describing a collective political struggle (McAdam et al. 2001: 4), or resistance, relating to individual, collective, or widespread forms of opposition (Hollander/Einwohner 2004: 536ff.; Lilja 2022)². Babajanian et al. (2005) suggest to expand f.i. the understandings of civil society towards including informal forms of community organization, mutual aid, or spheres of social interaction.

The relevance of this thesis is derived from the following: In an attempt to examine the issue of representation and weak civil societies in a more transdisciplinary manner and as mobilization can vary tremendously from generally accepted patterns coined in Western circumstances, in this thesis I aim to include localized, quiet forms of resistance, that can be unstructured, unorganized, or covert, embedded in everyday forms of resistance (Scott 1985). I make use of the concept of ‘quiet’ food sovereignty (Visser et al. 2015), which depicts a muted bottom-up striving for food sovereignty, that functions without political claim-making or action. For the post-Soviet space, generally only little research has been conducted in regards to food sovereignty movements and, in cases of their apparent absence, even fewer studies on alternative forms of peasant’s rural contention. This thesis intends to add to the scientific void. From a political point of view, especially Kyrgyzstan represents a puzzling case. The country has had the most open and liberal political system among the Central Asian countries after gaining independence and an ever-growing number of civil society organizations. Ever since 2017 – according to Freedom House (2024) – Kyrgyzstan is classified as a consolidated authoritarian regime (11 out of 100 possible points), its civil society ranking and democracy score declined, and there is only little evidence of social movement activities in general. Particularly in rural areas, mobilization seems to be even quieter than in urban areas and a public discourse on topics closely related to food sovereignty is lacking, while food sovereignty is being used as a synonym for national food security (Visser et al. 2015; Human Rights Watch 2024).

¹ Western countries are defined according to perspective, status of ‘development’, and culture, not according to their geographical location.

² It must be noted, that these three concepts overlap, intersect, and diverge greatly depending on contexts and research field. Especially resistance is a highly debated concept and a single definition cannot do justice to its multiple functions and forms, which is why I refer to Hollander/Einwohner 2004 and Lilja 2022 for a more detailed discussion.

In order to make sense of the indicated contradictions, this thesis aims to answer the following research question:

Which factors explain the challenges to the emergence of food sovereignty movements in post-Soviet countries?

To help answer my research question, I defined three sub questions:

1. What are the structural conditions that characterize the agricultural sector in post-soviet countries?
2. How are peasants in post-soviet countries organized? What strategies do they apply to foster/promote their interests?
3. Does the concept of food sovereignty play a role in these strategies? If so, how do peasants strive for food sovereignty, if at all?

This thesis is structured in six chapters. After presenting the state of research, a brief introduction into the terms and usage of food security as well as food sovereignty follows. The theoretical foundation chapter is split into two subchapters. In the first subchapter on context, structures, and actors, I provide an insight into social movement studies and thereafter delineate the concept and usage of political opportunity structures and its limitations. The second subchapter revolves around theories on mobilization potential in peasants, focusing on classical agrarian Marxism, peasant studies, everyday forms of resistance as a political act, as well as the concept of quiet food sovereignty. In a concluding synthesis, the presented theoretical concepts are assembled. In the next chapter, I describe my methodical procedure, addressing the case study and data collection methods' choice, sample strategy, the execution of the research and its subsequent analysis, as well as limitations and weaknesses of the study. Thereafter, I explore Kyrgyzstan's pre-Soviet historical background in regards to forms of contention and mobilization patterns. Moreover, I illustrate the country's agricultural development on the basis of land reforms, its NGO and civil society sector, as well as political trends ever since 1991. The main part of this thesis, the analysis, is divided into six subchapters: (i) Unperceived and/or unused political opportunities, (ii) threats, (iii) weak civil society, (iv) cooperatives as top-down enterprises, (v) local understanding of food sovereignty as a concept, and (vi) everyday forms of resistance and quiet food sovereignty. Lastly, I summarize and discuss my results in a conclusion.

1.1 Relevance for the field of Development Studies

As a transdisciplinary study program, Development Studies open up room for a wide range of research in which global inequalities are critically examined and reflected. This process is based on theoretical approaches from political science, sociology, geography, economics, history, culture, and gender studies. As a result, from the continued existence of uneven power relations in knowledge creation generally and in research collaborations between the South and the North specifically, some kinds of knowledge are frequently overlooked in the creation of knowledge in Development Studies and

other fields. A new synthesis of knowledge is necessary, given the severity and breadth of the global shifts and inequities brought about by migration, climate change, or capitalist expansion, as well as how these factors interact. Transdisciplinary approaches of research do not only relate to incorporating various fields of research, but further entail a wide lens when it comes to research practices and methods. In addition to knowledge from diverse disciplines and non-academic actors, knowledge produced by scientists from the so-called Global South and practical expertise from indigenous and/or marginalized groups are included in a synthesis of knowledge (Dannecker/Heis 2020: 165f.).

The answer to the question on factors explaining the challenges to the emergence of food sovereignty movements in the post-Soviet space is not attributable to a monocausal explanation and therefore requires a transdisciplinary approach. With the help of influences from different fields of study, such as food studies and sociology, history, political science as well as geography, food sovereignty movements and their challenges can be more easily assessed and analysed. For the case at hand, applying a transdisciplinary approach was not free of challenges. Especially from a historical perspective, much local knowledge has been delivered solely orally, making traditional academic approaches obstructive in accessing specific information from the (pre-)Soviet times. Further, it must be acknowledged, that many archives have only recently been opened and therefore knowledge on peasant's expression of contention is still patchy and in a process of being rebuilt and reassembled. Too often for local and foreign researchers to stay inconspicuous and due to its colonial history with Russia, Central Asia is studied through a Russian lens, which distorts local knowledge (Abashin 2015; Dall'Agnola/Sharshenova 2024: 2). In order to decolonise the knowledge production in and on Central Asia, more research and discussion on the wider politics of allyship within academia is necessary and relevant to break free from established standards on research, even though the current authoritarian backlash might make this approach more difficult to realise.

With this research I aim to shed light on a region which is chronically underrepresented in scientific research practices and caught up between labels of developed and undeveloped or Global North and South (Moore 2001: 116ff.; Abashin 2015). Despite its high relevance, including marginalized or activist voices into this research proved to be complicated and exceeded the scope of this thesis. I will delineate this point further in chapter 3.5.

1.2 State of research

In the following I present the state of research relevant for the answering of the posed research question, which asks for challenging factors to food sovereignty movement emergence and development in the post-Soviet space. Although there is a broad range of research on the post-socialist space, the post-Soviet space, and especially Central Asia as a subregion, does not attract much

attention compared to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) or China (for a more detailed examination see Abashin 2015). On the specific topic of food sovereignty movements in the post-Soviet space, there is relatively little research yet. Scholars tend to apply research conducted in other post-socialist spaces onto lesser researched spaces such as Central Asia, expecting to find similarities or, even better, the same circumstances which enable comparisons and transfers of knowledge. This can be problematic at times when central insights gained from these analyses have only little to offer for studying Central Asian societies because of their different historical backgrounds, political alignments, and present developments. Scholars like Kandiyoti (2002: 240f.) argue that to deconstruct current and past developments, post-colonial or dependency theory provide a more critical view on the domination of a hegemonic West (including Russia/ the Soviet Union), with the help of Soviet Orientalism (Bustanov 2015), than applying general post-socialist theories and assumptions.

The field of Central Asian studies is still relatively young and has only in the recent decade experienced an upswing (Markowitz/Radnitz 2021: 587). This can be illustrated with several relatively recent publication such as (hand)books on Central Asia, focusing on different aspects, such as law and everyday life (Sahadeo/Zanca 2007; Beyer 2016), or historical development, decolonization, and gender (Tlostanova 2010; Khalid 2021). Further handbooks deal with food cultures (Mack/Surina 2005; Lakhtikova et al. 2019), post-Soviet transition (Wooden/Stefes 2009; Upadhyay 2022), NGOs and civil society (Ruffin/Waugh 1999; Giffen et al. 2005; Ziegler 2016), environmental humanities (Féaux de la Croix/Penati 2024), or a general overview on the Central Asian world of culture, identity, and religion (Hanks 2005; Féaux de la Croix/Reeves 2023). These (hand)books shed light on a chronically underrepresented world region and came in useful in understanding everyday life in Kyrgyzstan better and supporting the research results of this thesis. Additionally, a whole range of new scholarly work on authoritarian political development and interrelations with civil society development have been published (f.i. Ziegler 2016; Costa Buranelli 2020; Mihr et al. 2023), underlining increasing authoritarian rule and civil society suppression, as also shown by Freedom House (2024).

Studies on democratization, NGOs, and international organizations as well as civil society in general are abundant for CEE (f.i. Petrova/Tarrow 2007), the Caucasus (f.i. Wooden/Stefes 2009), the Baltics (f.i. Lindqvist 2015), and Central Asia (f.i. Ruffin/Waugh 1999; Giffen et al. 2005; Buxton 2011; Baxtiyorovich 2023), more specifically for Kyrgyzstan (f.i. Pierobon 2018; Hoare 2021). But on explaining or finding factors for the absence of an active and politically outspoken civil society in general, a void is revealed in scientific research. Even though much interest was shown for post-communist political change, economic transition, and the democratization processes, less attention has been paid to civil society's strength, influence, and opportunities, leading to a superficial understanding of the concept (Babajanian et al. 2005: 210f.). NGOs further constitute a relevant partner for the Kyrgyzstani political apparatus and civil society development, which can be observed

in the range of scientific research on the topic (Buxton 2009; Bayalieva-Jailobaeva 2014; Dar/Firdous 2015; Bekebayeva et al. 2019; Baxtiyorovich 2023). Although research on the topics is growing, gaps in our understanding of the post-socialist and post-Soviet's institutions remain.

Most research on social movements focuses on dynamics, emergence, emotions, or outcomes of social movements, usually neglecting the respective other, lacking tools to grasp or explain the absence or weakness of social movements. However, two chapters in main handbooks on social movement studies (della Porta et al. 2015; Snow et al. 2019) are dedicated to the role of social movements in authoritarian, repressive states (Johnston 2015; Chen/Moss 2018). They both, following James C. Scott's argumentation in *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), subtly critique the general approach to social movement research, arguing that usually scholars assume there to be no resistance or protest in and against authoritarian regimes, yet without developing the necessary tools to help locate and analyse the ones that do exist – in alternative forms to the established standard in social movement studies. While Chen and Moss (2018) concentrate rather on working against stereotypes connected to authoritarian regimes and showing the potential for protest despite repressions, Johnston (2015) gives an overview on different approaches to study social movements under authoritarian regimes and highlights the repressive repertoire as one possibility for social movements to express discontent despite repressive conditions (2015).

In social movement studies, analysis of the agrarian structures in which movements are embedded or emerge from (or stay absent from, as in this case) are rather rare, being overshadowed by studies on the political context in which they function (Borras et al. 2008: 181). Neglected are questions relating to the representation of social classes and issues dividing and/or uniting agrarian movements. Even though a rapid expansion of studies on civil society and social movements has taken place and despite their high profile and dynamism, research on the internal dynamics of (transnational) agrarian movements, or *new peasant movements*, themselves has only recently experienced an upswing (f.i. Borras et al. 2008: 179; Holt-Giménez 2006; Desmarais 2007; Edelman/Borras 2016; Edelman 2024). Research on these cross-border rural movements contributes largely to the field of peasant studies, out of which the field of critical agrarian studies has recently emerged as a more contemporary, transdisciplinary, and globally-oriented study field (Borras/Edelman 2008; Edelman/Wolford 2017; Akram-Lodhi et al. 2021; Edelman 2024). What transnational agrarian movements refer to is, in a loose definition, movements, organizations, coalitions, networks, and solidarity linkages of the rural poor (Borras et al. 2008: 170). Studies centring around transnational agrarian movements focus on connecting local peasant struggles with the extensive theoretical apparatus of social movement theory and at the same time critically examine this rather young type of vibrant civil society. However, an analysis of the dynamics of interconnectivity (or the absence of it) between the different levels of agrarian movements rather takes place at the fringes of the academic field or disregarded, just as an

analysis of structures within which movements are embedded and which characteristics lead to an emergence (or non-emergence, as important for this case) of these movements (Borras et al. 2008: 180).

Especially the formation and development of the largest transnational agrarian movement, La Vía Campesina, as well as an intensification of global injustices due to climate change, globalizing financial markets, or newly emerging wars, has generated research on agrarian change and food sovereignty since the 1990s. Scholars so far mainly concentrate on North-South relations, decolonialization processes, practices of agroecology, indigenous food systems, feminism, or assessments of transnational agrarian movement's outreach and impact (a.o. Figueroa-Helland et al. 2018; Ferguson et al. 2022; Calvário/Desmarais 2023). Spaces that cannot be clearly defined as Global North or South, but are found to be somewhere in between (semi-peripheral or being labelled as 'Second World'), are often left out – this is the case for most post-Soviet and post-socialist countries (Moore 2001: 116ff.; for a more detailed discussion see Gille 2010). Transnational agrarian movements' claims of a 'global' representation or coverage cannot be taken seriously and have to be discussed more carefully (Borras et al. 2008: 182). Rural peasants in these regions have been left behind or decided (for whatever reasons) to remain unlinked to any larger movements within the boundaries of their local or national setting (ibid. 182). Many transnational agrarian movements look for counterpart-organizations in those regions and declare, when they are not successful in finding any that represent similar values, that there is an absence of social, bottom-up movements, or that such regions are politically and organizationally weak (ibid. 187). These conclusions can be problematic, as shown by several scholars (f.i. Scott 1985; O'Brien 1996).

As one of a few, Marc Howard (2003) in *Weak Civil Society in Post-Socialist Europe* has conducted a comprehensive study in Eastern Germany and Russia, comparing civil society activities and developing three factors which constitute the low levels of participation in civil society organizations after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall. These factors are (1) the legacy of mistrust of communist organizations, (2) the persistence of friendship networks, and (3) post-communist disappointment (ibid. 30). Even though Howard focuses on post-communist Europe and his research lies 20 years in the past, his analysis and outcomes are relevant for this study. As will be delineated later on, many external and internal factors conditioning the absence of social movement action in Kyrgyzstan are similar to the ones Howard depicted. Following on from Howard, Scott Radnitz (2006) conducted a study on the outbreak of mass mobilization in authoritarian settings, with a case focus on Kyrgyzstan, and the effects of Soviet legacies on state and society. In it, he presents two conditions, which facilitate the expansion of protest across community boundaries, which are low levels of public goods, coupled with economic opportunities autonomously used by elites in order to earn revenue. According to him, the most effective scale of mobilisation is determined by the number

of elites – not like previously assumed Western NGOs, clans, or radical Islam – who mobilise locally and then unite their protests, as well as the geographic dispersion of these elites. Radnitz argues, that only in case of elite-initiated demonstrations, coupled with direct contact and mediation between groups, an incipient movement can overcome gaps between elites and masses as well as between different communities and regions. In later research, Satybaldieva (2015) and Doolotkeldieva (2015) however shows, that attributing mobilization successes solely to the power of elites might provide a reductionist explanation, in that it neglects everyday actions and political strategies of the non-elites. Even though neoliberal market reforms have weakened social ties (Spoor 2004; Steimann 2011), the agency of non-elites, if researched and taken seriously, might prove to have more power than assumed so far. Individuals can resist the prevailing symbolic dominant order, and such resistance can take subtle, everyday forms of resistance.

In relation to studying practices of resistance, in the mid-1980s a shift from peasant revolutions towards less overt and informal practices of resistance has taken place. In a time of a general decline of radical social movements, James C. Scott in his book *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) contributed to a recasting of peasants as relatively disempowered agents whose struggles were mostly solved by applying coping mechanisms or defensive adaptations to change instead of enforcing transformation in their interest (Le Mons Walker 2008: 462f.). Scott's ideas have partly lost their relevance with the emergence of transnational agrarian movements, which depict a strong uniting class formation of peasants on a global scale. Nevertheless, not everywhere, as the focus of this thesis proves, overt political social movements connecting in cross-border alliances emerge and develop, and practices of everyday covert forms of resistance remain important channels for the expression of contention.

Scholarly discourse has predominantly focused on Western instances of food democracy and formal civil society. It has yet to value the self-organized, low-key, and informal political actions centred around food in post-socialist countries. Additionally, many of the better-known studies on Eurasian agrarian relations are usually framed by the degree of revolutionary potential of the peasantry (f.i. Tauger 2010). However, the theoretical apparatus of concepts around resistance and mobilization applied to agrarian studies comes to its limitations when applied to the post-socialist agrarian context (Visser et al. 2021: 309). Studies on related fields of study, such as food self-provisioning (production and sharing of food without economic benefit) (Smith et al. 2015; Jehlička et al. 2019), dachas (Pungas 2023; 2024; Shkaruba et al. 2021), or quiet sustainability (Smith/Jehlička 2013) are mainly conducted in Central and Eastern Europe, but there is no research yet on any of those topics or food sovereignty movements in Central Asia, which might be due to the fact that there are no such politically outspoken movements to be researched. After all, there exists a broad range of literature on food security in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia, which helps to understand local debates on hunger and malnutrition better and connect different discourses on food, agriculture, and the sovereignty of peasant farmers

(WFP 2021; Iashina et al. 2023; Sidle et al. 2023). In this regard the concepts of a ‘quiet sustainability’ (sustainability by outcome rather than intention) (Smith/Jehlička 2013) and further, a ‘quiet food sovereignty’ (Visser et al. 2015) are relevant. They are applicable for practices that are not motivated by political engagement or activism. These small but widespread practices of food self-provisioning, silently aggregated, have far-reaching, positive implications in terms of sustainability as well as everyday practices of resistance (Scott 1985). The concept quiet food sovereignty has gained more traction in the past 10 years, especially due to a paper by Visser, Nikulin, Mamonova, and Spoor (2015), in which the authors investigated peasant agricultural movements in Russia. As they could not detect any politically outspoken bottom-up agrarian movements in the Russian political landscape, the authors concluded that rural people are mainly organized in local community or family groups, which act as security and support networks beyond the state. With the label of a *quiet* food sovereignty the authors try to incorporate peasant’s determination to be sovereign in regards to food, however lacking the political aim or demand to act in order to achieve political change. Instead, important factors in their approach to food sovereignty rely on individual economic benefits, ecological production for personal health, as well as culturally appropriate form of sociality (Visser et al. 2015: 525).

Not only Visser et al. have observed this ‘quiet’ phenomenon. Other scholars have written about quiet or silenced forms of resistance connected to practices of food sovereignty as well – although not always united under the same name. Similar studies were conducted in Romania (Velicu et al. 2022; Hajdu/Mamonova 2020), Bulgaria (Foltz 2022), Poland (Bilewicz 2020), Serbia (Petrović 2019), China (Zhang 2022; Wu 2023), Hungary (Brody et al. 2023), and Ukraine (Mamonova 2018; 2023). The application of this theoretical lens to post-socialist agrarian studies is rather young and highlights the disparities between local villagers and the food sovereignty movements, how they work as a counter-movement to the increasingly strong right-wing movements, the role of post-communist legacies and their interplay with capitalist structures, everyday practices such as seed or food saving, as well as women’s roles in resistance acts. Quiet food sovereignty has been applied to other contexts beyond Eurasia as well, typically at the margins of the food sovereignty movement, for example in South Africa (Siebert 2020). Approaches to (quiet) food sovereignty however can also be shown from different angles: agricultural cooperatives (Lerman/Sedik 2018; Beishenaly/Dufays 2023), sustainable usage of pastures and development (Levine et al. 2017), agroforestry (Djanibekov et al. 2016), food systems and prevention of malnutrition (Tilekeyev et al. 2023), or food preservation and cultures (Perry 2011; Otunchieva et al. 2021; Scott/Chi 2022). These related fields of study will be helpful in the analysis of Kyrgyzstani (quiet) food sovereignty practices. Further, literature reviews such as by Samson et al. (2021) help to establish an overview about current and past developments towards food sovereignty and the right to food in general. Furthermore, studies with a rather general focus on silenced resistance of the rural poor (f.i. Malseed 2008; Moreda 2015; Smith et al. 2015; Kim 2018; Blom et al. 2022) add

to the state of research. Le Mons Walker (2008) examined collective action as a form of everyday peasant politics in post-socialist China, discovering overt forms of protest which are influenced by China's socialist legacy and older peasant ideologies, through which peasants form a shared class perspective. Her research showed how despite a lower freedom score than Kyrgyzstan (9/100 versus 27/100 – Freedom House 2024) and strict authoritarian rule, overt protest evolves and is expressed in China. This again proves how using a monocausal explanation to discover challenging factors to food sovereignty movement emergence in authoritarian contexts is inadequate and requires a multicausal approach.

So far, there are no decided studies on Central Asian rural peasant mobilization and agrarian question(s) – at least in the German and English academic literature – and views on the topic are generally quite divergent. Some researchers argue for a return of the peasant and a reinvigoration of a peasant moral economy for the post-socialist and post-Soviet space, while others vigorously criticize the idea of a moral economy driving post-socialist producers (see chapter 2.2). Still others argue that the label 'peasant' cannot be easily applied to Kyrgyzstani rural producers due to their hybrid character, as well as the huge variety in smallholder farming across Eurasia (Pallot/Nefedova 2007; Visser et al. 2021: 306). Unfortunately, for Eurasia there is not sufficient research proving one or the other on a larger scale, except for mountainous regions in countries such as Tajikistan, Armenia, Georgia (Spoor 2012; Hofman/Visser 2014), or Russia (Mamonova et al. 2013), which saw a widespread re-emergence of peasants. At least for post-Soviet Russia, this peasantry is described as fragmented, with a weakly developed peasant identity, among others due to the complex relationship between peasants and pastoralists. The latter's neglect and aversion in this field of study is striking, according to Scoones (2021), and the focus in studies on rural mobility in Central Asia has generally shifted rather towards labour or ethnic migration (Ferret 2023: 488).

While research on practices of food sovereignty has grown immensely in the past decades and significantly advanced the state of knowledge around the topic, the post-Soviet space is often overlooked in classical North-South analysis in regards to social movement studies, especially on (transnational) agrarian movements, civil society, and food sovereignty practices and is therefore underrepresented in academic debates on the topic. Further, the absence of (agrarian) social movements in this realm and explanations for it have not been investigated systematically to date.

1.3 Food sovereignty as a precondition to food security

Introductory, the role of the concepts food sovereignty and food security have to be delineated, as both concepts have a history of confusion, comparison, and a diverse range of definitions in common. Typically, food sovereignty as the younger concept is seen as opposed to the concept of food security, when actually in their origins and contemporary expressions they intersect considerably, having been

frequently imprecise concepts, always contested and constantly evolving, sometimes even converging (Edelman 2014: 967). I will try to only touch upon this debate briefly, to not overstretch the scope of this research. However, some background information is necessary in order to continue with two working definitions.

The concept of food security was first utilised in Europe after World War I³ and originally linked to the concept of national security, meaning each country should be able to produce its own food to avoid vulnerability to international threats (Edelman 2014). From the 1970s onwards, it was more frequently used and embedded in national legislations and international contexts, especially since the 1974 World Food Summit, where it was defined as the “availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices” (quoted in Clay 2003: 27). Here still the concept related solely to the national rather than the individual level. Slowly and with the pressure of activists and scientists the focus shifted more towards the household level as a (in)secure unit (Edelman 2014: 966). With a rise of critical thinking in this regard, definitions of food security started to include elements that were later part of the food sovereignty demands, such as autonomy, sustainability, equity, or self-determination (ibid. 967). Even though discussions within the food security debate are not in deadlock and its four dimensions availability, access, utilization, and stability are arguably being expanded by the dimensions of agency and sustainability (Clapp et al. 2022), food security remains embedded in dominant neoliberal development discourses, which intend increases in production and are aligned with transnational agribusiness (Jarosz 2014: 169ff.).

Contrarily, discourses surrounding food sovereignty typically originate from NGOs and civil society and are in line with discourses both inside and outside of academia, related to Marxist political economy and ecology. The roots of the concept of food sovereignty are much debated and covered in myth, as Edelman (2014) points out. He traces the concept’s origins to a 1983 Mexican government program, from where on other South and Central American activists appropriated and redefined it. Others link the beginning of food sovereignty even earlier to the globalization in the 1970s, the emergence of the World Trade Organization, or the quick growth of giant seed corporations (Edelman et al. 2014: 913f.). The movement was formally established out of several national agrarian movements as a peasant (not an intellectual or ideological) construction in 1993 and has since enlarged its network and gained access to many international platforms such as the United Nations (UN) or the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), aiming to facilitate the re-engagement of the peasantry in the decision-making process, where agricultural policies are defined.

³ Even though some scholars insist on its emergence dating to the 1970s (see Jarosz 2014 or Fairbairn 2010).

In general, the rise of transnational agrarian movements and subsequent coalitions and alliances they have formed with advocacy groups and NGOs made possible the creation of the *International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty* (IPC), which shortly followed the 1996 Rome World Food Summit (Edelman et al. 2014: 914f.). The summit can be described as one of the first public and far-reaching events at which the concept of food sovereignty was introduced and suggested to replace food security as a guiding principle. Demands brought forward were related to anchoring food as a basic human right, agrarian reform redirecting power back to peasants while reorganizing established food trade, protecting natural resources, social peace, as well as democratic control (LVC 1996). However, even in the first definitions of food sovereignty, the state used to be considered the relevant unit of sovereignty. What was new was the „right to produce food“ as well as the mention of „territory“ (Edelman et al. 2014: 914f.). From the early 2000s onwards, a shift towards the prevailing food sovereignty discourse occurred, when the IPC moved closer to LVC’s definition, moving from ‘nation’ down to ‘peoples’. Today, LVC’s definition of food sovereignty concentrates on „the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems“ while putting „the needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.“ (LVC n.d.).

In the past 30 years the food sovereignty movement has transformed not only into a policy demand, but most importantly into a political movement, contributed to the formation of transnational coalitions, such as the People’s Coalition on Food Sovereignty, the IPC, and the Nyéléni Forum, which includes LVC and various other coalitions of peasants, pastoralists and fisherfolk (Edelman 2014: 959f.). It is a multidimensional concept: „It is at once a slogan, a paradigm, a mix of practical policies, a movement and a utopian aspiration.“ (Edelman 2014: 959f.). In other contexts, food sovereignty has also been included into the policies and constitutions of a number of national and regional governments, including Bolivia and Ecuador (Guardiola and García-Quero 2014; Edelman 2014: 959f.). In order to move from „appealing slogan to on-the-ground policy“, there are however some more specifications needed, f.i. what ‘sovereignty’ relates to primarily: the national, local, or individual level (see Edelman 2014: 968f.). In order for food producers and consumers to be truly sovereign, it is necessary for both to be supported by and incorporated into a variety of social, economic, and political fora that extend beyond the domain of food: a healthy, sustainable, and diverse rural economy that encompasses activities beyond food production (Edelman et al. 2014: 924). What is further sometimes excluded in the discourse are the profound structural changes needed to transform the capitalist economy in which the neoliberal food system is embedded and pave a way for food sovereignty to feasibly exist – this adheres to demands such as ‘food democracy’, ‘food justice’, or ‘the right to food’ (Edelman et al. 2014: 927). Even though the concept has gained increasing ground on a global level,

there is no uniform conceptualization of what it constitutes, with its definition expanding over time, with a growing emphasis on women, LGBTQIA+⁴ and other disadvantaged groups, democratic choice, and consensus building (Agarwal 2014: 1247; Gioia/von Redecker 2018). However, the definition of the term itself might bear many contradictions, as discussed by Patel (2009) and Agarwal (2014).

Although the Global South and Global West also diverge in their interpretations of food sovereignty (Patel 2009), the major agricultural producers in Russia and most countries of the former Soviet Union (f.i. Ukraine and Kazakhstan) have discourses and practices of food sovereignty that are radically different from global interpretations (see f.i. the Declaration of Nyéléni 2007; Wegren/Trotsuk 2013; Shagaida/Uzun 2015). Therefore, the study of the situation in the post-Soviet space and, first of all, in Kyrgyzstan, will contribute to a more accurate understanding of the essence of food sovereignty. The remote mountain villages in Central Asia have always existed on the margins of poverty because of the barren terrain and the lack of diverse and nutritional crops, but conditions have worsened with the ongoing economic instability following the Soviet collapse in early 1990 and ongoing climate changes. Because of the desolate landscape and scarcity of varied and nourishing crops, Central Asian isolated mountain communities have traditionally survived on the edge of poverty; nevertheless, circumstances have deteriorated due to continuous economic instability following the fall of the Soviet Union in early 1990 and ongoing climate changes. Of the more global solutions to food insecurity only few are actually relevant to high mountain peoples as their cultural practices and diets and especially access to food differs greatly from people in more urban or valley rural areas (Sidle et al. 2023: 347).

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical foundation of this thesis is twofold. In a first step, context, structures, and actors are examined, starting with a brief definition of social movements. In the realm of social movement studies and in order to analyse the correlation between structural conditions and collective action, I make use of the concept of political opportunity structures. Secondly, the analytical frame for the evaluation of the mobilizing potential of peasants is presented, which is grounded in peasant studies. This second part is divided into four sub-chapters, of which each is based on a different approach to answering the question of peasant's mobilizing potential: classical Marxism, peasant studies, everyday forms of resistance, and quiet food sovereignty. Thirdly, I focus on strategies of local resistance, which can be analysed with the help of different frames. The concepts of *practices of everyday resistance* and the of *quiet food sovereignty* are presented here, which enable an analytical comprehension of factors that shape the specific situation of Kyrgyz peasant's strive towards food sovereignty. In the last step, the

⁴ Stands for Lesbians, Gays, Bi-Sexuals, Trans, Queers, Inter-, and Asexual.

synthesis, I explain how I operationalize these approaches and how they can come together in finding answers to the posed research question.

2.1 Context, structures, and actors:

Social movements and political opportunity structures

The strive for food sovereignty has developed into a social movement in the past 30 years and has proven to have a strong mobilization capacity, shaping the public discourse, and subsequently generating collective action (a.o. van der Ploeg 2021: 115). It has however only fragmentarily expanded across the globe, leaving certain regions untouched, mainly due to structural reasons. In order to analyse the correlation between these structural reasons for (the absence of) collective action, I chose to make use of the concept of political opportunity structures, which is a part of social movement studies. Social movement studies' analytical core deals with questions concerning circumstances and forms of contention, how variations in this regard can be explained, what drives urges for action, and how they are sustained and organized – a broad field which offers a variety of interpretations. I define social movements, in accordance with McAdam (1982: 20), as „rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through noninstitutionalized means“. Although this definition is rather crisp and may not offer much detail, it does summarize the core of what a social movement entails precisely. In general, most definitions leave open a diverse range of questions concerning at what point social action leads into becoming a social movement or what criteria for it are and how it can be measured. Until around 1960, the main focus of social movement studies was analysing reasons as to why mobilization occurs in the first place, what spurs it, without being able to find explanations for different outcomes of contention despite equal economic and social circumstances (Tarrow 2022: 144f.). Only from 1960 onwards did social movement studies evolve into the research area of deprivation- or frustration-theories, in which scholars started taking social movements as an autonomous social form and people's own rationality and their will to deliberately improve the social environment according to their discontent more seriously (Beyer/Schnabel 2017: 59). Scholars did however tend to simplify the emergence of protest: grievances have to reach a certain level and protest will follow automatically (McAdam 1982). Nevertheless, what still could not be explained were the different outcomes of contention despite comparable economic and structural backgrounds: „Grievances are everywhere, protests not“ (Japp 1984: 316; Tarrow 2022: 144f.). Instead of following a monocausal approach to explaining the emergence or absence of social movements, the inclusion of further possible conditions is important in this regard. This includes internal factors such as culture, emotions, or strategies and their potential effects on the one hand for the process of perceiving opportunities or threats as such and on the other hand for pondering for an adequate response. As social movement's political agency is not institutionalized, measuring its influence seems almost impossible, especially considering the fact that

politics are shaped by many different (f)actors (Kern 2008: 175). In order to understand what might influence different outcomes of contention under similar conditions, the context in which social movements appear, are embedded in or remain absent need to be examined more closely. The political opportunity structures approach was developed to answer these questions.

Social movement studies are roughly constituted in three approaches: political opportunity structures, framing theory, and resource mobilization theory. Choosing the political opportunity structures approach was based on the need to examine exogenous factors (or framed as ‘challenges’ in my research question) reconditioning social movement’s prospects, which the other two approaches do not provide in such detail as they focus on outcomes or initial mobilization strategies of social movements. The earliest studies on political opportunity structures emerged out of the field of urban politics in the 1970s (Beyer/Schnabel 2017: 105). Due to its wide focus and broad positions, a commonly accepted definition of political opportunity structures is hard to find (as with most theoretical concepts and depending on the research field⁵) and its operationalization is handled rather differently, which of course complicates a verdict on the fruitfulness of the approach. I draw upon Sidney Tarrow’s understanding of political opportunity structures (2022). The concept of it revolves around the resources that are external to a group, over which social movements have no influence: „Contention is shaped by the interaction between opportunities and threats. [...] It is how threats and opportunities combine, that shapes people’s decisions regarding whether to engage in collective action or stay home.” (Tarrow 2022: 143). These exogenous structural conditions „enhance or inhibit a social movement’s prospects for (a) mobilizing, (b) advancing particular claims rather than others, (c) cultivating some alliances rather than others, (d) employing particular political strategies and tactics rather than others, and (e) affecting mainstream institutional politics and policy” (Meyer 2004: 126; Tarrow 2022: 144f.). The main assumption here is, that political structures can bring out opportunities or threats for social movements and their actions, however they do not automatically lead to mobilization (Tarrow 2022). Further, these opportunities and threats are neither objective – they must always be perceived as such in order to be used – nor are they apparent all at once to everyone (Tarrow 2022: 144). Therefore, challengers need to be able to perceive the situation as an opportunity as well as assess how and if to react to it and grasp their own agency: „No matter how momentous a change appears in retrospect, it only becomes an ‘opportunity’ when defined as such by a group of actors sufficiently well organized to act on this shared definition of the situation.” (McAdam et al. 1996: 8). As the act of perceiving is always a subjective process, often the under- or overestimation of opportunities or threats inside social movements becomes an issue (Meyer/Minkhoff 2004). At the

⁵ Rootes points to a relevant issue here: He argues, that definitions and approaches to defining concepts usually depend on the field of study the authors belong to, naming political science and sociology as main opponents in this regard. For further information on this as well as a discussion on the usage and meaning of ‘structure’, see Rootes (1999: 80ff.).

same time, opportunities and threats can also be illusory. These are called pseudo-opportunities, as they do not exist but are being perceived to exist (Tarrow 2022: 144).

Examining threats and opportunities is mainly used as a strategy for understanding how respective movements arise, develop, and either fail or succeed within their particular regimes (Tarrow 2022: 155). Opportunities and threats intersect while acting as two poles of a continuum of social situations (Tarrow 2022: 143) and shall be explained in more detail in the following.

2.1.1 Defining opportunities

Opportunities, according to Goldstone and Tilly (2001: 182f.), can be defined as

„the perceived probability that social protest actions will lead to success in achieving a desired outcome. [...] Thus, any changes that shift the balance of political and economic resources between a state and challengers, that weaken a state's ability to reward its followers or opponents or to pursue a coherent policy, or that shift domestic or outside support away from the regime, increases opportunities”.

According to Tarrow, political opportunities can be divided into volatile and more stable opportunities. Volatile „political opportunities are fickle friends”, as they can open, close, and shift quickly from allies to elites or allow new challengers with differing aims to enter the arena (Tarrow 2022: 153). They can expand through certain mechanisms, of which Tarrow lists four: (1) increasing access to opportunities, (2) shifting alignments, (3) divided elites, and (4) the availability of potential allies (Tarrow 2022: 144ff.). As shown by Eisinger (1973), increasing access to opportunities, meaning the relationship between protest and political opportunities, does not lead to more contention per se. Open systems hold institutionalized opportunities for collective action, which is why the more open a system is, the less mobilization occurs. Accordingly, protest is most likely to occur in systems with a mix of open and closed factors (1973: 15). The instability and therefore likely shifting of political alignments can encourage contention by opening up new spaces of uncertainty, especially in the context of elections. The division among elites can additionally encourage contention by either motivating retired elites to return to the political scene or incentivizing resource-poor groups to make use of the opening spaces. Lastly, influential allies are crucial in the encouragement of challengers. Allies such as transnational social movements, NGOs, or even international institutions can assist domestic social groups in various regards, providing security and support against repression, in courts, or simply as friends in uniting for the same cause. In their role as outside allies, they are further able to ‘name and shame’ regime practices and to intervene on local's behalf, who lack resources and political freedom to act against state repression (Chen/Moss 2018: 674). These four outlined mechanisms sometimes overlap, possibly expanding opportunities. In general, mobilization efforts in authoritarian states have increasingly become more internationalized or globalized with the emergence of communication technologies and social media, facilitating to expose regime abuses to international audiences. The internationalization

of social movements was created through political opportunities, making it increasingly difficult for regimes to quiet movements. However, for example in trying to connect to inter- or transnational movements in order to attract the support of external allies, activists take high risks in incurring significant repression, which their overseas allies are unable to prevent or work against (ibid.). That is why these mechanisms always need to be observed in connection with (the threat of) repression.

More stable opportunities relate to the state and overall structure of the regime in which a social movement is embedded. Even though they can shift quickly as well, they are more institutionalized and dependent on the state's strength, making them less dynamic than volatile opportunities (Tarrow 2022: 144ff.). Important to understand as well is how regime change and the combination of capacity and democracy influences the patterns of contention under more stable opportunities. The regime type is highly relevant in the study of political opportunities and threats as well. Tarrow defines four types of regimes, which are defined by state capacity (the degree to which governmental action impacts the character and distribution of population, activity, and resources within a government's territory) and level of democracy: high-capacity democratic, high-capacity undemocratic, low-capacity undemocratic, low-capacity democratic (Tarrow 2022: 141). These categories underlie three factors, which are (1) state strength (centralization and decentralization), (2) states' prevailing strategies towards challengers, and (3) the overall structure of the regime and the role of protest in regime change (Tarrow 2022: 153). In high-capacity undemocratic (or authoritarian) regimes repression is systematic in that contention is either forcefully repressed or transformed into significantly transgressive forms.

2.1.2 Defining threats

The main challenge of forming social movements is to activate third parties to support their claims and to „make noises“ (Lipsky 1968: 1148). The state however possesses an arsenal of strategic weapons, with which they can neutralize or even suppress protest – so-called threats. Threats apply to all risks and costs that can be associated with collective action or non-action, emanating from the state or related non-state actors (Tarrow 2022: 143). They can be considered as a stable part of political opportunities 'national cleavage structures' – between centre and periphery, religious confessions, rural and urban spheres as well as classes (Kriesi et al. 1995: 53). Based on Goldstone and Tilly (2001: 183) threats are

„often seen only as the 'flip side' of opportunities, but they are actually analytically distinct. [...] A group may decide to bear very high costs for protest if it believes the chances of success are high, but the same group may decide to avoid even modest costs if it believes the chances of succeeding are low.“ (Tarrow 2022: 143).

However, threats not only present a challenge to the formation of protest, but can also trigger contention. In these cases, contention often develop a radicalized character and can ensue a period of radicalized contention, revolution, or civil war (Tarrow 2022: 140).

When it comes to repression as a threat and a hindering factor to the development of social movements, scholars usually focus on emerging movements and how regimes have shut their protest down with repressive manners. However, only in few cases do scholars consider that movements do not emerge in the first place due to repressive regimes and that people perceive only threats instead of political opportunities, hindering them from starting collective action (Chen/Moss 2019). Tarrow (2022: 146f.) defines repression as a „state’s physical coercion of challengers”, while suppression relates to „the social control of dissidence”. Authoritarian states usually have a restrictive character, shown in lacking democratic freedoms and reliance on violence and pre-emptive surveillance in order to repress collective action and dissent (Johnston 2015: 619). Violent or coercive tactics can be overt, like assault, arrests, torture, extrajudicial killings, or restrictions of basic civil liberties, or covert, including tactics such as harassment, ostentatious surveillance, or disappearances (Heuer/Hierman 2022: 242). Regimes tend to apply multifaceted repressive repertoires, in which violent, overt forms are alternated with non-violent or indirect forms of repression, depending on the context and outcome. Non-violent forms of repression are used in order to undermine, monitor, or neutralize the state’s opponents and to „increase the overall cost of collective action through means other than violence.” (Heuer/Hierman 2022: 239ff.). Such methods include channelling, censorship (of internet, social media, and press), resource deprivation, legal persecution, or simply ignorance. Additionally, bureaucratisation and the erection of long-term institutional barriers to collective action, speech, and assembly are often more effective in undermining movements as well as dismantling movement’s resources and participation while pretending to maintain a glimpse of liberalism or political freedom (Chen/Moss 2019: 670; Heuer/Hiermann 2022: 243f.).

No regime, regardless of the strength and size of its repression apparatus and level of isolation, is an entirely sealed system (Johnston 2015: 620; Tarrow 2022: 141). Firstly, even under highly restrictive regimes such as North Korea, which use propaganda and strict monitoring to surveil their citizens, social movements occur (Johnston 2015: 622)⁶. Secondly, social movement’s way of organizing or targeting differ from those in more democratic settings and sometimes take on creative or quiet forms of protest or contention (see chapter 2.2.3). The modern social movement repertoire, consisting of demonstrations, marches, sit-ins, or rallies are less widely practiced due to concrete risks posed by the

⁶ North Korea, probably the highest capacity-repressive state worldwide, experienced a wave of protest in 2009, when the currency was devalued and citizens not only lost all their savings, but food prices skyrocketed dramatically. Even though what followed was not a sustained movement, but rather an outburst of contention, it could have evolved into a network of opposition if given the space/opportunity (Johnston 2015: 622).

political or military authorities, however social movements are an accompanying feature of socio-political life in authoritarian states and even have potential to change certain aspects of illiberal systems of governance (Chen/Moss 2019: 666).

2.1.3 The role of state-related actors: NGOs and civil society

For authoritarian regimes, suppressing the preconditions for collective action can have more disadvantages than benefits. Besides being a costly process in terms of time, resources, and reputation, state violence blocks information flows from below to the top, leaving the government unprepared and surprised of any insurgencies. In order to get access to information about sources of dissent, many authoritarian regimes tolerate or integrate some form of grassroots movement that they provide monitored and controlled venues for, which some scholars refer to as ‘consultative authoritarianism’ (Knox/Sharipova 2024a). State actors can hold double-roles as influential allies and/or divided elites in Tarrow’s outline. Tarrow conceives the state mainly as an opponent. This can, depending on the level of state power, vary and they can turn into allies (f.i. local politicians might have different opinions or approaches than their national government colleagues). This can be especially complex to determine in authoritarian contexts, in which corruption levels are usually high and different motives and means rule. In Central Asian peripheries, often customary law and ethnic leaders dominate rather than state authorities, which complicates the application of the concept of political opportunity structures further (Beyer 2016).

State actors may also choose to maintain their stability by either incorporating and/or instrumentalizing challengers’ potential allies in shifting alignments, such as elites or NGOs into their repressive structures or imposing strict laws on them, covertly restricting their work (Tarrow 2022: 149). Accordingly, threats do not necessarily have to emanate just from state actors. Heuer and Hiermann (2022) show, that non-state repressive agents can play a crucial role in supporting state’s threat techniques, for example in forms of channelling in which repressive regimes use elites as mediators. In reverse, civil society and NGOs can represent the most relevant threat to authoritarian regime survival (Howard 2003: 34), which is why they are usually restricted by repressive regimes. In many contexts it is difficult to differentiate between NGOs and civil society, due to a process that some scholars refer to as *NGO-ization* (Lang 2022). Although civil society is conceived as non-economic, non-state, and non-privacy, it does receive most funding from private donors, businesses, as well as governments. Civically engaged groups are increasingly pulled towards institutionalization, professionalization, and are accordingly forced to bureaucratize their work and are incentivized to shift their focus on more marketable expert knowledge or services, weakening their contention capacities (Lang 2022).

2.1.4 Limitations and application

There are two main limitations to the application of the political opportunity structures approach that are relevant for this study. First, a simplification of situations (Kriesi et al 1995: 83; Meyer 2004: 134; Gamson/Meyer 1996: 275). The empirical causality derived from applying the political opportunity approach is often accused of neither being further investigated nor fitting (Meyer 2004: 134), linking to the issue of a temptation of simplification of situations (Kriesi et al 1995: 83). To prevent this, McAdam (1996) suggests to analyse threats on the same level as opportunities, pointing to the fact that they cannot bring about any effects if they're not perceived properly, they have to change the perception of actors. I intend to take this critique seriously, as I assume threats to be just as relevant in this case as opportunities, if not more relevant.

Secondly, a point of critique refers to the Western-centric focus of social movement studies, being rooted in US-American (f.i. Snow et al. 2019) and European (f.i. della Porta et al. 2015) research traditions⁷. This can be observed on the basis of the first social movement in the modern sense, which serves as the starting point of social movement studies: the French Revolution of 1789 (Görllich/Habermann 2018: 245). The political opportunity structures approach is usually applied to new social movements, which have manifested themselves in Western Europe and Northern America since the early 1970s. With that, the question of a generalizability to other forms of political opportunity structures arises as well as if a Western research tradition is in fact applicable to non-Western contexts. This can be problematic for the case at hand, which is the post-Soviet space. This region used to be typically labelled as „Second World“, a space located between centre and periphery, neither „developed“ nor „underdeveloped“ and accordingly lacking proper analytical tools for research (Moore 2001; Tlostanova 2015). Tarrow in his 2022 edition of *Power in Movement* recognizes this issue in expanding stable mechanism of opportunities in order to include undemocratic regimes from his 2011 edition. I aim to counteract upon this dilemma by acknowledging the difficulties that come along with applying these presented concepts, reflecting their role in this research, as well as drawing on additional theoretical concepts in order to diversify my analytical frame. Additionally, this dilemma can be further expanded to the concept of civil society. Civil society in a narrow sense generally derives from a particular theoretical tradition and refers to the specific kinds of voluntary organizations that emerged from Western European and US-American models, making it an inherently Western concept with an ethnocentric bias. Even though anthropological research tends to include all forms of social organization and practice, granting every country its own national-specific civil society form, civil society can hardly work as a universal concept to exist everywhere, as it is dependent on democratic

⁷ The US-American approach contains rather detailed studies of single movements and their specific histories, using it mainly as a set of variables in order to grasp dynamics of a single movement's political environment (Gamson/Meyer 1996: 274), while the European research strand has a stronger focus on cross-national comparative research (McAdam et al. 1996).

institutions in order to function properly (Babajanian et al. 2005: 212). With the orientation to democratization and Westernization in many post-socialist countries, there is a basis for studying civil society even in those non-Western contexts, albeit one should be careful not to stretch their unique forms of political and social action in order to fit them into the already existing civil society canon (Fendrychová/Jehlička 2018). Finally, it is therefore rather relevant to differentiate between civil society in democratic, and in non-democratic regimes, or between oppositional and democratic civil society.

Despite the range of various critiques, which span further than what I responded to, the political opportunity structures approach offers a systematic theoretical framework for analysing the political opportunities afforded by and threats emanating from the structural context in which they are embedded, as well as how social movements perceive and influence these opportunities and threats.

2.2 Theoretical approaches to the mobilization of peasants

There are many diverse attempts at explaining peasant's revolutionary potential, but the generated answers are strikingly contradictory, as will be shown in this subchapter (Skocpol 1982: 355). But first: What is a 'peasant' or 'the peasantry'⁸? This question can be described as one of the most disputed topics of peasant studies with a long, contentious, and complicated history (Edelman 2013: 2; van der Ploeg 2021: 109). There are four different approaches of definitions, namely historical, social scientific, activist organizations, as well as normative. Most basically, in the historical sense a peasant is understood to be a farmer or the rural poor, serfs, agricultural workers, and the like, usually with a pejorative connotation such as 'stupid', 'lazy, or 'rude', which imply inferiority (Edelman 2013: 3). Skipping way ahead, with the emergence of peasant studies, interest in peasants arose due to peasant wars and revolutions of the past century which resulted in peasants becoming important political protagonist (ibid.: 4). Peasants act „[...] as a metaphor for peasant agriculture, peasantries and their potentials, [...] as a central ingredient of radical theory, practices and policies.” (van der Ploeg 2021: 109f.). Van der Ploeg argues that „[...] peasant agriculture is a practice without a theory.” (2013: 11) and understands peasant farming as an „everyday social struggle: a permanent struggle for autonomy, to improve the prospects of the farm and the household and create new opportunities for the next generation. Progress may be made, or setbacks encountered but the desire to move ahead is always there.” (2021: 116).

La Vía Campesina (which literally means 'peasant path'), from an activist organization point of view, gives a rather extensive and explicit definition of what they mean by 'peasants' or 'campesinos'. In short, they refer to peasants as „people of the land” (see LVC 2009 or Desmarais 2008), including

⁸ For a more detailed discussion, which the scope of this thesis does not allow, see van der Ploeg 2021 and/or Edelman 2013.

„peasants, family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, women, youth, consumers and environmental and urban movements” (LVC n.d.). This way, La Vía Campesina groups together more than 200 million people, from rural workers in the Global South to medium-sized commercial farms in the Global North, which has been subject to discussion (LVC n.d.; Edelman 2013: 9). Therefore, speaking of one global peasant as a social category seems plausible, is however worth investigating in regards to generalisability, rightly raising the question: „What do they have in common?” (Bernstein 2010a: 112). Bernstein argues against subsuming this diverse group of people under a single category, claiming it would generalize their individual suffering: „Nothing is gained, and much obscured, by characterizing contemporary small farmers as ‘peasants’, clinging to past worlds and the persistence or survival of a pre-capitalist social category into the modern globalized era, fluctuating between celebrated resistance or an obstacle to development” (Bernstein 2006: 454; 2009: 75; also see Hardt/Negri 2004: 115-127). Others in turn see the term as empowering, uniting all land workers in order to make their struggles more visible and creating a global phenomenon (Desmarais 2002). Seeing that peasants share certain common conditions of existence, creates a common basis for collective action, in which common interests are pursued. Borras et al. (2008: 185f.) criticize that overly restrictive definitions of peasants fail to represent groups of rural people, whose livelihoods have long been diverse and plural. Another argument that speaks for the usage of the term peasant is the self-appropriation of the term (as seen in La Vía Campesina’s members) which can be interpreted as reclaiming the label. Reclaiming labels that were (historically) used mainly pejoratively in order to unite strongly as a group with a common interest is not a new phenomenon, but is practiced by many oppressed groups, such as the LGBTQIA+ community (see f.i. Galinsky et al. 2013).

A solid basis for grouping rural smallholders and land workers together in a single entity therefore is provided. The term peasant is used in this thesis in order to refer to the hybrid character of rural smallholders in the post-Soviet space. Due to Kyrgyzstan’s historical development, the country is crossed by a diverse range of smallholder types, mostly nomad and transhumance livestock breeding, subsistence and small-scale farmers, or newly emerging forms, which cannot fit into a single category alone. To include them all and to stay in line with La Vía Campesina’s emancipatory usage of it, the term peasant seems appropriate, even though its criticism is acknowledged. In the case of the post-Soviet countries in general however, caution is advised. In Central Asian history the term peasant was used as a pejorative label for Slavic colonial settlers relocating from the Western parts of the Union to the newly colonized lands in the East, opposing to the indigenous nomad peoples. For this reason, the perception and usage of the term peasant might still be negatively burdened (see Morrison 2015).

The academic debate about the agrarian question, the economy of peasant households, and peasant’s mobilization potential is a lot more comprehensive than what can be portrayed here (for a more

detailed discussion on these topics see Bernstein 2006; Akram-Lohdi/Kay 2010a; 2010b; or Edelman 2024). For this analysis, four segments of studies on peasant's mobilization and resistance practices are more closely outlined: (1) classical agrarian Marxism, (2) peasant studies, (3) practices of everyday resistance, and (4) quiet food sovereignty.

2.2.1 Classical agrarian Marxism

Scholars of classical agrarian Marxism and Marx himself (1964) argued that the urban working class (or proletariat) possesses more revolutionary potential than peasants because of several reasons, of which I will outline two main reasons. The first reason revolves around the geographical location, communication techniques, and political goals of protest. In the course of the industrialization, the concentration of workers in dense areas (mostly cities, close to the centres of political power) working in factories was a historically new phenomenon. The worker's ability to shut down the flow of capital by collectively laying down work gave them much power. At the same time, the French small-holding peasant communities that Marx studied were scattered across the countryside, isolated, and further away from the centres of power, which complicated the formation of a powerful class. Their political passivity was caused by a lack of (internal) communication, which constitutes the key to the political significance between centre and periphery. The communication tools as well as the work structure of the urban working class, which was defined by cooperation and communication, gave them a political advantage and enabled them to emerge as a political subject – the industrial proletariat (Katz 1992: 122f.). In the context of the French Revolution of 1789 and Napoleons Coup d'état of the 18th Brumaire VIII in 1799, Marx went as far as comparing the peasantry to a sack of potatoes:

„A small holding, a peasant and his family; alongside them another smallholding, another peasant and another family. [...] the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homogenous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes. [...] Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interest in their own name [...] They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.” (Marx (1978 [1852]), VII: 126).

This statement by Marx can certainly be interpreted in different ways (see Katz 1992). Without delving too deep into the debate on the meaning of *class* as a Marxist⁹ category, it can be generally stated, that although peasants were significantly involved in the success of the French Revolution, it did not lead to far-reaching or long-lasting effects on the societal structures in the French countryside and even until today, society is structured similar to before the French Revolution. Peasants, so it was thought, even though united by a shared identity, are only capable of reaction instead of representing

⁹ Marx himself never provided a clear definition of what he understands under *class*. Marxist literature therefore exhibits a diverse range of attempts to define it, which is why I am referring to Katz (1992) for a more detailed discussion.

themselves and their class interest and therefore have to be represented by other classes. However, if their interests must be represented, their support nevertheless has to be won. According to Marx, peasants themselves had to decide their fate, as there was no shortage of suitors (Katz 1992: 64; Hardt/Negri 2004: 122).

The second reason relates to peasant's double identity as property-owners and workers. The urban working class lacked the ownership of the means of production, which made them dependent on their wage labour and therefore more prone to oppression and exploitation, creating a universal class interest in overthrowing capitalism. Rural peasants often owned a small piece of land that they cultivated and so were able to sustain their lifestyles relatively independently from the political decisions made in the centres, ultimately impeding their ability to form a class. Mao Zedong in his subsequent analysis underlines the difficulty for peasants to form a class in adding a fundamental division (Hardt/Negri 2004: 116f.). He differentiates between the wealthy peasants who own property and are therefore close to landlords, and the poor peasants who do not own (sufficient) property and are therefore closer to the workers. This division splits the already fragmented group of peasants further and aggravates their mobilization as a class. This thought can be spun further in the sense that the term peasant today is so all-encompassing that it addresses many different kinds of rural peoples who are engaged in different types of food production and can be assigned to different kinds of classes – making Marx' theses increasingly difficult to apply.

When referring to the loss of peasant's revolutionary initiative, Marx emphasizes the triumph of peasant conservatism: Hereby he means their active and collective role – the opposite of a passive instrument – in bringing Napoleon to power and consolidating his rule, in order to prevent changes and preserving their traditional way of life (Katz 1992: 65; Hardt/Negri 2004: 122). He did however not neglect peasant's importance in a socialist revolution altogether. Marx was convinced, that any socialist revolution in a country with a substantial peasant population would fail if it did not have the support of the peasantry (Katz 1992: 63). In general, however, Marx expected that with incipient industrialization and increasing economic development, capitalism would eventually fully absorb the peasantry and make small-scale food production redundant. Marx' approach was widely adopted by Marxist scholars of the 19th and 20th century, such as V.I. Lenin and Karl Kautsky (Kautsky 1988[1899]; Lenin 1899; Friedman 2019: 1199). In later lines of Marxist thought, Lenin's for example, the possibility of peasant's agency in transformation processes was recognized, but only by following the urban industrial proletariat – an unequal and potentially dangerous partnership, in which one suppressed subject speaks for a subordinated other (Hardt/Negri 2004: 123). Kautsky later argued that peasants might join revolutionary movements or parties under some circumstances, using the inherent potential of their double-identity as either workers or property owners, but without ascribing them an active role in socialist revolution (Watts 2021: 55). Ever since the Cold War relaxation, it was widely

assumed that the peasantry had disappeared simultaneously to rising industrialization (Friedman 2019: 1097). Bernstein, among others, argues how the discourse about a dynamic of 're-peasantization' would be misleading, because the peasantry has disappeared due to their grand differences in ethnicity, gender, or race, and agriculture has been fully absorbed by capitalism, as predicted by Marx (Bernstein 2006: 456; Friedmann 2016; Hardt/Negri 2004: 115-127).

2.2.2 Peasant studies

Other scholars in turn see peasants as the main contributors to revolutionary acts. Compared to Marx and his peers, scholars of peasant studies are sure about the return or survival of the peasantry, in turn arguing for a rise of peasant movements. To a book with the title *Les paysans son de retour* (the peasants are back; Perez-Vitoria 2005), van der Ploeg (2013: 13) responds: „Indeed they are back, both in practice and in policy”. It has to be acknowledged though, that peasants are back in a different form than previously: they are more heterogeneous, they create commons, they live the art of not being governed (Scott 2009) and act at the interstices of the system, meaning the voids that the state apparatuses cannot regulate – places of permanent struggle, cradles of resistance, and in the best case, lived alternatives to capitalist reality (Dietz/Engels 2021: 668; van der Ploeg 2013: 14). As already mentioned, for the case of Russia, Mamonova et al. (2013) find an overarching peasant identity to be lacking and peasantry united only in a fragmented manner. Nevertheless, currently more peasants than ever before in history roam the world and their agricultural practices remain the main source of the world's food (Nicholson/Borras 2023: 618f.).

With the manifold crises arising from globalized agricultural structures and subsequent struggles over land and labour, the question of peasant's potential and capacity to bring about emancipatory social transformation arises again, especially since the emergence of transnational agrarian movements. Eric Wolf (1966) and Teodor Shanin (1972) were some of the first scholars of peasant studies to display that Russian peasant communities did resist modernization and started an intellectual movement in which peasants were understood as agents of resistance and revolution, creating a class with its own logic before as well as after the 1917 Revolution (Friedman 2019: 1098; 2021: 17ff.; Bernstein 2020). They questioned the established perspectives of class differentiation in rural societies, separating classes of workers and owners from each other and ascribed peasants mobilizing and class formation potential. Eric Wolf (1966) defined peasants as classes in relation to ruling classes and states, reframing past revolutions as „Peasant Wars” in an anti-colonial and socialist liberation struggle. Especially Shanin (1972) based his assumptions on the approach of demographic differentiation, which Russian agricultural economist Alexander Chayanov (1991) had brought forward as a counter response to assumptions of permanent class differentiation by classical agrarian Marxism (Friedman 2019: 1098). He emphasised the viability of peasant agriculture and its ability to survive and prosper under any circumstances, based on the changing balance of workers and consumers within households: a

centripetal force, leading to the stability of peasantry as a whole (Friedman 2021: 18; van der Ploeg 2021: 109).

Chayanov believed peasants to be the main agents in a strive towards socialist revolution, especially when organized in vertical (bottom-up) cooperatives (Hu et al. 2023: 2617). This concept of cooperatives is broken down by Chayanov (1991: 15) into two concepts: a 'cooperative enterprise' and a 'cooperative movement'. A cooperative enterprise adapts to market economy conditions and mainly works towards economic profit (ibid. 22), while additional to economic functions, non-economic functions such as education, 'cooperative awareness', or solidarity in the community should be encouraged in order to create a bottom-up, multi-level 'cooperative-as-movement' approach (ibid. 227). Ultimately by creating a 'self-collectivisation', farmers can move towards a socialist farm production structure (Danilov 1989: 5), preventing the domination of and exploitation by large-scale capital (Bernstein 2020: 35f.). According to ideal vertical cooperation, the goal is the creation of 'a cooperative of cooperatives' that concentrates on different topics, such as marketing, machinery, or credit, and work together in a simultaneous and evolutionary manner. This cooperation functions on a voluntary small-scale level without destroying the aspects of the economy in which small production units are more effective than larger ones – facilitated, but not managed by the government (Hu et al. 2023: 2619). According to Chayanov, these cooperatives are no nice-to-have supplement, but constitute a necessity for the persistence of peasant farming in many regions (ibid. 2612). Chayanov however also pointed to six possible obstacles, which collectively constitute a structural trap: the mismatch between smallholders' short-term needs and the cooperatives' mid-to-long-term imperatives, the lack of start-up capital and technology, powerful competition from capitalist counterparts, the leadership deficit, the high cost of social organization and mobilization, and absent or misguided state support (Hu et al. 2023: 2625). These obstacles will be directly applied on the case of Kyrgyzstani cooperative formation and development processes.

The increasing numbers in and power of transnational agrarian movements ever since the 1990s and recent outbreaks of farmer protests in Europe and beyond (Mortimer 2024) further display peasants' potential in collectively organizing. Transnational agrarian movements can be loosely defined to mean „'movements', 'organizations', 'coalitions', 'networks', and 'solidarity linkages' of the 'rural poor'“ (Borras et al. 2008: 170). These 'new' social movements transcend class boundaries, guided by non-material considerations, while 'old' social movements were mainly formed by class structures of industrial capitalism, aiming to uproot material inequalities (Woods 2003: 315). These movements have introduced more radical visions and methods into the international arenas, mainly expressed by voices and actions of peasant groups, for example the Zapatistas of Mexico or La Vía Campesina. Their main goals are not solely to call for solidarity, but rather to connect single struggles together into one large movement in order to burst entrenched, oppressive structures and create new, liberating ones

(Görlich/Haberman 2018: 250). La Vía Campesina, which is considered to be the largest transnational network of national peasant organizations, serves as an ideal example for globalized local struggles and as a relevant connection point with social movement studies. What differentiates LVC from other networks is its members, who, even though a heterogeneous group, define themselves as peasants or smallholders, which is a requirement to join the network, while in other networks medium and large farmers are dominant (Borras et al. 2008: 171). It can be described as an amorphous coalition of groups and organizations, while at the same time having developed characteristics of a more formalized organization. This indicates that La Vía Campesina may be perceived as a social movement in certain contexts, but not in others. Its transnational nature suggests that the geographical context may play a role in determining whether or not it is perceived as a social movement – place and character of state structures matter (Isgren 2018: 181f.). Like already discussed in chapter 2, movements do not emerge simply because there are objective reasons (f.i. inequalities) for contention, but because arising political opportunities facilitate their emergence. Today, La Vía Campesina is „one of the best-organized and most politically coherent radical anti-capitalist transnational movements” (Nicholson/Borras 2023: 610). Representing more than 200 million peasants, La Vía Campesina facilitates their identity formation as a peasant class as well as providing an umbrella of protection (ibid. 613).

Large transnational networks tend to be highly heterogeneous in terms of class and, as already mentioned, today’s movements often transcend class boundaries. Dynamics of ideological and political difference can be looked at from three perspectives, of which the most relevant for this research is class based (Borras et al. 2008: 195). In studying current transnational agrarian movements from a class perspective lens, the extent of presence and domination of a specific class or classes within a movement matter. If a movement is dominated by middle and rich farmers of the Global North, its general political pattern tends to become less radical and more conservative (ibid. 194). On the question of representation however, it is often rather assumed than empirically demonstrated, f.i. the representation is often directly linked to visibility and ‘loudness’. Analysing representation in the context of transnational agricultural movements necessitates looking beyond the obvious factors such as „visibility and loudness” (ibid. 183) and into topics that are typically left out of the movements’ discourses. According to Borras et al. (2008), this can be accomplished in four steps, of which three are relevant for this study. Firstly, partial representation is related to the obvious voids in global representation in countries such as China, Russia, and regions such as Central Asia, the Middle East, or Northern Africa. The way in which issues are framed, how demands are made, and how these procedures and results are carried out within transnational agrarian movements are all significantly impacted by this incomplete representation (ibid. 182f.). Secondly, because of restrictive definitions of terms such as peasant, as already outlined above, transnational agrarian movements sometimes fail

to represent groups of rural people. The rural sector is increasingly diverse and plural and involves groups of people who do not practice sedentary agriculture in a narrower sense, like transhumance and nomadic peoples (ibid. 185). Thirdly, transnational actions are very complex to understand and deal with, the concept of class or other terms that lack proper definition seem too abstract, vague, or fluid. Moreover, complex practices of resistance or contention that are invisible for leaders and activists of such movements to acknowledge or comprehend are prone to fall victim to simplification (ibid. 186).

2.2.3 Everyday forms of resistance as a political act

„Where there is power, there is resistance.“ (Foucault 1978: 95-96).

One might be irritated by Foucault's generalized assumption of resistance in all instances, where power is present. He speaks of power being everywhere, in every social relationship, and coming from everywhere (Foucault 1998: 63), which means resistance would have to be present in the same amount. Social science scholars (especially Foucault) have been rather preoccupied with analysing power, while neglecting the analysis of resistance (Vinthagen/Johansson 2013). Resistance, a concept used to describe a variety of behaviours and actions at all levels of human social life and settings, is rather difficult to define: Some see it almost everywhere, some almost nowhere¹⁰ (Hollander/Einwohner 2004: 534). Most frequently, resistance is thought to refer to social movements or protest and contentious politics, aimed at achieving some sort of change, in some cases aiming to curtail change. Hollander and Einwohner (2004) define seven types of resistance, ranging from overt (which can include acts of violence) to missed or attempted resistance (including muted or invisible forms). Noticeably, more research has been done on overt forms of resistance, than on either missed or attempted resistance (understandably, as it also goes unnoticed by researchers). What most scholars can agree on, is the relevance of oppositional action to power in order to speak of acts of resistance, as well as intentional action that is recognized by others (ibid. 546). Debates emerge when it comes to subtler or even invisible or muted forms of resistance. It becomes increasingly unclear what should be counted as 'political' in our modern world as the boundaries between politics, power, and resistance are changing and vary (Vinthagen/Johansson 2020: 2). The conventional idea of politics is becoming less and less appropriate, while especially in contemporary subcultures and movements almost everything is politicized (ibid. 3). Moreover, the framing of certain social actions as political or resistance differs greatly from people's own views of their actions and national circumstances and connotations of it. Neighbourhood watch consisting of older women sitting on a bench and observing the happenings of the town all day is considered a political act from the women's point of view, but not from a traditional social movement studies angle (Leipnik 2015; Visser et al. 2021: 306). In contexts

¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion on the academic debate about resistance see Hollander/Einwohner 2004 or Lilja 2022.

of authoritarian rule however, the impact of certain activities might not seem political at first, but may turn out to be a highly sensitive political act of resistance in the respective case. For such settings, additional tools are required. Developing a framework that recognizes and credits the creative forms of resistance exhibited by peasants while avoiding the misattribution of a form of politics that are not part of their lived experience can however present a dilemma. Learning about the broad range of strategies and structures of local and everyday resistances can help researchers become more critical to reductionist or partial theories of power and help avoid devaluing their practices as primitive, pre-political, or misguided (Abu-Lughod 1992: 47-53).

Everyday forms of peasant resistance as described by James C. Scott (1985) enable a different approach to studying social movements by focussing to a greater extent on everyday practices and customs that tend to be overlooked or neglected, but that can be considered as counter-hegemonic. Scott's research challenges the common assumption of resistance as a visible act and draws attention to what he calls *everyday forms of resistance*, which are of ordinary and common nature: „My claim is that for most of history and for most human subjects, political life was largely everyday resistance and that to ignore this perpetual struggle was to ignore the bulk of political life” (Scott 2020: ix), pointing to the historical entanglement with (everyday) power. In his work, Scott focuses on individual peasant strategies, on rethinking hegemony, and rural class conflicts – from a Chayanovian perspective. According to Scott, the powerless rarely have opportunities or resources with which to openly challenge or resist existing power structures, which is why these everyday forms of resistance are neither organized nor politically articulated. They are a practice, not a certain intent or outcome, supported by silent resistance when either organized action does not succeed or does not exist in the first place (Johansson/Vinthagen 2014: 2f.; Vinthagen/Johansson 2020: 1f.). Many forms are discrete, muted, or solely emancipatory on an individual level. These individual and informal forms of resistance might function as a facilitator of open rebellion and mass mobilization in instances where they meet public confrontations by collectively organized protest (that are easily recognized as resistance) and form a „culture of resistance” (Vinthagen/Johansson 2020: 2). These actions are however heterogeneous and contingent, due to changing situations and contexts, instead of following a universal strategy or coherent form of action, hence why peasant's „low-profile techniques” (Scott 2020: xvi) can go unnoticed by the powerful (Vinthagen/Johansson 2014: 2). Scott suggests to organise disguised acts of resistance to three categories: (1) everyday resistance such as poaching, squatting, or evasion, which are brought about by material domination, (2) hidden transcripts of anger, aggression, and a discourse of dignity, which are a response to a denial of status, and (3) expressions of folk or millennial religion, myth of social banditry, or class heroes as an answer to ideological domination (Scott 1985). In order to include a more comprehensive and systematic exploration of everyday forms of resistance, I further rely on the framework developed by Johansson and Vinthagen (2014). This approach includes four dimensions of

everyday resistance: (1) repertoires of everyday resistance (referring to Scott's categories), (2) relationships of agents (between the actor, the target and the observer), (3) spatialization, and (4) temporalization of everyday resistance. These dimensions are not mutually exclusive, but rather intertwined, together with (at least) four fundamental intersections of power relations, which are gender, sexuality, class, and 'race'/ethnicity, making it an intersectional approach.

The success of these acts of resistance depends on political opportunities and associated threats and people's perception and interpretation of those. It is therefore necessary to evade drawing a distinction between different types of resistance and to fathom everyday resistance as a distinct form of resistance that is related to other forms of resistance. In comparison to other more persistent, organized, and traditional forms of political opposition, it might be viewed as an early, off-stage, or latter stage action. Iniguez de Heredia (2017) establishes a connection between the everyday and 'patterns', implying the repetition of certain behaviours in the lives of people, although not necessarily on a daily basis. Similarly, predominant power is reproduced in everyday actions or patterns by people following, accepting, normalising, and enforcing rules, discourses, or laws in an automatic, non-reflective manner (Vinhagen/Johansson 2020: 28). Rather than debating whether some everyday acts can be considered as resistance, it is more helpful to look at what different acts have in common, examining the conditions under which certain types of resistance emerge or what makes actors chose one type of resistance over another (Hollander/Einwohner 2004: 546). In order to achieve this, structure and agency will be considered, as is inherent to critical agrarian studies, arguing that individuals possess various forms of capital and their actions cannot be understood in terms of cultural norms or rational choice alone, but act according to personal values and aim to 'doing the right thing' (Satybaldieva 2015). Structures (including gender, class, international donors, markets, and the state) enable and constrain individuals to pursue strategies and interests.

2.2.4 Quiet food sovereignty

Everyday forms of resistance are strongly connected to the concept of a '*quiet*' food sovereignty (Visser et al. 2015), which can further be understood as an extension of the food sovereignty movement. Visser, Nikulin, Spoor, and Mamonova (2015) have conducted the first study on food sovereignty in the post-Soviet space, examining if it exists at all as a concept or practice. As the authors show, (rural) social movements that emerge bottom-up and remain distanced from the state authorities, or are maybe even connected transnationally, simply could not be detected in their case Russia. What they found instead were muted forms of resistance to the predominant system. Their outcome is a certain kind of food sovereignty, which they refer to as *quiet food sovereignty*, building on the concept of *quiet*

*sustainability*¹¹ (Smith/Jehlička 2013). Quiet food sovereignty describes a bottom-up striving or longing for food sovereignty, which thrives without any form of collective organization formulating an outspoken discourse or any political action. Practices of quiet food sovereignty therefore do not directly challenge the food system as a whole through ideas and claims, but focus on individual benefits, economically and in regard to personal health, as well as keeping cultural traditions, such as exchanging self-produced foods, alive.

The authors embed the concept in the realm of 'everyday practices of resistance', with reference to Scott (1985), and 'muted discourses' (Ardener 1975) and incorporate a political dimension (although a rather implicit one) by including a perspective on rights and entitlements, viewing rights (in the sphere of property) as multi-layered. Three categories are utilized in the approach to detect if a political dimension is inherent to local practices of food sovereignty: (1) the claiming of rights, (2) the struggle to achieve those rights, and (3) a clear vision to shift the control of productive resources back to farmers (Visser et al. 2015: 518-523). In the Russian case study, none of these practices could have been detected, which led the authors to come up with the label of a quiet form of food sovereignty. The 'quiet' in quiet food sovereignty refers to a lack of active claim-making in the sense of being politically outspoken about one's own rights to food production, purchasing, and consumption. In this regard the question arises if the rights discourse is in fact absent (intrinsically apolitical) or if it might be muted by external factors (potential for political struggle). Either way, quiet food sovereignty is never entirely apolitical, as the question on how food is produced and in what ways producers are dependent on state-established structures can never be disconnected from defending their access to resources (ibid. 523). Russian smallholders regard cultivating their own food as an important, however implicit, right that has a longstanding tradition or belongs to a natural order of things. Due to this unquestionable belief, smallholders do not see a point in stating the obvious or incentivizing protest, if their right to continue producing is not directly threatened (ibid. 522f.).

Even though peasant farmers in Russia still provide a substantial share of Russia's food production (producing around 90% of the country's potatoes, 80% of vegetables, and around half of milk and meat; see Visser et al. 2015: 519) they are denounced as an inefficient, 'backward' relic of the past by the government, which favours industrial large-scale farming. Peasants therefore do not perceive themselves as relevant (political) actors in the realm of food production. They regard their plots as a fall-back option in cases of insecurity, more so as a means to recreation or healthy nutrition, which among others reasons contributes to the absence of a (public) discourse.

¹¹ The authors of this study, after conducting research in post-socialist Central Europe, argue, that healthy and environmentally productive agriculture can be achieved without the necessity for obvious discourses and social movements. They therefore refer to this approach as 'quiet'.

The authors point out, that as of now one cannot speak of quiet food sovereignty as a movement per se (at least for the case of Russia), as it is too diffuse and faces many hindrances still. With food sovereignty being a rather broad concept already, the risk of weakening it further by introducing yet another subvariant of it – a quiet form – has to be recognized and critically viewed. However, as food sovereignty claims to be an inclusive movement working on a global level, its aims should include local realities of rural people in non-democratic settings as well, even if they differ from more vocal practices (Visser et al. 2015: 525). Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that the question of framing certain everyday practices as resistance can be a highly academic debate. The research subjects themselves might not necessarily regard their actions as politicised acts of resistance at all, but rather as a conventional or established part and way of their culture, traditions, lives, and personalities (Vinhagen/Johansson 2020: 29).

2.3 Synthesis

In this concluding synthesis, the introduced theoretical concepts shall be brought together and further delineated, in which forms they complement one another and how they can symbiotically contribute to answering the preceding research question.

Ever since the development away from frustration theory, which expects protest to occur as soon as grievances reach a certain level of intolerability, scholars have awarded challengers more agency in expressing their contention and attributed said contention, or its respective absence, to a multicausal explanation. In this regard, the political opportunity structures approach, which is rooted in social movement studies, aims to include the exogenous factors to the emergence, development, or absence of contention into an analysis. The main assumption of the political opportunity structures approach is that political structures can bring out opportunities or threats for social movements and their actions. Political opportunity structures' usage is however not limited to movement's emergence and development per se, but can be extended to studying their absence as well. The absence of politically outspoken social movements does indeed not equal the absence of political opportunities, as outlined. However, in cases in which social movements are weak or absent, threats may have superseded opportunities provided by the state, allies, or elites. At the same time, state, elites, and allies can represent threats and opportunities simultaneously or shift quickly in their roles towards challengers. Further, these opportunities have to be perceived as such and subsequently deliberately made use of in order to create an impact. The political opportunity structures approach is suitable for the study of the respective case of Kyrgyzstan in the sense, that it can be helpful in understanding and outlining the history, development, and challenges of Kyrgyzstani rural social movements connected to agrarian issues. While threats usually divide into repression (overt or covert violent forms) and suppression (non-violent forms), opportunities can be separated into volatile (with categories of increasing access, shifting alignments, divided elites, influential allies) and stable (consisting of state strength, strategies

towards challengers, overall regime structure), which influence the patterns of contention. Shifting alignments and influential allies can serve as critical allies and threats at the same time, depending on their level of state relations and obedience. Other relevant factors are regime changes and capacities as well as level of democracy. In high-capacity undemocratic regimes, such as Kyrgyzstan, suppression and repression usually prevail in order to obtain the status quo or even expand state power.

In regards to my research question, which asks for challenging factors to the emergence of food sovereignty movements, I will not be relying on political opportunity structures only. The underlying assumption to this research is that political opportunities are rather absent in the respective case, constituting the reason for why social movements, and more specifically rural food sovereignty movements, are weak, absent, or enormously challenged in their emergence and development, hinting to the fact that threats might have more influence in the respective case. Drawing on the two main points of critique relevant to this research, which were already delineated above, more emphasis is put on threats than on opportunities. Moreover, the challenge concerning the Western-centric orientation of social movement studies is countered by making use of additional theoretical concepts of peasant studies, more specifically theories on the mobilizing potential of peasants, as well as on strategies and practices of everyday forms of resistance. Factors explaining the absence of social movements cannot be analysed using a monocausal approach only (regarding the authoritarian style of governance as the root of all problems), but has to include a variety of possible conditions such as (national) political structures, social systems, or cultural legacies and traditions, which require a broader theoretical frame.

Due to its broad and pluralist approach, structure and agency play an important role in peasant studies' and its more transdisciplinary extension critical agrarian studies' connection of theory and empirics, which creates a connecting point with political opportunity structures. In this context, structure refers to reoccurring arrangements that may affect or potentially limit people's options, while agency means people's ability to act autonomously, showing that not only political opportunities themselves are outlining factors, but also how social structure and socialization of individuals have an effect on behaviour (Akram-Lodhi 2018). Analysis of the mobilization potential of peasants are usually divided into either denying peasants mobilization potential, referring to the classical Marxist approach of peasant agriculture, or insisting on peasant's inherent revolutionary potential, like peasant studies scholars do. Furthermore, political opportunity structures can be connected to the potential harboured in peasant cooperatives and transnational agrarian movements. Cooperatives play a crucial role in this regard, as they, according to Chayanov (1991) and if vertically organized, can act as a social movement and counter industrial and enterprise-oriented agricultural structures. They can create fundamental change in supporting the persistence of peasant farming, ergo using political opportunities for themselves in a collective manner. Nevertheless, these cooperative movements face

many obstacles and challenges (or threats), which hinder them from forming a movement and empowering peasants to mobilization. Chayanov articulates six obstacles, which function as categories for this analysis. Transnational agrarian movements display a modern tool for cross-border solidarity, claim-making, and mobilization towards forming a united peasant class – however, while this tool has to be perceived as such in order to make use of it, it is not always free from threats emerging from the state or even from mechanisms inherent to the transnational structures and capacities of these movements. In viewing the claim of ‘globally’ active transnational agrarian movements critically, we can start learning about obstacles and hindrances peasants in countries which are currently chronically underrepresented in the global arenas have to overcome.

Even though this thesis does not follow an anthropological research approach, incorporating everyday forms of resistance can prove beneficial in a number of ways. Due to the absence of politically outspoken and easily recognisable forms of resistance in respect to food sovereignty in the case of Kyrgyzstan, forms of contention that are not discernible as such, but expressed in everyday or quiet forms of resistance, need to be examined instead. These forms can be recognized by the extensive range of dimensions and categories defined by Scott (1991) and Vinthagen and Johansson (2014; 2020). Most importantly, however, the concept of quiet food sovereignty, which can be described as an everyday form of resistance, serves as the main category with which to recognize everyday forms of rural resistance and offers a holistic perspective on rural agrarian practices in Kyrgyzstan. It may even add one tile to the incomplete mosaic of food sovereignty studies in the post-Soviet space, of which as of now only Russia has been thoroughly examined. In a first step, detecting a possible political dimension in local peasant’s (quiet) food sovereignty practices is analytically approached by evaluating the three categories of (1) the claiming of rights, (2) the struggle to achieve those rights, and (3) a clear vision to shift the control of productive resources back to farmers (Visser et al. 2015: 518-523). In case of an absent political dimension, it has to be evaluated if peasants are intrinsically apolitical or if their potential political action is muted by suppressive and/or repressive threats.

3. Methods

In the following section, the methodical approach to this qualitative study is presented. After elaborating on the research design and the case study, I continue to introduce the data collection methods and go into detail on how the research was conducted. Finally, I discuss the limitations and weaknesses that come with conducting research in an authoritarian context.

3.1 Research design and case study

In the centre of qualitative research, we find practices, interactions, or discourses, to which everyday knowledge and practices and an understanding of everyday life are crucial. It is crucial, because humans do not (inter)act based on rigid established norms, roles, and meanings, but instead every

social (inter)action can be comprehended as an interpretative act (Mayring 2002: 10). Further, qualitative research can be described as entering a dialogue with the collected data, rather than simply a mechanical collecting and interpretation of firmly defined data. Compared to quantitative research, which is defined by extensive data collection in order to achieve representativeness, qualitative research allows in-depth analysis of single perspectives and phenomena, including the researcher's reflections (Flick 2021: 24ff.). This is relevant for the present case because a qualitative research approach enables to delineate the complexity of underlying conflicts, which are embedded in convoluted settings and are shaped by diverse realities and experiences. As such, it is not possible to generalize them; instead, their understanding makes exploratory processes necessary.

Relevant to be addressed firstly is how this research is guided by decolonial and feminist research ethics, which were defined by Decolonialidad Europa (2013). With this approach, masculine and colonial logic of (mostly Western-centric) research is articulated, which aims to work with principles such as neutrality, objectivity, and rationality. (Decolonial) Researchers like Ramón Grosfoguel (2013) or Ochy Curiel (2021) draw attention to the importance of non-Western knowledge production and critically examining one's own positionality in the research process. Grosfoguel elaborates on Western knowledge production being based on four epistemicides of knowledge¹², which led to a Western-centric and -dominated, sexist, racist, and classist scholarship development. Today, every research discipline follows its own catalogue of methods, which was primarily created to be used in the Global North, following a perspective of a methodological nationalism (Wimmer/Glick Schiller 2002). But how can subjective points of view or everyday knowledge get communicated in a reliable manner? How can their messages be validated and are they independent from the researcher (Flick 2019: 474)? Objectivity is understood as reflecting one's own methodological approach and disclosing it in a comprehensive manner, instead of trying to oppress one's one subjectivity completely (Baur/Blasius 2019: 6f.). The awareness of the influence of one's own personality on research is not only the basis of qualitative research, but its strength. Scientists find themselves in a delicate position, as they always live in the practice they are investigating, which makes them producers of first and second order constructions (Reichert 2019: 37). I will come back to my own positionality and critical reflection of the research process later on (chapter 3.5), but for now it can be said, that qualitative research is a constant process of critical reflection and negotiation of the complexity of the research process (Dannecker/Englert 2014: 11ff.).

¹² Grosfoguel refers to the four genocides of the 16th century, which he calls "epistemicides," meaning the eradication of knowledge and differing forms of knowing. He focuses on the development of contemporary (colonial) knowledge systems as the cornerstone of Westernized universities, led "by a few men from five countries in Western Europe" and its significance for the decolonization of knowledge (Grosfoguel 2013: 74).

For this analysis a case study approach is undertaken. A case can be understood in different ways: next to classical subjects of social sciences like single persons or whole societies, social processes or single situations can also be the focus of single case studies (Hering/Jungmann 2019: 619). A case study analysis is therefore a comprehensive research strategy in which a delimitable unit, namely a case, is to be comprehensively understood in terms of its internal structures and environmental conditions (Yin 2014: 16). Case studies are designed to facilitate the exploration of novel processes, behaviours, or those that are still poorly understood and grant the opportunity for a holistic view of the process. The case does not emerge out of nowhere or is chosen randomly, but rather arises out of the more or less structured conception about the object of the research project in the beginning of the examination. A case study always consists of more than one observation, which do have a timely connection and/or gain meaning through comparison with expectations derived from theories (Blatter et al. 2007: 125)¹³. The design of the case study is somewhat flexible – which can be described as strength and weakness at the same time – and makes a systematic approach to addressing the large number of design choices necessary (Meyer 2001: 329f.). In the following, I explain the selection of the case, the sampling strategy, the selection of data collection methods and interview partners.

The case country selected for this analysis is Kyrgyzstan, one of the five Central Asian countries¹⁴. In order to answer the posed research question on challenging factors to the emergence of food sovereignty movements in the post-Soviet space, Kyrgyzstan emerged as the most suitable case study for several reasons. First to mention is the country's political situation. The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to the formation of a variety of states with different cultural and political systems and new political trajectories (Ivanov 2022). The transition to democratic structures did not transpire smoothly. Instead, many political elites from the Soviet period transferred into post-Soviet structures and build, more or less strict, dictatorships. Compared to the other four countries, Kyrgyzstan has had a relatively open-minded political elite and was hailed by some as the „democratic island“ of Central Asia (f.i. Anderson 1999). This label was based on the initial political developments after independence and the first and second (2005 and 2010) of three (2020) political revolutions, in which merely the political leaders were exchanged (Ivanov 2022; Sheranova/Uraimov 2023). Later on, this evaluation was retracted (Radnitz 2006: 82; Dar/Firdous 2015: 224). Ever since the election of president Japarov in 2020 the country has experienced an authoritarian backlash. According to *The Central Asia Protest Tracker*¹⁵ (CAPT), between 2018 and 2020 Kyrgyzstan experienced around 500 protests. This number gives cause to expect or assume Kyrgyzstani civil society to be active, additional to the fact that the

¹³ For more on case studies, see Blatter et al. 2007.

¹⁴ Next to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan.

¹⁵ *The Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs* developed CAPT, a dataset of protest activity, by assembling and categorizing protest activity in all five Central Asian republics from January 1, 2018 to August 31, 2020 (The Oxus Society 2020; Jardine et al. 2022).

country counts roughly 20.000 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to this day (Baxtiyorovich 2023: 154). The ambiguity of an apparently strong and outspoken civil society and the simultaneous absence of rural social movements makes Kyrgyzstan an interesting case. A critical examination of Kyrgyzstan's peasant resistance landscape is a first step in examining the possible existence of a quiet subversion, one that defies conventional notions of resistance and social movements and can be attributed to a quiet form of food sovereignty movement.

Second, a country's geographic conditions are an important factor in social movement analysis. Kyrgyzstan is landlocked and characterized by a wide array of landscapes, ranging from steppe over lush green valleys and the Tien Shan mountain range to mega-cities. 90% of the country are above 1.500 meters. The Northern and Eastern parts of the country are rather dry and unsuitable for many types of agriculture, while in the South and West land is arable, especially in the Ferghana Valley, an area criss-crossed by serpentine borders with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Arable land accounts for 12% and pastures account for 85% of land (Mogilevskii et al. 2017: 31). Accordingly, the preconditions are not favourable for large-scale industrial food production, while small-scale and subsistence farming are prevalent and account for 90-98% of all produced foods in the country (Maksimov/Ten 2020; Kozhogulova et al. 2023). These numbers point to an absence of a great power accumulation in the agricultural sector and the potential power held by smallholders and peasant producers. Geography often has a longer-lasting influence on agrarian structures than actual land reforms (Visser et al. 2021: 307). It can also influence national and local movement patterns, which is why this point is relevant for the case at hand. Further, using La Vía Campesina as an example, transnational networks can work as social movements while at the same time displaying a plurality of movement organizations and alliances, scales, sites, and forms of anti-capitalist struggles (Borras 2023: 694). The emergence or absence of political movements can neither be attributed to objective reasons alone, nor to identical actors, strategies, or claims, even if they are part of the same transnational phenomenon. Geography seems to matter here, too (Isgren 2018: 181f.).

Third, the role of international organization and development agencies as well as NGOs, which have had and still have an immense impact on the rural development of Central Asia, provides a relevant pillar for this research. Not only were they strongly involved in the agricultural reforms and rural transformation after 1989, but shape the agricultural sector and peasant's lives in terms of financialization and investment until today. NGOs constitute a crucial role in Kyrgyz politics as well as in the supervision of social services and aim at creating and supporting a Western-oriented civil society.

Fourth, and as already outlined in the state of research, the lack of studies on food sovereignty and rural movements in Central Asia is noteworthy and obstructive to an understanding of rural forms of contention in the region, which is why I aim to contribute to this emerging field of research. So far, not

only a lack of research, but further a lack of food sovereignty movements altogether presents an interesting case. A lack of national agrarian organizations or movements in transnational realms does however not necessarily equal an absence of practices of food sovereignty in those regions. Although even the Global West and South currently operate with differing definitions and methods of food sovereignty (Patel 2009), the Kyrgyz perspective may deviate significantly from the previously examined fundamental ideas of food sovereignty. Therefore, a closer look at the post-Soviet space – and Kyrgyzstan in particular – can be considered valuable to the critical examination and broader understanding of food sovereignty (movements) worldwide, which are showing a global rise in popularity.

This case study interest can be described as instrumental. The case itself is only of secondary interest and plays a supportive role in facilitating the understanding we are gaining of something else, while the focus is on gaining insight into an issue and to draw a generalization from it (Stake 2005: 445f.; Hering/Jungmann 2019). Kyrgyzstan in this regard as a case country serves as a means to an end, in which the entire post-Soviet space is seen as addressed. The goal is to find out about the structural, cultural, political, and social underpinnings of the challenges to food sovereignty movement emergence. Kyrgyzstan serves as an exemplary case, from which to draw parallels to other post-Soviet cases.

3.2 Data collection methods

In the following I delineate the methods used for data collection. I used a triangulated approach in collecting data, because it provides stronger substantiation of constructs and hypotheses than approaches using only one or two methods (Meyer 2001: 336). In order to obtaining a multifaceted picture of the research field, I chose a combination of semi-open expert interviews, literature analysis, media reports, as well as documents provided by interview partners as supporting data, with main emphasis on the first.

Expert interviews in general do not necessarily follow the same execution logic, but can be conducted in an open, closed, or narrative format. For this research I have chosen a semi-open form of expert interview (Flick 2021: 168-217). Questions in a semi-open outline are aimed at being open to the individual interview partner's views and experiences and addressing the relevant aspects of the research. Questions should also enable to make interviews comparable among the various interview partners and across the diverse topics that come up, and further allow spontaneous follow-up questions (Flick 2021: 175). The questions were precisely constructed to guarantee a quick understanding. An open and neutral formulation of the questions and a flexible design of the guide, that can adapt to the conversation dynamics, were important. Open and neutral formulation of questions stimulate interview partners to talk about their own experiences, feelings, and sharing their

knowledge on relevant topics, without suggestively pushing them in desired directions (Dannecker/Vossemer 2014: 154).

Expert is a relational status and its classification is oriented by the respective research interest and awarded by the respective researcher. According to Meuser and Nagel (1991: 443), a person can be classified as an expert when they have information about processes of decision-making or (groups of) people, which they gained through privileged access. Experts can also be defined by their knowledge access or their status of knowledge production. They are usually specialists in regards to certain institutional, organizational, or social contexts and their living environment, resulting from their embeddedness and biographical experience (Froschauer/Lueger 2003: 36; Dannecker/Vossemer 2014: 161). Interviews can facilitate the amplification of voices that might otherwise lack channels for expression, which is why they are a powerful tool in qualitative research practices. Experts are often drawn upon in order to get access to information about vulnerable groups that cannot easily be reached or when for ethical reasons interviews might not be inappropriate (Flick 2021: 201). The definition or outcalling of so-called experts has especially in the context of indigenous and decolonizing research been reviewed critically against the background of a hierarchisation of knowledge in the North-South divide and its resulting consequences (Dannecker/Englert 2014: 161ff.; Flick 2021: 202f.). From an ethical point of view, ascribing someone the status as an expert needs to be considered precisely:

„[B]y what right on whose authority does one claim to speak of others? On whose terms is space created in which they are allowed to speak? Is it merely an attempt to incorporate and subsume ‘other’ voices into the Northern canons?“ (McEwan 2008: 243f).

Moreover, the knowledge possessed by experts has to be distinguished between technical, process, and interpretive knowledge (Flick 2021: 202). In this regard, I am aware of the difficulties underlying this approach to research. I rely largely on the knowledge of so-called experts on movement potential or behaviour of peasant farmers in Kyrgyzstan, instead of involving the research subjects themselves I continue this reflection in chapter 3.5.

The aim of using expert interviews is twofold: Firstly, in the conceptional phase of the research process I conducted four explorative expert-interviews (Flick 2021: 201). These were conducted with researchers from Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and the United States who work on similar topics in the post-Soviet space. These interviews were crucial in the process of attaining access to the field, to relevant contextual knowledge and literature, as well as helping me narrow down the topic (Dannecker/Vossemer 2014: 162f.). Secondly, I conducted 11 theory-generating (Flick 2021: 201), or formal, expert-interviews, of which nine were conducted on-site in Bishkek, while two were held online. Further, I conducted an additional five explorative interviews: Two with local researchers in

Bishkek, one with a local researcher online, and two online interviews with staff from an international and a national organization. The explorative interviews were conducted without a strict interview guide and not recorded, but only notes taken. Altogether, I have conducted 20 expert-interviews, which can be subdivided into four groups: 1. academic researchers (8; however, seven out of eight interviews were explorative), 2. staff from national NGOs (6), 3. staff/members from international organizations and development agencies (4), and 4. agricultural advisors (2). The interviews all followed the same guideline of questions, with only adaptations in regards to interview partner's affiliate organizations. An overview of all conducted interviews can be found in the appendix.

3.3 Conducting the research

3.3.1 Access to the field and its limitations

Access to the Central Asian countries is anything but straightforward and varies heavily depending on the researcher's background (Markowitz/Radnitz 2021: 584ff.). Local or non-local scientific researchers who are suspects to government critique can be intimidated, monitored, arrested, and forced out of the country by the state (Dall'Agnola/ Sharshenova 2024: 2¹⁶). Access to research subjects further presents a challenge, especially when it comes to more sensitive research topics, which is why some researchers rely on recruiting suitable interview partners via social media or on dating platforms such as Tinder (Sorbello 2024). Accordingly, this research required to be carefully planned and executed, also due to further challenges associated with press freedom, availability of data, and difficult access to possible interview partners. Before visiting the case country, I prepared by gathering background knowledge on the topic and country-specific information that I reckoned to be helpful in the process of getting a better understanding of the case. This mainly included reviewing academic literature, with a specific focus on food sovereignty and food security discourses in post-socialist contexts, democratization processes ever since 1989, food practices and culture, as well as evaluations of NGO-ization and civil society networks. Media articles were only contingently helpful. Central Asia is not a frequent focus in Western media and local media is usually only accessible in Russian or Kyrgyz language, making translation necessary. According to the UNDP and the Kyrgyz government, the Kyrgyz digital development is progressing quickly and „pioneer[ing] in regulating digital technologies“ (UNDP 2024). The reality however still greatly varies from this. I quickly noticed that gaining information via the internet is restricted not only due to language difficulties, but rather because many NGOs or organizations do not have a website or if they do it is often outdated or lacks contact details. As it turns out, email is not a medium that is widely or gladly used. Instead, people rely on services such as WhatsApp or Facebook for all sorts of (public) communication and to share their activities and

¹⁶ In this volume, ethical, structural, and methodological obstacles to conducting research in and on Central Asia are collected.

information – in the political, but also private sphere. This was revealed to me during the explorative interviews with researchers before the research stay and reinforced the importance of the research stay. The chosen method of the single case study requires to show the many facets of a case and to present it in its complexity as comprehensively as possible. Establishing personal contacts with local experts and applying the snowball-system in acquiring potential interview partners comes to its limits without being on site, as it requires a certain level of trust. For these reasons, I decided a research stay was necessary. Also, as the goal of this research is not only a one-sided knowledge-production, I considered personal contacts on site as important. Further, I hope to create a useful collection of literature and information for local scientists as well as activists and to add to the broader knowledge about Central Asian struggles for food sovereignty.

3.3.2 Sampling strategy and size

Conducting explorative interviews with researchers prior to the research stay has helped tremendously in finding suitable contacts in Bishkek and accessing people and organizations, which would not have been possible with a research solely conducted online. One fellow student in particular connected me to many of his local friends, which introduced me to Kyrgyz culture, aside from this research. These friends and many other people acted as my gatekeepers, defined in the qualitative research tradition as individuals within social networks who have positions and knowledge that facilitate access and connections to communities that would otherwise be hard to reach (McFadyen/Rankin 2016). Local gatekeepers were, first and foremost, the Graduate School of Development at the University of Central Asia in Bishkek, that was kind enough to accept me as a Visiting Student and provided me with a work space as well as contacts to local researchers and other master students of the program. Secondly, the interview partners I had already secured previous to coming to Bishkek, such as GIZ, FAO, and Camp Alatau, were crucial in opening gates. In a form of snowball system, they linked me to national organizations I would not have been able to approach by myself. This method is widely recognized in the social sciences for approaching possible interview partners that are more challenging to reach (Biernacki/Waldorf 1981).

In order to overcome the inherent power structures in scientific research, it is crucial to include locally produced knowledge and experiences in a transdisciplinary approach. However, the direct engagement with locals embodies complex power dynamics. This is a relevant reflection for a research process such as this, but does not constitute the main reason why the voices of local peasants were not included in this research. Peasant farmers were not directly contacted due to three reasons. Firstly, I simply did not have sufficient capacities for a geographically dispersed research approach, on top of that in Russian – a language I barely speak. I conducted all interviews on site in Bishkek or online, due to the headquarters of NGOs and other institutions being located in the capital and their staff either speaking English or even German. I did not have the timely or financial resources to travel across

Kyrgyzstan with a translator in order to find interview partners. Secondly, from a research ethics point of view I did not feel comfortable to penetrate into unknown territory in my position as a white European woman with insufficient language skills. Moreover, as peasants are mostly marginalized, it would have required a high level of trust to get into touch with them and persuade them to share intimate information. Thirdly, this study could not have been representative, as my limit were roughly 20 interviews. Qualitative studies are not designed to achieve generalizability, but instead aim to offer comprehensive understandings of the lived reality of the people under study and the relevant social issue. Interviewing a broader range of people from different backgrounds and contexts contributed to a diversification of generated data and provided a more heterogenous view on the research topic (Dannecker/Englert 2014). Hence, the scientific value of delving deeper into the narratives and experiences of the selected group of people was larger than expanding the sampling size in order to get closer to a form of generalizability.

3.3.3 Interview guide

For the conception of the interview guide I made use of the SPSS-method, which stands for collecting, checking, sorting, subsuming (Dannecker/Vossemer 2014: 160; Helfferich 2009: 179; in German: sammeln, prüfen, sortieren, subsumieren). First, all potential questions are collected without a particular order, where after in a second step all questions irrelevant to the research question are eliminated. Thirdly, the remaining questions are structured and organized according to different topics and lastly the interview guide is subsumed, including final adjustments and questions brought in the according order. According to Helfferich (2009: 180), the interview guide does not consist of too many questions and can be easily remembered. Further, it leaves open some space for topics that the interview partners want to contribute.

The structure of the interview guide can be divided into six parts. The first part (introduction) consists of some introductory words about myself, the research, and the handling of data. Subsequently, I asked for any time restrictions and set a time frame as well as asked for permission to record the interview. Secondly, I asked the interview partner to introduce themselves and their affiliate organization, especially in regards to the regional context of Kyrgyzstan. The third part (terminology) revolved around the terminology of food sovereignty and food security, interview partner's associations with the terms, as well as which role the terms play in their work in terms of associated strategies. Sections four and five focus on questions relating to international cooperation and national work. Here I aimed at finding out more about the respective organization's work, their cooperation partners, their involvement in supporting bottom-up movements, as well as their connections in the international sphere, especially with La Vía Campesina. Further, questions on agricultural cooperatives and their political demands are explored. In section six, questions on food culture are asked to find out about everyday practices of food sovereignty. Lastly, in chapter seven I brought together a few general

questions, depending on the time and mood, as well as technical questions such as tips on further interview partners or available data. I chose to ask the most sensible question towards the end of the interview, as suggested by Blaur and Blasius (2019: 16), which related to a recently introduced law on NGO-work, which will be further elaborated on in chapter 4.2.2 and 5.2. I lastly gave my interview partners the chance to express any uncertainties or concluding remarks and offered for them to ask any remaining questions (Dannecker/Vossemer 2014: 160). I chose to use the same interview guide in all the interviews, as questions did not vary tremendously in respect to people's affiliation or background. Only minor changes in a few questions were made depending on their specific knowledge. One exemplary interview guide is attached in the appendix. It combines all relevant questions for different interview partners, which is why it is more exhaustive than what I asked individually.

3.4 Data analysis: focused interview-analysis

In order to appropriately analyse the collected material, I rely on the book *Focussed interview analysis with MAXQDA* (Kuckartz/Rädiker 2024). The strategy applied here is one aimed at reducing complexities and summarizing the wealth of data by evaluating the material systematically and focussed on answering research questions. This is carried out with a generalising objective, meaning the results should have a wider range and are not limited to the sample and setting analysed (ibid. XVIII). For this analysis, MAXQDA was used as an analytical tool. The overall aim is to develop a coding frame or codebook that is both theory-led and related to the material. Kuckartz and Rädiker (2024) suggest to follow six different sequential steps:

(1) Preparing, organising and exploring data

The formally conducted interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed word-for-word with correction of most dialect or linguistic errors, except for when incomprehensible, which was marked with 'unv.' (in German 'unverständlich'). During the interviews which were not recorded due to wishes from the interview partners, notes were taken. As expert interviews are about the content rather than emotions attached to it, complex notation systems are redundant. Pauses, vocal pitch, and other nonverbal or para-linguistic elements were not subject of interpretation (Meuser/Nagel 1991: 455).

In this first step, the data is screened once to get accustomed with it, striking passages are marked and ideas for ways of interpretation collected. It is crucial to keep the research question in mind at all times as a guiding line as well as to constantly reflect on one's own pre-assumptions and point of view to keep an open mind. After this first exploration of data, important results should be noted (Kuckartz/Rädiker 2024: 30-37).

(2) Developing the coding frame

The first step here is to understand the difference of the terms code, concept, and category, which can overlap and lead to confusion. To counteract on any confusion (for the reader and myself), I will solely

refer to *codes* (also because in MAXQDA there are only options for codes), actively excluding other scholars and their designs – there is no consensus in social sciences on these terms anyways. What they all have in common, is that these analysing tools have to be developed further in the process of the analysis, through grouping, summarizing, focussing, or differentiating (ibid.: 27). A code describes „a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.” (Saldaña 2021: 5). In contrast to grounded theory approaches, the assignment of text passage and codes in qualitative content analysis is strictly rule-based. Moreover, both the evaluation aspects and the evaluation rules are defined so precisely that systematic, intersubjectively verifiable processing is possible.

Kuckartz and Rädiker (2024: 28f.) differentiate between seven different types of codes: (1) facts (verifiable and easily standardisable), (2) thematic, (3) evaluative or scaling, (4) analytical with a higher degree of abstraction and interpretation, (5) theoretical, relating to the existing theoretical concept, (6) in-vivo, meaning using striking words introduced by the interview partners as codes, and (7) formal, like word counts or number of speech contributions. Additionally, there are structuring codes that do not organise the material, but the codes themselves.

Codes should first of all be derived from the interview guide and the research question (inductively), to be later on complemented by codes derived from the theoretical approaches (deductively). Moreover, codes should have some specific characteristics, like being exhaustive, clear, and comprehensible. Additionally, Kuckartz and Rädiker (2024: 37-42) suggest to include three fixed codes to have at all times: other (in which text passages are collected that do not fit any existing code), ‘flowers along the path’ (to save passages that are not relevant for the research question at that moment, but might be later), and quotable passages (that are especially graphic and are ideally quoted in the text).

(3) Coding of interviews

The coding process consists of two parts: the basic coding round and the in-depth coding. The basic coding serves as a starting point, from which the first set of codes are allocated, however without going into too much detail. It is necessary to outline some ground rules in order to start the coding process. The scope of the code should not consist of one or a few words only, but rather a complete or part of a sentence, and if incomprehensible on its own also include the previous question: „Better to code too much text than too little” (ibid. 47).

(4) Developing the coding frame further and in-depth coding

The second coding round can be divided into five steps: (1) Select codes and define order of processing, (2) get an overview of the assigned content, (3) decide on the further procedure with regard to this

code (e.g. differentiate and form subcategories; merge with another category), (4) record the most important contents of a coded segment as key points in comments, (5) differentiate the category further and form data-driven subcategories (precision coding). Further, in addition to codes derived from the interview guide and research question, codes derive directly from theory have to be included here as well (ibid. 58-76).

(5) Analysis options after coding

Ways of analysing the collected data on the basis of the developed coding frame are manifold. Therefore, it is important to narrow down the options prior to starting the analysis. To begin with, one should formulate some analysing questions, that can be helpful in guiding the analysis. The multi-stage coding process leads to the creation of a matrix, in which a horizontal glance gives holistic answers on a specific case, meaning one interviewed person, while a vertical glance allows for a thematically oriented analysis: Providing all relevant text passages on a specific topic, regardless of the interview partner.

The code frame itself already presents a strong analytical result and at the same time a tool. As the data is already very refined after the multi-stage coding process, they are properly structured and can contribute to answering the research question(s). Further possibilities for analysis are, among others, analysing the frequency of codes, their correlations, carrying out comparisons, or creating concept maps and model graphics (ibid. 79-111).

(6) Writing the report and documenting the analysis process

One crucial advice for academic research lies in continuously and routinely writing and taking notes, even in the beginning of the process, and especially during the analysis process by using in-document or code memos in MAXQDA. The often-criticized weakness of qualitative research, its generalisability, can be agreed with to a certain extent: Qualitative research cannot generate generalizability in the form of statistical representation. It is however not necessary to have a sample of $n=1000$ in order to plausibly delineate how phenomena are related. The generalization in this case rather refers to an empirically justified theory or to the recognizing of patterns, which could later on be tested with a larger sample (ibid. 113-121).

3.5 Conducting research in authoritarian contexts and further limitations

„[...] We need more honest reflections on potentially uncomfortable and sensitive themes that are too little discussed, let alone written about in the academic and professional realm: researchers' fears, insecurities and mistakes during fieldwork, the mental impact it has on the researcher, and the possibility of coming home with little in the way of publishable findings.“ (Dall'Agnola/Sharshenova 2024: 6).

Even though this research was conducted with decolonial and feminist research ethics in mind, scientific research generally comes with restrictions, limitations, failures, and weaknesses, especially in authoritarian contexts (see Rivetti 2015). I was fortunate enough to avoid experiencing any severe limitations that would have led to serious weaknesses in my research process. However, some smaller inconveniences occurred, as I already touched upon in previous subchapters. Additional to difficulties in approaching the field, limitations to acquiring interview partners were an issue. Not everyone I was eager to speak with responded to my inquiries or was available. In one case, the time span between inquiry and interview was over three months. Another example is a local, well-established NGO, with which an interview failed due to language and organizational issues. Another local interview partner I was eager to meet with, that was recommended to me by several of my interview partners, never responded to me, even after I had reached out via different channels. This denied me to include a more cultural perspective.

As one of the sub-questions is related to the discourse, perception, and usage of the terms food sovereignty and food security, in the beginning a media review seemed relevant to complement the information I drew from the interviews. I started conducting this part of the research prior to the research stay and swiftly noticed that the terms were not present a lot in either media nor governmental policy papers. In general, what has to be considered while doing a media analysis is the level of press freedom in the respective context. The deeper I dived into the specifics of Kyrgyzstan, the more I noticed the volatile setting and lacking freedom of press and media. As (critical) journalism in Kyrgyzstan is a dangerous endeavour and internet is considered semi free (Freedom House 2024; more on this see chapter 5.2.1), the legitimacy of the information and data gathered from Kyrgyzstani websites or media has to be carefully examined. This also reaffirmed the necessity of the research stay. With the elaborated issues in mind, I decided to use media reports only in a supportive role, not as an analytical tool. There are however some media outlets, like Kloop or Radio Azattyk, that are considered critical and free by Western media, which can be trusted and which were helpful for this research.

One weakness to the conduction of this research is the description and stagnation of working definitions of inherently Western concepts, for example civil society, resistance, or contention. They do not only represent a challenge for this research, but for all research conducted outside of the Western sphere: „Sadly, qualitative research, in many if not all of its forms, serves as a metaphor for colonial knowledge, for power, for the truth” (Denzin/Lincoln 2003: 1). The issues of Western concepts applied to non-Western contexts is also relevant in the process of choosing research subjects. If peasants do not see themselves as political actors and therefore do not present themselves accordingly in the public sphere, they will usually not be made subjects of scientific research or be recognized by the experts I have included in this study. For these kinds of settings, ethnographical research would be needed to examine everyday practices of life more closely, connecting to the post-

colonial debate on civil society. This also relates to the problematic of using James Scott's theoretical approach of everyday resistance, in which he applies ethnographical research. I was unable to incorporate an ethnological research approach here as well, as already explained in chapter 3.3.1. Therefore, certain elements relevant for this study remain unexplored or unseen. Incorporating the voice of local peasants should be investigated in future research, which would further benefit from including a broader range of actors, like politicians or cooperative leaders.

Another central issue is the handling of the researcher's subjectivity, as they are part of the society they aim to analyse. They might be enticed to represent a specific perspective, oversee certain aspects, or bring their own prejudices into the research process (Baur/Blasius 2019: 6f.). Further, their social status, meaning the person's ethnicity, class, or gender identity, can never be fully disregarded and always needs to be critically examined by the researcher in the process. It is however not only relevant to reflect on one's positionality, but additionally to reflect on the institutional and political circumstances (Curiel 2021: 51f.). The research is constrained to the gained perceptions during the interviews and the respective selection of literature. Even though a substantial amount of data was collected for this research, it is impossible to engage all existing literature into a research this limited and therefore selections had to be made – a process which is prone to be influenced by one's positionality. This extends to the interpretation of the collected data as well, which bears a risk of biases underlying the research process.

I am aware that the knowledge generated in this research is influenced by both enduring power structures that shape the development of ancient and modern knowledge as well as my own positionality as a researcher. As a white, female researcher hailing from Europe, I benefit from certain (un)known material, social, and/or structural privileges that might facilitate the research process. I aimed at keeping a professional distance from my interview partners, in order to not get too comfortable around them, and constantly reminded myself of my role as a researcher. This was however difficult at times, as it is considered rude to refuse Kyrgyzstani hospitality, which even extended to the German interview partners I met in Bishkek (f.i. being invited for dinner and drinks after the interview). I have found myself in situations close to crossing the boundaries of qualitative research rules. During interviews the risk is high to slip into a suggestive or dichotomous style of asking questions, especially in uncomfortable situations, in which I felt like the other person did not understand my question or was hesitating. Instead of embracing short moments of silence, hasty reaction can subtly influence or steer the course of conversation. One is easily tempted to raise suggestive questions by giving possible answers or ask yes/no questions as well as comment or assess certain facts (Dannecker/Vossemer 2014: 167f.). However, I am aware of this and can therefore reflect on it in an adequate manner. Conducting research means embarking on a learning process, which is inherently prone to mistakes.

Following up on my position as a researcher, it has to be acknowledged that there is usually a risk of reproducing (neo-)colonial structures with research conducted by a researcher from the Global North, who conducts research in the Global South (Vanner 2015). Research also underlies the danger of reproducing gender stereotypes or misogynist structures emanating from patriarchal conceptions and traditions. As Denzin tells us: „Gender filters knowledge“ (1989: 116), meaning the sex of the interviewer and the interview partner have to be considered, as the interview takes place within the cultural boundaries of the respective social system, in this case a conservative and highly patriarchal society. My pre-assumption of gender disparity and hierarchy was confirmed to me during the interviews. Eight out of the 14 interviews with locals were conducted with men, who had a very different approach to answering questions than the women I spoke to. They usually began talking before I had even started addressing the formalities of the interview or was done with the preparation of questions and would not stop until I interrupted them (especially male interview partners aged 50+) – which wasn’t easy to do, as I was aware of the differing gender hierarchy in Kyrgyzstan and did not feel comfortable in my position as a foreign, young woman. Eventually, I had to sharply end interviews due to time restrictions. Women on the other hand were rather considerate of time, starting up conversations rather than simply explaining, as well as being responsive to questions.

4. Background and context

To make sense of the post-communist present and future it is necessary to have an understanding of the (pre-)communist past (Howard 2003: 4). In this chapter I outline historical and present developments of the region of Central Asia, and especially Kyrgyzstan, in regards to protest, contention, civil society, agriculture, and political developments in order to provide some context for the subsequent analysis. Most studies on the post-Soviet space start – as indicated in the term ‘post’-Soviet – in 1991, leading to the assumption that Central Asian history is only relevant in light of the Soviet Union and its subsequent developments – which is not correct and will be demonstrated in the following.

4.1 Historical outline of resistance movements in Kyrgyzstan

Central Asia has been shaped by interactions between the agrarian societies China, India, Iran, and Europe, as well as those of the Eurasian steppe. The steppe, stretching from Hungary to Korea, does not provide much for a sedentary life, which is why pastoral nomadism has been and continues to be the best survival strategy. Even though surrounding agrarian societies viewed them as ‘barbaric’ and ‘backwards’, they had difficulties controlling the vast frontiers of their empires (Khalid 2021: 17f.). Before the first Russian occupation of Turkestan in 1713, Central Asia used to be divided into three multilingual republics, which were subject to reoccurring tensions between nomadic and sedentary populations: Turkestan, Bukhara, and Khiva. Central Asia had been fragmented and heterogeneous in

many respects, which stems from its long history of being reigned by foreign forces, most importantly the Mongols, the Golden Hordes, and Timur Lenk. Catherine the Great's conquest in 1783, the official inclusion into the Tsarist Empire in 1875, and finally the forceful inclusion into the Soviet Union in 1918 display the power of external control in the region. However, these constant back-and-forth conquests were usually answered with resistance and riots, sometimes leading to violent conflicts – f.i. the year-long resistance of the Ferghana valley Kyrgyz tribes in 1876, who after negotiations later on accepted the Russian protectorate (Abazov 2004: 11).

The occupation and inclusion of Central Asia into the Tsarist Empire and later on the Soviet Union was accompanied by violent conflict. One example to be named here is the Basmachi (meaning attacker) movement, which not only appeared in Central Asia, but also in Crimea and defined a group of (armed) peasants to first form during the Tsarist times. Their actions were limited to smaller acts of resistance at first, theft and sabotage of Russians, when later, during the violent occupation of Turkestan starting in 1916, also educated and local leaders joined the guerrilla fight against colonial power. Their resistance against Russian orders had its peak in 1916, when Tsar Nicolas II. drafted farmers and nomads into the army to fight in World War I., leading to the proclaiming of independent *khanates*¹⁷, a following wave of violence, and several hundred thousand people to flee across the Tian Shan mountains towards China – most of them died on the dangerous endeavour¹⁸ (Karpazli 2016). The Basmachi movement subsequently ebbed and flowed between 1918 and 1948, but retained mass character during 1920-1931 in particular, presenting a direct threat to the authorities (Brower 1996). Their fight, which included attempts to form an independent political party in order to establish Central Asian autonomy, were crushed by Soviet military offensives (Abazov 2004: 19ff.; Nourzhanov 2015). Towards the end of the 1920s, there had been confrontational as well as less confrontational forms of anti-colonial resistance against collectivization similar to the early Basmachi revolts, especially in the South of Kyrgyzstan (Loring 2008). Resistance and response to it were complex and diverse, especially because resistance was not only aimed at collectivization efforts, but tensions and passive resistance (such as sabotage, concealment of property, and foot-dragging) had been growing due to other policies that attempted to change rural livelihoods as well. Violent acts however were only provoked later on, in 1929/30, leading to a revival of Basmachi rebellion, including violent demonstrations and revolts across the territory (ibid.).

The Soviets were eager to suppress any revolutionary potential arising in their new colonies and, especially as soon as Stalin came to power, started fundamentally repressing Central Asians. The creation of new borders and cultural uniformity solidified Soviet power and influence in the region.

¹⁷ A historical name for state structure of Turkic or Mongolic tribes, similar to a principality or kingdom.

¹⁸ This is being referred to as *urkun* in the Kyrgyzstani language, translating to *Great Exodus*.

Over the next decades, even more profound transformations were implemented. Starting from 1925, an ideological front was opened to assert control over cultural policy. Back then Central Asia was too fragmented to be ruled effectively by the Soviets. Consequently, the Soviets new imagination included linguistic homogeneity, clear state boundaries, extirpation of local (religious) belief system, as well as nationhood and modernity (Khalid 2021: 201-207). The Kyrgyz, who had been an oral society until then, were forced into a written language in the 1920s and 1930s. New words and concepts (like telephone, railway, or revolution) were introduced in Russian, solidifying Soviet cultural influence (ibid. 190). Subsequently, pan-Soviet developments along the lines of industrialization shaped the region like never before. During the time of *Great Terror* from 1936-38, the population was starkly decimated by a wave of purges against opponents to Stalinist rule and people's spirit for resistance was broken. Although all of these developments were far from straightforward or predetermined, they changed Central Asia to a point of being unrecognizable compared to pre-Soviet times (ibid. 207-215). Some scholars argue that due to the state's dominance, no active civil society existed during communism. Yet again, this argument is based on applying an inherently Western concept to a non-Western space. Understanding civil society as a communal concept, having roots in past centuries of community organizing and traditions of mutual aid or localized forms of decision-making, it should rather be defined as a sphere of social interaction, which can be highly informal (Babajanian et al. 2005: 212f.).

The Kyrgyz were traditionally engaged in a mixture of subsistence, semi-pastoral, and nomadic animal husbandry or transhumance. With their technique, which evolved over hundreds of years, they made use of the unique climate and land resources without damaging them. Their lifestyle revolved around seasonal migration to the valleys during the winter and migrating back to the summer camps in the higher reaches of the mountains. They usually relied on buying wheat or barley from settled neighbours (or trading it for meat) and sometimes cultivated crops themselves (Abazov 2004: 11f.). The arrival of capitalism with the inclusion into the Tsarist empire transformed the landscape of Kyrgyzstan. A steady increase in trading and trade routes via newly build railways and technologies included growing industrialization of agricultural production and the introduction of new crops such as cotton or tobacco. As people began to engage in various economic activities outside agriculture and their families, traditional lifestyles were increasingly abandoned (ibid. 13). When the Soviets had established their rule over Central Asia, their major goal of industrialization was aimed to be reached by a large-scale centrally controlled farming system, which included a collectivization of agriculture and sedentarization of mobile people. The traditionally practiced forms of food cultivation were not useful for producing large amounts of standardized products, let alone for exporting into other Soviet nations. For this reason, peasants were (often forcefully) incorporated into the large state-run collective farms, called *kolkhoz*, with long-lasting consequences (Ercilasun 2017: 40ff). First, and also due to the widespread resettlements of peasants from all over the Soviet Union (from an 80%

Kyrgyzstani population to roughly half the population being recent immigrants from across the Soviet Union), many Kyrgyzstani peasants decided to leave their home territory (McDowell 2023: 6). In the early 1930s, without providing alternatives, the Soviet government decided to collect livestock from peasants in order to force them to settle. Peasants were robbed of their only property and their main source of food, as they did not have sufficient knowledge and skills of agricultural production. Many decided to slaughter their animals as an act of protest against the deprivation of their livestock. From 1941 to 1946, in connection to World War II., a severe famine hit Kyrgyzstan, decimating the Kyrgyzstani population drastically (ibid.).

In general, evidence of resistance remains fragmentary and it is generally accepted that there are many unwritten and unvoiced aspects in Kyrgyz history (Ercilasun 2017: 39). (Sensitive) Parts of the archives remain closed to researchers. There is curiosity still among the post-independence generations to find out about past injustices against their families and with concerns about a re-Sovietising of Russia, the Russian war in Ukraine, or a re-evaluation of the Soviet colonization, a new urgency is brought to rediscovering the past (McDowell 2023: 3). McDowell considers to rethink collectivization as a „developmentalist colonising strategy“ (ibid. 4). Towards the 1990s, with the *perestroika* (transformation) and *glasnost* (openness) reforms opening new spaces of freedom, political protest against personalist rule started to resurface and was partly responsible for opposition-driven regime change in Central Asia. The protests in Central Asia had their beginnings in the wake of violent ethnic conflict along the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border, which had started in a peaceful manner before turning into increasingly violent riots and eventually into a militarized conflict (Beissinger 2002). While the Kyrgyzstani leadership was rather slow to respond, protesters made use of the arising political opportunities and took to the streets in a first-ever mass demonstration, including radical forms such as hunger strikes (McGlinchey 2009: 126; Tarrow 2022: 158-161).

4.2 Post-soviet times

Every post-Soviet nation has had their country-specific experiences with Russian power and therefore pursues its own handling of the past and current relationship to Russia. Following its independence in 1991, Kyrgyzstan underwent significant political, economic, and sociocultural transformations. These transformations had a variety of immediate impacts on people's daily lives, including changes to income generation, the provision of food and consumer goods, the management and use of natural resources, as well as the availability of reliable social services. It further brought about new challenges related to national belonging or religious identity (Dörre/Schütte 2018: 1). In the following, three topics will be examined in more detail: land reforms and agricultural development, the emergence and development of NGOs and civil society, as well as the general political development of the country and region.

4.2.1 Land reforms and agricultural development

Compared to other Central Asian states, Kyrgyzstan has experienced the most comprehensive and radical agricultural reforms post-independence (Mogilevskii et al. 2017). With the dissolution of the kolkhoz systems established under Soviet rule, private property rights to land were established again, enabling the widespread re-emergence of individual farms and subsistence farming, including kitchen gardens (Sidle et al. 2023: 347). In the first years of transition however, the economy collapsed. Many ethnic Russians, Germans, or Jews quickly left the country, taking technical expertise with them. With the further collapse of the political system, agrarian and rural structures were reorganized as well, however led to periods of hunger between 1992 and 2002.

In the first phase of agricultural reform from 1991-1994, the measures towards reorganizing farms were inconsistent. They consisted of set principles of land distribution, while at the same time collective farms were reorganized in forms of agricultural cooperatives or farm associations. Two thirds of farmers remained in their kolchoz-like organizations for the time being. Farmers who wanted to become independent had the opportunity to claim land shares and establish their individual peasant farms. Between 1994 and 2003, the target was full individualization of farming, which consequently led to a decrease in average farm size, reorganizing all state and collective farms. In the third phase, starting in 2004, the development of agricultural extension services and infrastructure was emphasized by the government. Priorities in this regard were the development of cooperatives, peasant farms, and agri-businesses, the improvement of pasture and water management, and in general the social development of rural areas (Mogilevskii et al. 2017: 13ff.). However, not all farmers decided to individualize their plots. Many decided to stay in their collective alliances, voluntarily forming new farming enterprises with friends, family, or neighbours by pooling their land, capital, and labour in order to overcome scarcity and lack of knowledge and skills. Up until the 2010s, these collectives were found to be significantly more productive compared to individual farms (Agarwal 2014: 1261f.). In 2009, a further pasture reform was initiated, in which pasture was transferred to communities and one pasture user union established in each rural *rayon* (municipality). Today, individualization of farming is widespread: In 2019, peasant farms accounted for over 85% of agricultural crop area with a typical farm size of about two hectares (Mogilevskii et al. 2017: 23; Ishikawa/Kawabata 2022: 260). Limits to the growth of productivity can be further observed in a lack of state subsidies (except for wheat, seeds, or fertilizer). The government expenditures on agriculture are very low, in 2015 it accounted for 1,5% of the government budget. Therefore, it is not surprising, that reforms and agendas have not been sufficiently implemented and farmers feel left alone and face many challenges.

Additionally, much of traditional knowledge has been lost during the Soviet era. Limited knowledge and education restrict farm management, crop rotation and other techniques. There is little investment motivation or capacity, which is contradictory to the shift to individual entrepreneurs who

practice business-oriented agriculture (Mogilevskii et al. 2017: 30). Instead of supporting small-scale farmers and improving their situations, the government still, as a Soviet relict, promotes and supports large-scale farming endeavours. Trainings, consultation, and financial support have been outsourced to bigger companies (such as Kumtor Gold Company¹⁹) or NGOs, which I will come back to later (Dergousoff/Churokova 2015: 20).

Due to a lack of employment perspectives other than farming and the steadily growing population and accompanying reduction of arable land and pasture resources in rural areas, one consequence is labour outmigration, which accounts for 33% of the Kyrgyzstani GDP (AFC/CAIConsulting 2020: 100f.). Around 700.000 Kyrgyzstani citizens work abroad, mainly in Russia, in order to earn money to send back to Kyrgyzstan – out of roughly 7 million. Women are often left behind and in charge of not only care work, but additionally taking care of the family farm and subsistence activities (ibid. 106). This instability has increased since the Covid pandemic, the Russian war in Ukraine, and rising inflation (Sidle 2023: 347).

Further, there has been a recent trend to ‘supermarketization’, in which bazaars are increasingly replaced by cheaper supermarkets, that offer many Western products as well as products from other post-Soviet nations – simplified by the 2015 established Eurasian Economic Union (Hofman 2018). Due to this trend, access to food is simplified. As a consequence, people abandon their plots, which creates new dependency structures. The main causes for modern food insecurity in the country are structural or systematic: In addition to the Covid pandemic, political instability, violent border conflicts, and climate disasters resulted in an economic crisis. What is more, access to food was increasingly restricted by inflation and rising food prices (WFP 2021: 6). On average, vulnerable populations spend 65 percent of their income on food, which affects their access to a nutritious diet, while 97 percent of households stated that high food prices had caused difficulties throughout the year (ibid.). The agrarian economy’s contribution to the GDP declined from around 40% in 1995 to around 15% in 2015 and the country is still faced with a persistent level of poverty, with roughly one third of the population living below the poverty line (WFP 2021: 14). One solution to poor conditions in rural food production is seen in the development of agricultural cooperatives by the government as well as international organizations. In the *National Development Strategy for 2018-2040* (Kyrgyz Government 2018: 49f.) it is stated that the government will support and facilitate this transformation and promote the creation of agricultural clusters by turning small farms into agricultural cooperatives. The government’s aims are however focused mainly on becoming a leading supplier of high-quality environmentally friendly and organic products. Due to large distrust in agricultural service cooperatives in the beginning and an absence of government support so far, private companies have largely contributed to emerging

¹⁹Kumtor is the name of a large Gold Mine in Kyrgyzstan. It’s responsible for more than 50% of the GDP while being sharply criticized on accounts of corruption, environmental disaster, and human rights abuses. Counterintuitively, the company plays a crucial role in the financing and support of NGOs.

agribusiness and farmer survival, while NGOs and international organizations have been mainly supportive in the establishment of agricultural cooperatives (Ishikawa/Kawabata 2022: 261).

4.2.2 The emergence and development of NGOs and civil society

The foundation process of NGOs is based on a range of peculiarities and obstacles, according to Baxtiyorovich (2023: 151). Two factors played a main role in their establishment: the initial desire of the Kyrgyzstani government to cooperate with the international, and especially Western, community after a long period of isolation, as well as the initial change towards a democracy, of which civil society and NGOs are believed to be an essential building block. However, bureaucratic obstacles, a complex registration process, high fees, and people's apprehensiveness towards new forms of organizations slowed down the process. Due to the country's limited financial resources, international donors with already established knowledge and experience invested large sums into promoting democratization in the region with programs to „seed civil society” (Pierobon 2018: 108). These actions were grounded on the 'civil society orthodoxy', as defined by Mandel (2002: 280f.), in which 'NGOs = civil society = democracy'. Fostering democracy by using a Western civil society-building block to be implemented in non-Western contexts was and still is a popular tool for foreign donors (Roy 2005: 1005; Mandel 2002: 283). Due to the cultural background of nomadism in Kyrgyzstan, it is further implied that civil society might have never existed in Eurasia as such under Western-implied preconditions.

NGOs were established in three phases. The first phase (1991-2000; rather chaotic and spontaneous) was characterized by a high influx of foreign investment, as Kyrgyzstan was favoured by international donors due to its most ambitious democratic potential and an increase in the number of citizen initiative groups and political parties. 90% of all NGOs during that time were financed with money from outside of the country, in 2000 the country already counted roughly 5.000 NGOs (Baxtiyorovich 2023: 154). In the second phase (2000-2010) NGOs started to focus more strongly on interests of civil society and demanding change from the government, sometimes leading to cooperation with the government, which started to rely on the non-state sector in many crucial, mainly social regards. In 2006, NGOs reached a number of roughly 13.000 and in 2010 even 18.000 (ibid.). With two political revolutions during that time and bloody border conflicts arising, the government slowly started to take precautionary measures against the further increasing power of NGOs. The third stage (2010-today) is related to the strengthening of intergovernmental organizations and increasing cooperation with newly established academic institutes, inside and outside of the country. In this period NGOs with an environmental focus have increased drastically, making up roughly 14% of total NGOs. Today, 20.000 NGOs are officially registered, which are mostly still dependent on foreign money. Starting in 2016, the government began to pay more attention to public funding of NGOs, aiming to limit the international donors influence (ibid. 155). Ever since, the treatment for NGOs has negatively evolved and now, with two restrictive laws imposed reached its climax. This will further be examined in chapter 5.2.

4.2.3 Political development of the country and region

Kyrgyzstan used to be referred to as the 'democratic island' of Central Asia due to its initially open political system, protest culture, and its three colourful revolutions, which brought about political change (a.o. Anderson 1999; Pannier 2024). While Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan quickly fell victim to a new sort of personality cult and remain ruled by dictators until today, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have struggled to find their path to democracy as well. Initially, after independence Kyrgyzstan was turned into a republic with a parliamentary system of government under president Akayev, who did have the goal of creating a democracy. Possibly due to a lack of knowledge on what actually defines a democracy, he barely managed to build an illiberal democracy (Malloy 2020). Definitions on the state form vary, some scholars speak of hybrid regimes in order to avoid a definite verdict about their 'democraticness' as semi-democratic or semi-authoritarian regimes, covering the grey area in between that is coined by political turmoil and social unrest (Stefes/Wooden 2009: 6; Tarrow 2022: 143). Others speak of post-liberal states (Lottholz 2017; 2018).

Since 1991, there have at all times been many political parties and movements in Kyrgyzstan, with currently 226 registered, of which most are inactive. Several dozen however continue to participate in official elections, with the weakness of being largely personality-driven (Pannier 2024). This abundance of parties has so far made it difficult for any Kyrgyzstani president to avoid criticism all together. Freedom House (2024) used to define Kyrgyzstan as semi-free up until 2018. Ever since, the political situation has intensified, with corruption accusations increasing in the light of the 2020 elections. Protest broke out as soon as the election results, which were most likely rigged, were released. In the course of just two weeks, Sadyr Japarov was approved as the new prime minister. Japarov had gone from prisoner – for violently protesting in favour of a nationalization of the Kumtor mine – to holding Kyrgyzstan's top political post in just two weeks. According to the Venice Commission of the European council, the election did „not reflect genuine democratic principles” and further had a voter turnout of only 33% (Venice Commission 2021; Coppenrath/Baldasari 2021). Japarov quickly appointed close friends into his government and commissioned a constitutional referendum in 2021, after which the country returned to a mode of presidential system of government. The president was strengthened, while the powers of the Kyrgyzstani parliament, which had been expanded in the 2010s, were partially restricted. In addition, a new body was created in the form of the *kurultai* (People's Assembly), which primarily has a supervisory function over the other bodies. Today, Kyrgyzstan can be considered an authoritarian state (Pannier 2024; Freedom House 2024). However, even though social science researchers have a soft spot for categorizing states neatly and put labels on every aspect of political life, it was Max Weber (1978: 262) who said how it „is very exceptional” for regimes to belong „only to one or another of these pure types”. Most regimes, even if from the outside they might be assigned to one type of regime form, fall into a grey zone between the standard types, leading to an array of

competing terms with definitions that overlap and, contra intuitively, lead to more imprecise cross-overs (Chen/Moss 2019: 668). Authoritarianism is often used interchangeably with terms such as dictatorship or autocracy, which aim to refer to forms of non-democracies. In either case, authoritarianism is understood as „a state system that is highly punitive of dissent and lacking a meaningful degree of political competition” (ibid.).

5. Challenging factors for the emergence of food sovereignty movements

In this chapter, the main analysis of the collected data is presented. Like outlined in the third chapter on the methodical approach, in a first step the code frame was structured according to codes deducted from the theoretical framework. The four main categories which emerged were opportunities and threats, as well as potential for mobilization and everyday practices of (quiet) food sovereignty. In a second step, the codes deducted from the interview data have been translated into categories for analysis. Deriving from the code frame, this chapter is divided into six subchapters, each with an individual focus on one challenging factor to the emergence of food sovereignty movements, and is structured as follows: In the first section, unused and/or unperceived political opportunities are examined, focusing on volatile and stable political opportunities. Next, threats in the forms of suppressive, non-violent and repressive, violent forms of government tactics are analysed and discussed. This is followed by a subchapter on weak civil society, based on the main codes which derived from the interview data: Lack of trust, Soviet legacy, and cultural logic, as well as development stages and development aid, trans-, inter-, and national actors, and finally economic marginalization. Subsequently, I will delineate how cooperatives work as top-down enterprises in Kyrgyzstan, after which I elaborate on the local understanding of food sovereignty as a concept as obstructive to the emergence of food sovereignty movements. Lastly, I examine everyday forms of resistance and quiet food sovereignty.

5.1 Unperceived and/or unused political opportunities

This chapter is structured according to the divide of political opportunity structures into volatile (increasing access to opportunities, shifting alignments, divided elites, availability of potential allies) and stable opportunities (overall regime structure, strategies towards challengers, state capacity/strength) (Tarrow 2022: 144ff.). In the following, political opportunity structures in Kyrgyzstan are evaluated based on interview data as well as relevant literature, with a focus on the availability of potential allies and state strength. Since previous research and explorative interviews show that no bottom-up peasant farmer organizations which express political demands exist in Kyrgyzstan and especially rural contention is largely absent from the political realms, it is to be assumed that political opportunities are significantly low or absent. Therefore, and as already outlined in chapter 2.1 on the

theoretical concept of political opportunity structures, this framework does not provide sufficient tools in order to comprehensively adhere to the local-specific situation of peasant farmer's contention in Kyrgyzstan, which is why additional frameworks are applied supportively.

5.1.1 Volatile political opportunities

While increasing access to opportunities and shifting alignments can be said to have rather decreased since 2020 in the process of returning authoritarian governance, the role of divided elites continues to be relevant. Divided elites played a significant role in the three political revolutions which have taken place in the past 20 years, but since their influence on mobilization patterns in this regard has been analysed more comprehensively in other studies already (see f.i. Radnitz 2010; Satybaldieva 2015), in this thesis the availability of potential allies will be in focus, like the collected interview data suggested as well. Influential allies play a pivotal role in encouraging challengers, as they can offer invaluable assistance to domestic social groups in a number of ways, including providing security and support against repression, offering legal counsel, or simply showing solidarity in uniting for a common cause. The interview data provides four potential influential allies relevant for mobilization in Kyrgyzstan. Judging by the frequency of the codes, transnational movements or networks (such as La Vía Campesina) have shown to be perceived as the most influential ally, after which cooperatives, international institutions and development agencies, and NGOs were named.

La Vía Campesina serves as a representative for transnational agrarian movements in this case (as will be further delineated in chapter 5.3.3.1). They have created a global network for solidarity and knowledge as well as experience-sharing, similar to the overarching food sovereignty movement and network Nyéléni, in which La Vía Campesina is embedded. Because of its more informal and broad structure, Nyéléni includes NGOs as well as peasant organizations. These networks contribute to peasant's lives directly in many forms. They provide solidarity on a global level, are able to exert political pressure from the outside, and most importantly, provide added value in terms of understanding that local struggles are repeated in different regions of the world and are connected in that way (Interview ECVC, pos. 64). Additionally, they fight for peasant rights on international levels such as the UN, and sometimes succeed in contributing to policy reforms. While these international reforms may or may not be translated into concrete national policies, they have the potential to alter the political opportunity structure for future mass mobilizations or movement building (Nicholson/Borras 2023: 611). Farm leaders have indicated that being a member of transnational networks or movements fosters a sense of belonging to a community of individuals facing similar circumstances and sharing values. This, in turn, has been observed to mitigate feelings of isolation or discouragement (Desmarais 2008: 141). Transnational agrarian movements therefore not only provide solidarity across the globe, but by empowering and supporting peasants in their daily struggles open up political opportunities for them to make use of. As evident in the case of Kyrgyzstan however,

politically outspoken bottom-up peasant organizations do not exist and there are no Kyrgyzstani members in La Vía Campesina. So far, there is no cooperation in the Central Asian region with La Vía Campesina in general. Even though according to Aida, her NGO ADI is part of the Nyéléni network, on the *Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia* website all Central Asian countries appear as „to be confirmed”, except for Tajikistan (Nyéléni n.d.). In this regard, if interview partners were familiar with La Vía Campesina, they mentioned how their work seems very far away from Kyrgyzstani struggles and seemed sceptical of any common connecting points (Interview ADI, pos. 38). Even though ADI is not directly connected to La Vía Campesina, they are in dialogue with the European Coordination Vía Campesina (ECVC) (Interview ADI, pos. 8, 40). ECVC is registered as an organization and therefore was able to directly cooperate with ADI in a project which included other post-socialist countries such as Georgia and Romania. Aida from ADI shared her experience of being supported by ECVC in screening documents for important meetings on international as well as national level, translations, and briefings on how to defend their own position in meetings with government officials (ibid. 42ff.).

Interview partners more often referred to other transnational networks with which they were in contact or in cooperation, such as the International Network of Mountain Indigenous People (Bio-Muras, pos. 15), Slow Food (Interview Bio-Muras, pos. 9; Interview ADI, pos. 213ff), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (Interview Camp Alatau, pos. 50), or the Green Alliance (Interview El Too, pos. 121ff.). Further, it became obvious that seeking out connections to international organizations might not be a priority for people in this context. To my question on any possible international connection or experiences of barriers in connecting, the interview partner from El Too responded: „I don't know, I was actually not really trying to link to these organizations on an international level, but it's a good idea, maybe I can try.” (Interview El Too, pos. 131). For Central Asia, and Kyrgyzstan in particular, it seems transnational agrarian movements harbour much potential in empowering local peasants to organize and collectively join the fight for food sovereignty. Nevertheless, so far there seem to be only little points of contact and accordingly, only little political opportunities arising.

Besides transnational networks, cooperatives were mentioned often as potential allies. According to Chayanov (1991), bottom-up peasant farmer cooperatives constitute a necessity for the persistence of peasant farming in many regions. They hold the potential to create a cooperative movement in which peasant farmers are independent from capitalist exploitation – facilitated, but not managed by the government. Cooperatives therefore can act as crucial agents of change and allies for peasant farmers in their strive for food sovereignty. Interview partners referred to best-practice examples of cooperatives in whose foundation or supervision they were involved, pointing to their inherent potential of economic capacity building. Positive outcomes are the doubling of yields, reduction of CO2 emissions of greenhouses, or the establishment of logistics centres. Advisors from AFC described their

consulting projects as a process in which the consultants learned from peasant farmers in a participatory way, not the other way around. They further see the only chance for peasant farmers to improve their yields and production outcomes in the building of service cooperative structures, as opposed to production cooperatives (Interview AFC, pos. 161). In regards to the building of peasant farmer production structures, they pointed to the fact, that these do not have to be built by cooperatives per se, but alternatively commercial service providers could generate the same output and additionally provide advice and inputs or distribute seeds. Peasant farmers only stand a chance if overarching structures are in place, which is why initiatives often focus on market access first (Interview ACF, pos. 164). Aida from ADI mentions that many good examples of cooperatives exist already and slowly, without too much pressure on peasants, their potential is unleashed. Nevertheless, she underlined how pressure from international development agencies or governmental institutions works in a counterproductive way and people quickly feel reminded of the *kolchose* system under Soviet rule (Interview ADI, pos. 158). According to one advisor, farmers have only one choice and that is cooperating with one another in order to purchase materials in bulk or arrange logistics, as well as to market their products in small quantities. Their main objectives for joining cooperatives are accordingly economic. Unfortunately, farmers have only little knowledge about cooperative structures and principles, about accounting or administration, which hinders them from joining or participating (Interview Anara Baizhumanova, pos. 4). These examples illustrate that cooperatives may be on a good path to serve as allies for peasant farmers. However, peasant farmers are still sceptical and the many weaknesses of cooperatives (which will be discussed in chapter 5.4) still complicate the flourishing of cooperatives as movements. Recognizing the inherent potential for cooperatives to act as movements and uniting peasant farmers across the country in order to form a class voice, is still pending. As evident from the interview data, cooperatives mainly act according to economic advantages, neglecting social functions, as required according to Chayanov (1991).

International institutions, like the World Bank or the United Nations, and international development agencies, such as the GIZ, were additionally mentioned as potential allies. These institutions have been active in the country ever since its independence and greatly supported rural development processes. The role of international institutions was viewed in a positive light by interview partners, yet at the same time, they were also regarded with a degree of scepticism, particularly by local NGOs. In their role as foreign actors, international institutions maintain close relations to the Kyrgyzstani government. This can on the one hand enable their range of activities, but on the other hand restrict their actions as soon as they deviate from the government's expectations. According to one interview partner, „FAO is like a ministerial body [...], FAO staff are like the servants of the ministers.” (Interview NLKDF, pos. 35). In the current backlash of authoritarianism in Kyrgyzstan, international institutions have developed an increasingly difficult standing. The Kyrgyzstani government perceives them as

foreign agents, while in their home countries they are being judged for investing money in authoritarian structures. GIZ has decided to cut funding in Kyrgyzstan and instead increase its funding for Uzbekistan, which has been politically liberated by new president Mirziyoyev after the death of dictator Karimov in 2016. This decision is certainly to be understood as a political statement and can greatly influence politics and development in Kyrgyzstan in a negative way (Interview GIZ, pos. 159). The US-American Christensen Fund was further mentioned by interview partners repeatedly, as they have initiated many different projects since 1991, built local and international networks, and invested a multitude of resources into the country. Their decision to leave Kyrgyzstan brings initiated projects to an early halt and holds the risk of their premature failure. This implies, that potential allies are indeed 'fickle friends', like Tarrow (2022: 153) suggested. They can quickly shift their alignment in favour or against vulnerable groups that have grown dependent on their support and accordingly influence mobilization potential and capacities greatly.

In regard to perceived opportunities, it became evident from the interviews that when the question of collaboration with transnational grassroots organisations or movements was posed, the respondents often replied affirmatively, indicating that there were no obstacles to such collaboration and that they were engaged with f.i. GIZ. However, GIZ is a state-funded international institution, not a grassroots-transnational movement. Either the perception of what is considered a grassroot movement is still difficult to grasp, or due to the lack of grassroot movements in their own country, GIZ is perceived as a grassroots movement because its aims are similar to what would be expected of a local grassroots movement (Interview Camp Alatau, pos. 27f.). In another example an interview partner described a successful cross-border collaboration between NGOs of all Central Asian nations, even Turkmenistan. Responding to my surprised enquiry if in Turkmenistan NGOs existed at all, he stated that their concept diverged lightly from the local Kyrgyzstani understanding of NGOs. He agreed with my assumption that these alleged NGOs might just be GOs (government organizations) (Interview Camp Alatau, pos. 27-46). It seems reasonable to assume that the concept of NGOs as independent entities, or at the very least, not influenced by government, is either misunderstood or absent from the understanding of those in Kyrgyzstan. This might be related to the fact that because NGOs in Kyrgyzstan have existed in this form since their inception there is no awareness of any alternative.

In my pursuit to get as close to local peasant farmers as possible, I aimed to contact small NGOs with pronounced objectives similar to food sovereignty. Those local NGOs willing to meet with me for interviews are all strongly connected to peasant farmers. The Agency for Development Initiative (ADI) for example supports local development initiatives for small-scale women and youth with a focus on food security and nutrition, agroecology, and food sovereignty, having founded the women-led local vegetable seed savers network *Dyikan Muras* and build connections between producers and consumers and capacity building for local communities (Interview ADI, pos. 18, 36, 107-122). Bio-

Muras, another local NGO, works closely with local farmers and custodians of traditional knowledge and supports them in conserving local agrobiodiversity (Interview Bio-Muras, pos. 9). They are keen on securing as well as teaching and passing on traditional practices of food production to young farmers. With that in mind, they connect elderly farmers with younger ones in order for them to exchange and share experiences (ibid. 61ff.). These local NGOs run chronically low on funding, as the Kyrgyzstani government rarely supports such endeavours. 82% of NGO funding depends on investments and project contracts with international institutions and development agencies (Baxtiyorovich 2023: 155), while the interview partner from ADI stated that all national NGOs depend on international funding (Interview ADI, pos. 164ff.).

5.1.2 Stable political opportunities

Weak institutional or state capacity is an often-mentioned factor in explanations on mobilization patterns. Political opportunities are more easily created under weak institutional and state capacity for challengers to perceive and make use of due to the state's inability to undermine or repress signs and actions of contention. Deriving from the interview data, weak state strength is shown mainly in a high corruption rate, a lack of enforcement of laws, and centralization.

During the Covid pandemic, the state struggled to respond with adequate crisis management (Interview El Too, pos. 147). These newly opening spaces may have been perceived as potential opportunities. However, it is also essential to acknowledge that individuals may have been reluctant to embrace these opportunities concurrently, being left alone in coping with the severe crisis. Weak state strength further appears in the form of lacking funds. Peasant farmers, local NGOs, or other rural networks receive little to no subsidies or funding, reinforcing existing resource inequalities and creating dependencies on foreign investment (Interview Camp Alatau, pos. 64). While project contracts are usually concluded with ministries, the money comes from foreign investors, which are mainly international institutions and development agencies (Interview ADI, pos. 164ff.). One reason for lacking support structures is corruption. Interview partner frequently referred to corrupt structures inside of Kyrgyzstani national politics, international partnerships, and in local structures (Interview GIZ, pos. 9; Interview AFC, pos. 189ff.; Interview Camp Alatau, pos. 70; Interview NLKDF, pos. 41, 75).

The low enforceability of laws emerged as another factor from the interview data. Especially in regards to climate change, local NGOs wish for stricter rules in terms of ecological protection. Even if laws exist, they are only rarely enforced, especially in rural areas (Interview Bio-Muras, pos. 97-106; Interview Camp Alatau, pos. 26). The absence of institutional or governmental capacity was mentioned as one of the causes. This was also mentioned in relation to Kyrgyzstan's dependence on Kazakh and Russian wheat and associated food security concerns that surface when borders are closed due to political conflicts (Interview El Too, pos. 38ff.). Additionally, because of the high centralization of power in the

centres, in rural areas traditional conflict resolution laws are still largely applied (see chapter 5.6). Beyond that, the frequently changing governments and government officials lead to a lack of consistent policy making, increasingly complicating NGOs and international institution's work in presenting an unreliable partner (Interview NLKDF, pos. 25).

As can be observed in Kyrgyzstan, structural factors such as weak state strength, a high corruption rate, or a lack of law enforcement do not necessarily translate into drivers for social mobilization. According to Doolotkeldieva (2015: 262f.), the high level of societal atomization, the corresponding social distrust towards individuals and political organizations, the informal character of networks, as well as the high centralization of power in the capital and corruption have demobilizing and discrediting effects on collective action. The incapacity to provide basic public goods, or emergency response like during the Covid pandemic, underline the state's failure and internal weakness (ibid. 270). Weak nations are by definition severely constrained in their ability to govern in periphery regions, where power structures are infamously dispersed and challenging to maintain. Therefore, the edges of weak states provide an ideal environment for the onset of state failure. Pre-2020, Doolotkeldieva (2015: 278) held the weakness of the Kyrgyzstani state partially accountable for impeding the unification of individuals for political action, as opposed to other authoritarian states:

„In Kyrgyzstan, the state does not openly work against the emancipation of its citizens, since its apparatus is too weak for such a task. Yet, the unresponsiveness (neither assent nor rejection) of state institutions to societal demands, the corruption of courts and the inability of political organizations to mediate conflicts demobilize citizens' self-organization.“ (ibid.)

It becomes obvious, that there is no centre for challengers to resist against, as the cluttered power structures between state officials and elites complicate targeting single people or institutions, leaving the state fragmented and curtailed in terms of its powers (Radnitz 2010; Doolotkeldieva 2015: 271). Doolotkeldieva (2015) concludes that a weak state produces a weak society. Even though between 1991 and 2020, the state structure and enforcement strength were weak, civil society never mobilized in a significant amount or 'loudness', explaining the current struggles of civil society to react to increasing repression. Post-2020, the state apparatus keeps developing its strength towards becoming a high-capacity undemocratic regime.

5.1.3 Discussion – A weak state produces a weak civil society

While in Eastern and Central Europe the collapse of communism and the emerging structure of political opportunities resulted in a spike of new social movements of a diverse range of topics, particularly rural interests and needs (Gorlach et al. 2008: 164ff.), Central Asia did not experience a similar outcome. Even at its best apparent democratic times, Kyrgyzstan rather pretended to have democratic features to its own population as well as to the international public. While in the early 2000s, the

Kyrgyzstani opposition and protest culture had been awarded much power in shaping Kyrgyz politics and even called a „learned political behaviour” (McGlinchey 2009: 134), credited to international organization’s and development agency’s efforts, these perceptions have changed. As much as these „political revolutions” were observed as political opportunities for citizens to make use of from outside of Kyrgyzstan, the emergence of these protests in the first-place bear witness of a weak state. Today’s scholarship largely agrees on political protest being mainly an elite-driven undertaking, motivated by independent business interests, informal networks, and patronage ties (McGlinchey 2009; Radnitz 2010; Satybaldieva 2015; Sheranova/Uraimov 2023). These aimed at continuity rather than change, hindering efforts to sustainable transformation of such issues as corruption or equitable distribution of resources (Radnitz 2006: 132f.). What was achieved was merely a transfer of power, not a true revolution. Gel’man (2003: 90) argues that „‘civil society,’ in the normative sense of democratic theory, is present in post-Soviet areas only to the extent allowed by the dominant elites”. The Soviet elite of Central Asia largely remained in power after independence and with the absence of an influential opposition established their power anew (Stefes/Wooden 2009: 8f.). Powerful elites can challenge entrenched autocracy along horizontal networks with the help of certain segments of the population, which are concentrated along vertical networks and the population’s revolutionary spirit is used for their interests (Radnitz 2006: 144; Oxus Society 2022: 12).

Like Doolotkeldieva (2015) states, factors such as high corruption rates or a lack of law enforcement do not necessarily translate into drivers for social mobilization, but on the contrary can weaken civil society simultaneously. Especially in rural areas, or the periphery, where power structures are infamously dispersed and challenging to maintain, the state struggles to be present. Additional to that, a societal atomization and social distrust towards political organizations and individuals have demobilizing effects on collective action.

On the one hand, neither the interview data nor the relevant literature provide much evidence of political opportunities emerging from stable political opportunities. Potential influential allies on the other hand are granted more influence on collective action and mobilization patterns by scholars and interview partners. While transnational networks in theory hold the greatest potential for possibly creating political opportunities and contribute to the formation of a peasant class in uniting peasants in their daily struggles, they are still mostly unknown to local peasant farmers. Seeking out connections outside of the country is not a priority for local peasant farmers or NGOs and so far, there seem to exist only little points of connection and accordingly, only little political opportunities arising. Similar issues apply to cooperatives as potential influential allies, which will be further discussed in chapter 5.4. International institutions, international development agencies, and NGOs in turn are fickle friends, as they can shift their alignments quickly from potential influential ally to the opposite. They depend on

the government's good will and in the case of NGOs on foreign investment in their quest to improve peasant farmer's lives and in that can only conditionally act as allies.

5.2 Threats

This subchapter is divided into two sections: One adhering to suppressive tactics, which are non-violent, and one to repressive tactics, which can be violent in overt or covert ways. In addition to interview data, media reports and secondary literature provide some helpful insights in discovering government tactics towards challengers.

5.2.1 Suppressive tactics: restrictive laws, distraction, and elite influence

Amidst an already growing resentment against the West and in order to protect the country from foreign interference and the imposition of 'Western ideology', on April 2nd, 2024, president Japarov signed the *Law on Amendments to the Law on Non-Commercial Organizations*, also known as *Law on Foreign Representatives*. NGOs active in supporting LGBTQIA+ people, women's groups, or ethnic minorities face harassment, threats, and physical attacks already. The law imposes further financial reporting requirements on any civil society organization that receives funding from abroad – which concerns the majority of Kyrgyzstani NGOs (Interview ADI, pos. 164ff.). The law shows similarities to the foreign agent laws introduced in Russia in 2012, in Georgia in 2024, as well as in 60 other countries since 2004 (Wood 2024). The law includes compulsory registration for already established and new NGOs and possible restrictions in their work. Newly registering NGOs that contradict the „health and moral of the population“ can simply be denied their foundation (ibid.). Already in 2021, the introduction of a new law obliged NGOs to fill out complex tax reports, which, on a more subtle note, add an excessive amount of bureaucracy:

„They [NGOs] say we have more and more to do with reports here and reports there and even more reports and we are more strongly controlled. It's not like they have anything to hide, but it's just a lot more work.“ (Interview GIZ, pos. 57).

Added bureaucratic work can be interpreted as a non-violent suppressive tactic for the government as it financially weakens NGOs from the inside without attracting much attention from the outside. When asked if it affects international institutions as well, GIZ responded that it will affect themselves and their grant partners immensely, as they make contracts with local NGOs who might no longer be allowed to receive funding from GIZ (Interview GIZ, pos. 57). FAO representatives further stated that the government had informed them that the law will be focused on tax regulation issues and financial flows in order to prevent activities of terroristic or other NGOs, that work against Kyrgyzstani traditions and values. This illustrates that the government proficiently hides the potential danger of the law behind anti-terror measures and tax flows in order to have stronger control and influence over NGO alignments. However, NGO representatives mentioned their fears about possible restrictions or even

having to discontinue their work to FAO (Interview FAO, pos. 54). The Soros Foundation and the Christensen Fund, two of the country's major NGOs, has already drawn consequences and announced to cease their operations in Kyrgyzstan and GIZ has further decided to cut their funding for a bilateral cooperation with Kyrgyzstan in favour of increasing investments in Uzbekistan (Interview GIZ, pos. 151). During my research stay in November, the law had not been officially introduced, but already passed its first round through parliament. All interview partners, except one, were sceptical about its possible consequences:

„It's a catastrophe, also for our development projects. As of now, there is no way of knowing how big of a catastrophe, but it's an additional instrument of power for the state. How influential it will be depends on the rigour of enforcement. [...] It can be activated at any time, that is the problem." (Interview ACF, pos. 243-246).

As evident from this quote and other interviews, contrary to strict and repressive laws on civil liberties, many relevant laws are not enforced properly at all, suggesting some laws are merely „a printed piece of paper" (ibid.), which can however be activated at any given moment the government decides to: „Who enforces the laws? It doesn't work. There is no control" (Interview Bio Muras, pos. 105; Camp Alatau, pos. 26). From the interviews it became clear, how the frequently changing governments and fluctuating staff fail to deliver a stable political setting for laws to be enforced and followed and how corruption aggravates this process: „Today our government is a corrupted one." (Interview NLKDF, pos. 75).

Similar to the *Law on Foreign Representatives*, the so-called *Law on Fakes* was recently adopted in 2021. It gives authorities power to have internet service providers block websites that offer information deemed to be false by the government without the need for a trial decision (Talant 2021; Iskender 2024). Two of the main free and critical media outlets, Kloop and Azattyk Radio²⁰ (RFE/RL's Kyrgyz service), were forced to shut down after having published government-critical content (Human Rights Watch 2024). Since then, the volume of blocked online content has increased. TikTok is the first social media service that was censored, justified by a law enacted in 2023 aimed at „protecting children from harmful information" as well as claiming TikTok's content would go against local traditional values, customs, and societal morality (Iskender 2024; Ismailbekova/Almazbekova 2024). Additionally, a mass media law was drafted in 2024, which significantly restricts civil society organizations and media's ability to operate independently. In their quest to restrict internet activism, authoritarian governments do not only rely on tactics like censorship, but also make use of the internet in order to manipulate citizens, f.i. before elections. According to Kurmanov (2024: 168), autocracies have learned

²⁰ With a 70-year history, Azattyk Radio is a well-known global media organization known for its critical journalism that provides TV, radio, and online platforms. Kloop Media and its news agency Kloop are one of the leading independent media outlets in Kyrgyzstan.

to use social media and online spaces to promote their strategic narratives and to pursue their legitimization, aiming to consolidate their rule in their engagement with digital activism.

Another law, which was drafted and discussed in Summer 2024, would further allow officials the authority to strip journalists of their accreditation in case their coverage was deemed to discredit the government or state officials as well as complicate the work of journalists in general (Imanaliyeva 2024). Producing content that covers public unrest, same-sex marriage or any other non-traditional relationships, or harms public morals – rather subjective categories – potentially make journalists liable to political manipulation, as the justice system is known to operate on the government's will. For instance, as part of a trial against media outlet Kloop in February 2024, „several psychiatrists testifying on behalf of the state said that the website's content affected citizen's mental health by upsetting them with negative information“, arguing for a shutdown of the outlet (Turgunbaeva/Pikulicka-Wilczewska 2024). Further, drug allegations have proven to be an effective tool to curb activist activities. During raids of activist's homes or media outlet's offices police allegedly place drugs to have legally based reasons for conviction. In addition to illegal narcotic possession, the head of a media outlet was further accused of forging documents, using a fake passport, and illegally crossing the state border. These charges were denied by the defendant, but as the case was kept secret due to unknown reasons, it was impossible to have him released (ibid.). Related to these forms of suppression are intimidation attempts and financial strains as in the case of the Zanoza.kg. The independent media outlet was found guilty of defamation and ordered to pay a fee too high for them to manage, hence why they had to close down their services (Imanaliyeva 2024).

In an overview of assembly laws across Central Asia, Heuer and Hierman (2022) demonstrate that most states „broadly reserve the right to limit basic civil liberties both through legal coercion and through the bureaucratization of dissent“ (ibid. 240), enabling regimes to control contentious acts' location, timing, or strategies. Kyrgyzstan, as the only Central Asian country, used to have a law *On the Right of Citizens to Assemble Peacefully, without Weapons, to Freely Hold Rallies and Demonstrations*, which formally did not require protestors to apply for official permissions for assembly and did not restrict their choice of location. This law was seen as a step towards more protest freedom, as it followed a law on assemblies which required official permissions beforehand (Heuer/Hierman 2022: 245). However, according to an OSCE/ODIHR review, although this law does not include a formally written approval process, organizers were required to notify authorities 12 days in advance of a planned protest without any confirmation or response of authorization, establishing a *de facto* permission-based system for assemblies (OSCE/ODIHR 2008). In several court decisions since March 2022, peaceful gatherings have progressively been limited in their choice of location. Meetings were banned in central areas of Bishkek, justified by temporary and necessary measures in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine shortly before and after small protests against the war had been held. The ban is

still (referring to August 2024) being held upright (see Pannier 2024). Similar bans were imposed on public protests by courts in September and October 2023 in Uzgen town and Chon-Alai district in Osh (Amnesty International 2024).

Many of these new legislations introduced since 2021 focus on tradition. One of the interview partners described these laws as a „guardian eye over traditional values” (Interview GIZ, pos. 61), which is justified by Japarov as keeping local values, moral principles, and the traditions of Kyrgyzstani society and ideology protected. The state acts as a moral guardian, allowed to intervene in constitutional court decisions in cases involving „moral and ethical values” (Ismailbekova/Almazbekova 2024). The interview partner described that Kyrgyzstan is made up of a diverse range of nationalities like Uzbek and Tajik, with diverging traditions and values, and is strongly influenced by financial investments from Turkey and Saudi-Arabia. Therefore, it is increasingly difficult to speak of one national tradition that needs to be protected. Even between Kyrgyzstani nomads and settled people, values differ. Traditional values are not clearly defined in legislations and therefore stay subjectively interpretable, depending on the case (Rickleton 2023b).

A further suppressive political tactic currently applied by the government is distraction. When president Japarov announced symbolic changes of the flag in autumn of 2023, citizens were outraged, as they are very attached to their flag, which symbols the view out of a yurt (their traditional nomadic tents) into the sun. Parliament adopted the proposal on December 20th 2023, quickly passing the bill through its second and third readings without discussion. Many people inside and outside of Kyrgyzstan believe the country has more important matters to focus on, which tactically disappeared in the background. The flag adaption was rather conceived as a diversionary manoeuvre in order to disguise other, more critical and impactful, law changes during the same period of time by media outlets and critics (Rickleton 2023a; Pannier 2024).

Concerning other subtle forms of suppression, lacking support structures for farmers are a factor that emerged from the collected data: „No subsidies, no support from the government.” (Interview NLKDF, pos. 19). A generally established subsidy-system as can be found in the European Union, or even in other Central Asian countries, does not exist in Kyrgyzstan (Interview Camp Alatau, pos. 64; Interview El Too, pos. 33f.). Farmers feel neglected and ignored (Interview NLKDF, pos. 117). The small amount of subsidies that exist allegedly include high rates, which is why farmers sometimes decide to reject them. Alternatively, subsidies will be accessed by people closer to the government due to corruption (Interview Camp Alatau, pos. 70). The government might follow the goal of keeping farmers poor and dependent on state incentives in order to prevent them from forming a peasant class that might eventually revolt against state structures and threaten the ruling system.

Elite mediation is another frequently used suppressive tool. As already touched upon in previous chapters, Radnitz (2006; 2010) and others have awarded the success of the political revolutions not to peasants and NGOs per se, but to elites, arguing that neither incidence of mobilization emerged spontaneously or bottom-up. Especially Radnitz's work reveals that mobilization occurred when elites who were challenged by the regime decided to organize protests. They collaborate with other elites and recruit people below their status. The first demonstrators, closest to the elite, then recruited laterally within their communities – a process Radnitz (2010: 10) refers to as *subversive clientelism*. Today, the process seems to have turned around. Government-close officials personally discourage protesters from carrying out protest in public-spaces by offering to take their grievances to higher authorities. This form of channelling is suspected to be an attempt to use local or lower-ranking officials as substitution for formal representative institutions and satisfy protesters demand for voicing their grievances (Heuer/Hierman 2022: 240).

5.2.2 Repressive tactics

„The Kyrgyzstani government's campaign against civil society is not just a series of random, sporadic attempts to fend off criticism — it is strategically designed to stifle critics. The state's actions echo some of the most repressive tactics deployed in the region's recent history.” (Amnesty International 2024).

Overt coercion is evident in the majority of extreme state violence tools, including torture, harassment, political imprisonment, or disappearances, while policing and ostentatious surveillance are forms of covert coercion. Especially in the past three years, repressive tactics have been increasingly applied by the Kyrgyzstani government towards challengers. The interview data did not reveal any repressive tactics, which is why I relied mostly on media reports for this. Most frequently, arrests, raids, as well as deportations are applied tools to be found in online searches. In October 2021, during a public outcry over a proposed deal to change Kyrgyzstan's border with Uzbekistan, the government launched a comprehensive crackdown on civil society, in which more than 20 prominent civil society activists were detained on charges of planning 'mass unrest', potentially in order to scare off further protest actions in the future (Freedom House 2023; Human Rights Watch 2024). Returning to the flag adaptation debate of 2023, in a protest event during the debate roughly 30 protestors assembled in downtown Bishkek to demand Japarov change his course. The organizer of the rally was afterwards detained (Imanaliyeva 2023).

Even though media outlets such as Kloop, 24.kg, or PolitKlinika were actively involved by the government to support the drafting process of the new mass media law as part of a working group, their suggestions and warnings concerning the serious risks of unacceptable derogations of human rights guarantees of freedom of expression were ignored (Putz 2024). The government merely pretended to involve media outlets in the development of the law in order to simulate democratic features of governance, which can be interpreted as only a means to an end. One week after 24.kg had

published articles about the mass media law, authorities raided the media outlet's offices and detained the chief editors as well as 11 other journalists on the same day (ibid.).

In January 2024, 11 reporters for the Temirov Live investigative group were arrested on the charge of calling for mass riots. The media outlet's office was raided, documents confiscated, and founder Bolot Temirov stripped of his Kyrgyzstani citizenship. As he also holds a Russian passport, he was later deported to Russia. Dozens, if not hundreds of regular people who spoke their mind openly on social media platforms now languish in prisons for statements the government did not approve of or perceived as threatening to their rule. This systematic repression appears to be an increasingly favoured tool used by the government, especially since there is no official data about prisoners released by the government (Turgunbaeva/Pikulicka-Wilczewska 2024).

Additional to silencing critics and challengers, the government increasingly tries to intimidate minority groups as well. In May 2024, one of the main safer-spaces for queer and progressive people in Bishkek fell victim to a violent police raid and was afterwards ordered to shut down (Kloop 2024). The official reason for the raid was suspicion of drug possession, however it becomes clear from the brutality of the raid, that intimidation of queers and people who follow „Western ideology” is a more likely reason.

5.2.3 Discussion

The collected data and literature suggest, that suppressive tactics exerted from the regime are predominant compared to repressive tactics. According to the Central Asian Protest Tracker, the Kyrgyz government has used violent tactics of repression at only seven percent of protests, which is less frequently than in neighbouring countries like Kazakhstan, where 26% of protests were answered with violence (Jardine et al. 2022: 6). In a few cases, the Kyrgyzstani regime makes use of repressive tactics in order to suppress collective action. As state violence is a rather expensive endeavour in terms of resources and reputation, regimes tend to develop a multifaceted repertoire in which violence is only one of several tactics (Heuer/Hierman 2022: 239). With this mixture of tactics, the aim is to increase the overall cost of collective action (ibid. 241).

In general, it can be stated, that the so-called colour revolutions of 2005 and 2010, instead of initiating a wave of democratization, have created an acute feeling of threat among authoritarian elites. A further step led to the adoption of more restrictive policies in order to contain the potential for future revolutions, following a similar logic of isolation, repression, persuasion, or marginalization, shaped by the regime's perceived intensity of a threat to regime survival (Finkel/Brudny 2012: 6f.). The early promises of democratic reform in Kyrgyzstan have become increasingly blocked legally, to the point where members of public associations or NGOs are singled out as „some dangerous category of citizens” (Mandel 2002: 286).

It must be acknowledged, that not all incidents of repression or suppression might come to the surface, as journalist's work is increasingly restricted by tactical intimidation as well as legislation tightening. This argument shows that repressive tactics are successful in weakening visible opposition activism (Imanaliyeva 2023), while suppressive laws help give reasons for actions such as these. Neither press and NGOs work, nor protest can be considered free, but activity in either of them proves to be a risk (for more information on recent civil society restrictions see Pannier 2024; Human Rights Watch 2024; Freedom House 2024). The data suggests how long-term repressive and suppressive structures make people lose their initiative: „Why to initiate some positive changes, why? They will punish me.” (Interview NLKDF, pos. 75). Journalists further complain: „The government has succeeded in making us divided and weak. Now every journalist and activist exercises self-censorship.” (Turgunbaeva/Pikulicka-Wilczewska 2024). The head and other editors of Kloop have already fled the country fearing a media crackdown.

These subtle threats and practices can be considered as common in the pursuit of keeping civil society apolitical and scare off or even eliminate unwanted opposition (Buzurtanova 2022: 227). Non-violent threats actively hinder the formation of contention by weakening civil society in a slow and steady development by cutting financial support chains, adding bureaucratic work, or forcing people to leave the country. Violent tactics are applied in cases of a sudden outburst of contention to suppress protests, government critique, and maintaining *traditional* values against values framed as Western, such as gender equality or LGBTQIA+ rights. Additionally, they aim to intimidate critical voices through arrests, raids, or deportations. These violent tactics are used in specifically selected moments and cases only.

The described state activities stand in contrast to the *Kyrgyz National Development Strategy* (2018-2040), in which the importance of „a strong, independent civil society” is underlined as „an indisputable fact and advantage” and it is stated that „the state will maximize the capacity of civil society to achieve development objectives based on partnership and concurrence of missions in a particular area of human activity.” (Kyrgyz Government 2018: 69f.). Kyrgyzstan has been ruled in a semi-authoritarian manner ever since independence in 1991, while many of these restrictive laws and policies have only been introduced in the past three years ever since Japarov came into power. Against this background, current suppressive and repressive tactics do not serve as an explanation for the absence or quietness of rural agrarian movements in the years before. Despite that, it shows that people do not even turn to more extreme forms of protest when their rights are more drastically restricted than in the years prior to strict authoritarian rule.

Ever since the regime change in 2020, Japarov and his officials effectively dismantled opposition voices, asserted government control over the mainstream media, and thereby weakened civil society. The

state acts as a moral guardian and by mobilising emotions justifies its actions with referring to necessary protection of local norms, customs, and traditional values.

5.3 Weak civil society

To begin with, describing Kyrgyzstan as a nation with a weak civil society does not equal generally denying the country a civil society. Politically outspoken displays of contention occur in larger cities and there are a number of local media outlets with highly engaged journalists who undertake oppositional work, even though they live in constant fear of repression. As already hinted at, large mobilizations have rarely emerged bottom-up, but are mostly elite-led. Furthermore, in regards to rural display of contention, and particularly related to food sovereignty, there are no easily visible forms to be recognized. In the following chapter, factors for the weakening of civil society are investigated. The most relevant codes I identified from my data in respect to challenges and limits to mobilization are a lack of trust, combined with a nation-specific cultural logic, which is derived from a persistent Soviet legacy. Other aspects that were often mentioned were the country's development stage, the role that trans-, inter-, and national actors play in mobilization efforts or their respective weakening, as well as economic marginalization.

5.3.1 Soviet legacy, lack of trust, and cultural logic

The interview partner from GIZ ascribed an important role in lacking mobilization efforts to the authoritarian regime, but emphasized the even more influential role of Soviet legacy. The experience of living under Soviet rule for roughly 70 years has had a profound and enduring impact on individuals, often manifesting in their actions and even subconscious patterns of thought and behaviour. According to her, the idea to organize or collectively revolt simply does not exist in people's minds and if it does, finding like-minded people presents an additional challenge: „I think it's really difficult to discard a system that has existed for so long and to think that you have the power yourself and that it's of any use at all if you network internationally.” (Interview GIZ, pos. 41). Even today, Russia still has tremendous influence in Central Asia, following its ambition of a *Russki mir* (Russian world). Russian TV channels make up 80% of the Kyrgyzstani national coverage and economic dependencies are at an all-time high (Buzurtanova 2022: 224ff.). Ideological presence of Moscow is most visible in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital, Russian is the first language and people experience discriminations for speaking Kyrgyz (ibid.; Interview El Too, pos. 69). The Kyrgyzstani people have kept their scepticism towards Russia upright, but with the return of strict authoritarian rule and increasingly strong political ties to Russia, this scepticism slowly erodes.

Bassler (2012: 14) describes surviving and new (in)formal policy patterns, whose functional logic is strongly based on old procedures, as unfavourable for democratisation processes. Formal patterns, such as the introduced right to vote or the presidential system of government, offer better

opportunities for the old elites to remain in their positions and receive access to (state) resources. Informal patterns and networks from Soviet times however have largely remained intact, strengthening the president through personal loyalty and informal power (ibid. 14-18). According to Bassler, the unsuccessful or lacking democratisation of Kyrgyzstan can be traced back to a path-dependent development of Soviet legacies in the constitution and society (ibid. 18). Giordano and Kostova (2002: 74f., 89) support an argument from the founder of ADI (pos. 94), in which she refers to how Western Europe's democratic systems have been established and internalized for over a century, while post-socialist spaces, such as Eastern Europe or Central Asia, have made vastly different experiences.

During Soviet times, memberships were usually forced and based on obedience, obligation, as well as external conformity rather than voluntary initiative, in which the communal and the collective were overemphasised (ibid. 26f.). As people have been discontent with compulsory collective work and in the process of adaptation to a capitalist market economy after 1991, the Kyrgyzstani society has grown less community-oriented and more individualistic, particularly in (semi)urban areas (Interview El Too, pos. 150; Interview ADI, pos. 203; Interview ACF, pos. 174). The development towards a more individualistic society was also starkly influenced by government policies that aimed at farmer individualization, like outlined in chapter 4.2.1.

Past negative experiences, which are reactivated in the present time through the collective memory lead to a social production of mistrust in specific practices – such mistrust is historically rooted and reactivated in the present through the group's collective memory (Giordano/Kostova 2002: 75, 89). The social production of mistrust has developed over decades and is imprinted into people's subconscious. It does not only affect people's relationships towards one another, but further affects people's attitudes and trust towards the state and its institutions. Howard (2003: 19, 26f.) outlines, that people's current behaviour is shaped by their prior experiences and how they interpret those experiences in the present. Even in recently liberated and democratic environments, the majority of people in post-socialist nations still have a deep suspicion of official organizations as a direct result of their experiences. Most people from post-socialist nations see and assess organizations with a certain continuity rather than clearly differentiating between the mass organizations of the communist era and the voluntary associations of today. They distinguish themselves by pointing out that, unlike in the past, when they were practically compelled to participate, they are now free to decide whether or not to engage (ibid.). According to Doolotkeldieva (2015: 207), the production of trust is a circular dynamic, which can lead to the creation of trust or even more suspicion, as well as the further alienation of individuals. Doolotkeldieva's (2015: 237) findings suggest, that not even pre-existing identities and established traditional networks are sufficient in inspiring collective action, which is required to gain trust in the first place.

Trust is a rare resource in the Kyrgyzstani society, which is based on a diverse set of factors. In the context of a generalized social distrust and the reproduction of contested images of protests, the success of mobilisations is contingent upon intrinsic mechanisms involved in the development of trust (ibid. 256-259). Against expectations, structural factors such as distrusting politics, authoritarian rule, corruption, or the informal character of networks do not necessarily translate into drivers for mobilization (ibid. 259-263). „This loss of trust is institutionally evolutionizing.” (Interview ADI, pos. 58).

While in the 1990s and 2000s joining cooperatives seemed like voluntarily accepting robbery and exploitation (Giordano/Kostova 2002: 87), today, the perspective on agricultural cooperatives has changed to a certain extent. As the main reason to join cooperatives are related to economic needs, the decision to avoid them is at the same time a refusal to comply with capitalist demands of the free market (ibid. 86f.). International development agencies use cooperatives as a means to elevate the country's agricultural capacities and decrease poverty among farmers, however aiming to create large-scale farming companies, comparable to *kolchozes* of Soviet times. The memory of forced collective labour evokes rather negative feelings in people. People fear returning into dependency structures by giving up control over their own assets or land (Interview ADI, pos. 144-148). Nevertheless, the aspect of lacking trust among people seemed to have higher relevance than similarities to *kolchozes* and fears of losing independence (Interview AFC, pos. 182). Building trust among farmers to join cooperatives and remain members as well as work for the persistence of the cooperatives proves to be the biggest challenge (Interview ADI, pos. 153-158). Mistrust goes as far as constant implication that people do not work honestly in contributing to cooperatives, be it in regular membership or administrative tasks. On a foundation such as this, no intrinsic growth can emerge (Interview ACF, pos. 195):

„Independence, this image alone, I am independent of others because I produce my own food, has something anti-social about it, if you let it melt in your mouth, because I don't trust others and have to do everything for myself.” (Interview ACF, pos. 217)

Many interview partners referred to Kyrgyzstan's nation-specific cultural logic as a challenging factor for mobilization and to the development of trust:

„It means they [the Kyrgyzstani people] usually obey the situation, but we are not demanding. People do not have this form of organizing, I know, I worked with a lot with Dutch people and you put three Dutch people together and they start discussing how to change the world, but Kyrgyz usually accept what is there.” (Interview EI Too, pos. 17).

„Pragmatism is a state of mind” (Explorative interview no. 3).

The examples with which the interview partners draw attention to the differences in Western or European critical thinking and the Kyrgyzstani nation-specific acceptance of given circumstances

accurately reflects what I encountered in scientific research as well. Another interview partner ascribes Kyrgyzstani people an attitude of acceptance, for example in relation to the UN: „Maybe it’s Soviet heritage for us, but we believe everything what they say and what is told at the UN level, you know, without any discussion, like a rule.” (Interview ADI, pos. 46). Further, a traditional principle of ‘being in the middle’ or maintaining balance is described, where people who demand exceptional things that deviate from the status quo are scorned by their communities (Interview EI Too, pos. 22).

The realisation or the idea that certain problems can be solved collectively is not part of the current cultural logic, because they have a different culture of organizing civil society (Interview ACF, pos. 166; Interview GIZ, pos. 41; Interview ECVC, pos. 10). Interview partners from GIZ (pos. 41) and AFC (pos. 166) stated that they had to initiate collective action and explain to peasant farmers that they can work together in a collective manner in order to improve their circumstances. They further ascribed Kyrgyzstani subordination to their nomadic background, because they used to live without hierarchical governance systems. People are rebellious in that they express their discontent with grumbling, but would still not collectively organize in order to evoke changes.

5.3.2 Development stages and development aid

Besides the challenges lack of trust and strong Soviet legacy, the country’s development stage was named quite frequently in being obstructive to mobilization. According to several interview partners, bottom-up movements are rather native to Western and African countries or India, where they emerged as a reaction to a diverse set of dependency structures, which offer a different breeding ground for further development, in contrast to post-Soviet and -socialist countries (Interview ACF, pos. 151; Interview ADI, pos. 150ff.). Under those circumstances, development on a national as well as on individual levels is believed to be at a different stage. Most local interview partners were sceptical about international institution’s and development agency’s development work in Kyrgyzstan. After independence, rural life was reorganized and seemed to start from nothing. Foreign experts were massively involved in this process, their ideas exported from Western think tanks to the Kyrgyzstani steppe. The models in question were not designed with Kyrgyzstan in mind, and even less so with an economy that remains largely dependent on mobile herd breeding. The principal actors in the field of development were (and might still are) at best only vaguely familiar with the Soviet period and continue to be mostly unaware of the colonial era and its reforms. Instead, dominant pasture management practices of pre-Soviet times are identified with the concept of 'tradition' (Jacquesson 2010: 114).

Interview partners further referred to development agency’s style of work as ineffective. Accordingly, international development agencies put too much effort into their public image with creating workshop booklets, bags or caps „and then later on just nothing grows” (Interview NLKDF, pos. 59).

This would lead to the failure of many development projects, such as the attempt to build farmer's cooperatives (Interview EI Too, pos. 44). Local NGO staff wish for more effort to be put into making bottom-up ideas grow and reducing their top-down approach in favour of this (ibid.). Local interview partners at the same time believe, that the Western development stage, which is the globally set standard and advertised by international institutions and the Kyrgyzstani government as the goal to be reached, will be reached eventually. Along the way however, Kyrgyzstan should find its own development path without being pushed into Western idealist notions of development (Interview ADI, pos. 94). Even though Europe has had 100 more years of experience with the process of democratization, Aida from ADI is convinced applying the same models won't work for Kyrgyzstan in the same manner: „I think we should make our own mistakes” (ibid.). She further referred to the fact that the stage of development is more crucial than assumed: „It takes time. I believe there will be more connection, but now it is how it is.” (Interview ADI, pos. 74). Interview partners referred not only to the national level with these statements, but also to the entire generation and individual development. People need time to grow, to develop their own opinions, and find their own way in making their own mistakes and learn from them (Interview ADI, pos. 84ff., 94).

The interview partner from EVCV further supported this argument. According to them, the absence of the post-Soviet region is not owed to lacking capacities inside of La Vía Campesina to identify and collaborate with new organizations, but often due to cultural differences. These processes are time-consuming and may require multiple attempts before achieving the desired outcome (Interview ECVC, pos. 18). Creating a foundation for collaboration and supporting the understanding to what extent food sovereignty goes further than just food security, or why food sovereignty is required as a precondition in order to guarantee food security at all, is a process of politization that requires time (Interview EVCV, pos. 28).

The interview partner from GIZ (pos. 71) explained the lack of politically motivated rural bottom-up movement and international cooperation by a lack of urgency. Farmers simply do not see a need to organize because their situation is not critical and other issues more pressing (also backed up by Howard 2003: 17). „Different priorities. And I think that also plays a role, first of all the priority of getting along. And then at some point you might come up with the idea of networking internationally, but that's not yet the case.” (Interview GIZ, pos. 119). For now, farmers would be happy to have increasingly better working conditions and do not think about political aspects of their work. She referred to a project in which the GIZ used a participatory approach for a joint development planning, aiming to connect farmers and local administrations and further improve financial planning. She however clearly states, that she would not label these actions as political in any sense (Interview GIZ, pos. 47). According to her, the political dimension of protest is restricted to land and water resources,

for and over which people fight on a local level, however excluding an aim to achieve policy changes on a larger scale.

The recognition that specific challenges can be addressed collectively is not part of the prevailing cultural logic and not embedded in people's minds, to which development projects have largely contributed. Farmers and peasants increasingly expect to receive help without strings attached and see it as development agency's obligation:

„It is evident that development organizations do not always play a constructive role in this context. They are often expected to address challenges before they reach a critical point, and to do so in a timely manner. This often results in the subsidization of certain problems through support measures.”
(Interview ACF, pos. 166)

In an explorative interview (no. 4) with a researcher it became obvious, how development workers or staff from international development agencies and embassies have a differing mindset towards Central Asia than for example towards Latin America or South Asia. Some think of Central Asia as less diverse in terms of landscape and people, less deserving of aid funds, and plainly „do not like being there”. Negative feelings among international staff implementing sustainable development goals might additionally hinder their success, due to a lack of engagement and lack of knowledge of traditional forms of living.

5.3.3 Trans-, inter-, and national actors

5.3.3.1 Transnational Agrarian Movements: La Vía Campesina

According to the collected interview data, transnational agrarian movements and NGOs can act as potentially influential allies (as discussed in chapter 5.1), but at the same time also limit or restrict mobilization potential. As became clear in the theoretical outline of peasant's potential to mobilization, transnational agrarian movements, such as La Vía Campesina, can offer great potential for uniting peasants, creating a common ground for exchange and global solidarity, possibly contributing to the formation of a peasant class. Less attention is paid to the fact that in some national-specific cases, this does not work.

My aim of identifying who within the La Vía Campesina network is responsible for the region of Central Asia proved to be more complicated than expected. The interview partner from ECVC stated that Central Asia was not ECVC's responsibility and that they did not have the authority to add them as members. They referred to their Asian colleagues, who would be responsible for a process such as this (Interview ECVC, pos. 14ff.). The South Asian representation of La Vía Campesina stated:

„Since it does not fall within our region, we have never worked with Central Asian members. While La Vía Campesina at the global level has its own process for including members from new regions, I am not

aware of any discussions within La Vía Campesina on Central Asia at this time.” (Explorative interview no. 9).

They referred to ECVC and Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia for further information on this matter, implying that they would be responsible rather than themselves. These opposing answers lead to the conclusion, that Central Asia once again appears to be a blank space in between two continents, for which no one feels responsible and which is neglected in the matter. It further displays how internal communication between the different representations of La Vía Campesina might not be well harmonised. Nonetheless, the employee from ECVC pointed to the fact, that not only the post-Soviet space was still missing from the La Vía Campesina network, but the Arabic space was formally not properly represented either, as well as the Pacific region. They stated that they as an organization are aware of these gaps and aim to build connections, however while being cognizant, these processes usually take time and are difficult to implement due to a diverse range of reasons. These reasons are not limited to the local cultures only. La Vía Campesina as an organization allegedly lacks sufficient capacities for identifying new possible partner organizations in culturally diverging geographical locations. What is more, sometimes cooperation does not continue further than a first round of discussions (Interview ECVC, pos. 10, 18). Acknowledging that La Vía Campesina as a single actor can hardly be responsible for missing mobilization patterns, it seems the issue lies in structural and systemic factors instead. Although most local organizations seem open to inter- or transnational cooperation, they might not know what’s out there or how to reach specific organizations in order to form cooperation in the first place (Interview Bio Muras, pos. 73).

Despite existing cooperation and constant exchange between La Vía Campesina and countries of Eastern Europe, cultures, attitudes, and operational fashions diverge greatly, leaving Eastern Europe only partly represented in the network. The case of Eastern Europe supports the argument of invincible cultural obstacles in forming cross-border cooperation, especially for post-socialist and post-Soviet countries. Additional obstructive factors are mandatory membership fees, which can be especially overwhelming for young organizations and such with low financial resources, or restrictive national laws on organic agriculture or rural bottom-up organization. One interview partner (Interview NLKDF, pos. 13) mentioned the loss of identity as a main reason not to join transnational networks. He referred to the unique status of nomadism in the world, which would be lost in an alliance with many other forms of food production or lifestyles. According to the interview partner from Bio-Muras (pos. 59), Kyrgyzstani peasants feel more comfortable in the International Network of Indigenous Mountain People (INMIP), a collaboration of mountain communities of 11 countries aiming to revive biocultural heritage for climate-resilient and sustainable food systems. The argument of identity loss was countered by the interview partner from ECVC, and diverse other outlets, in which the strength of an alliance of a diverse range of life- and food production styles was underlined. La Vía Campesina includes

pastoralists and nomads in their definition of *peasant*. Further, the interview partner from ECVC underlined, how unity grows with global solidarity, making common struggles heard more loudly in a larger network. According to them, in organizing collectively, people get the chance to facilitate change, even if it is difficult, rather than on their own (Interview ECVC, pos. 64).

Another struggle can be observed in the criteria requirements most transnational networks have for new members. If core values such as food sovereignty, agroecology, anti-systemic and anti-patriarchal attitudes are not intrinsic to new organizations, they might not get accepted (ibid. pos. 22). Here we circle back to the issues of different perceptions or conceptions of such terms, comparable to food sovereignty (Explorative interview no. 4). In Kyrgyzstan, ADI provides a helpful example for these criteria issues. ADI is registered as an NGO, which is why they cannot officially become a part of the LVC network. LVC only includes bottom-up peasant organizations which are independent from government- or other state-related funding sources and share goals such as agroecology, food sovereignty, feminism, or anti-capitalism (Interview ECVC, pos. 10).

Most importantly however, language barriers emerged to be the main challenge for expanding transnational networks from a Central Asian perspective. Usually members of NGOs are older in age and do not have sufficient English skills in order to participate in exchanges with international networks. Aida from local NGO ADI urges internationally active groups or institutions to take steps in their directions, not the other way around:

„We cannot express fully our thoughts. It always limits us. Even the translation. When you attend [...] they don't have Russian translation, we already have really big challenges to select some representative from our region, because all documents are in English. So, the person who is in this committee should somehow translate, but it's too much work, unpaid work of course. You know, that is why we have been just excluded from this discussion, because we even cannot have access to these documents in our languages. What can we say if we don't know what's going on. We just have to accept that we have to be busy with our own work and issues within the country.” (Interview ADI, pos. 78-84).

A lack of access to documents, short-term or poor-quality translations, and little efforts from international organizations to include more languages or provide proper translation present a challenge and consequently, a hindrance to the participation of non-English speakers in international conferences or to networking (Interview ECVC, pos. 68). The Tajik seed saving network *Zan va Zamin* (Women and Earth), which got honoured at a Nyéléni conference in 2012, afterwards stated how they will not return to international events as they felt uncomfortable and did not understand most of the event due to language and translation issues (Explorative interview no. 4). Akylbek from Bio-Muras further explains, how most peasants do not speak English and therefore are excluded from networking and organizing on larger levels as well, especially on digital platforms (Interview Bio-Muras, pos. 42;

Interview NLKDF, pos. 97). The absence of Russian as an official language is criticised as well (Interview ADI, pos. 80) and even GIZ staff criticized the lack of Russian in international contexts:

„The language barrier certainly plays a role. I mean, I have to say, I don't mind anyone knowing that, I think it's odd at GIZ, too. We are always international and everything is in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and German. Where is Russian? Russian? Does that even exist?“ (Interview GIZ, pos. 125).

This dilemma, as addressed by Aida, leads to a withdrawal of people into their national contexts and focus on local issues rather than continuing to connect on an international level. ECVC on the other hand is aware of the language barrier in these contexts. The interview partner illustrates the efforts of La Vía Campesina to be inclusive, like working with roughly 19 languages in their conferences, which is a big challenge for them. Supposedly, ECVC and La Vía Campesina are trying their best at including as many languages as possible, however have to admit, that it is not always possible due to their little timely and financial resources (Interview ECVC, pos. 68). Additionally, (poor-quality) translations increase the risk of confusion or mistakes concerning concepts such as food sovereignty. Most interview partners when asked if they are familiar with the concept of food sovereignty, used an online translator to translate the term into their mother-tongue. So far, there is no nationally established term for food sovereignty in the Kyrgyz language, which further complicates the approach to the concept and its dissemination. Food sovereignty is most often translated with food security in international contexts, adding to an already fragile construct of clear differentiation between the two (for further discussion see chapter 5.5).

5.3.3.2 Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society

Contemporary transnational agrarian movements are confronted by the challenge of coalitions with NGOs. On the one hand, NGOs have helped build movements in settings where grassroots movements were too scattered or not widespread to begin with, but became important building blocks in transnational agrarian movements later on (Borras/Edelman 2021: 107). NGOs remain the most reliable allies and main funding resource for peasant movements, as they can facilitate contacts in regions not previously linked to international spheres and support rural peasants with trainings and empowerment tools. On the other hand, the relationship between NGOs and grassroots movements can be problematic and lead to (financial) dependencies and (ideological) influence. Moreover, some transnational agrarian movements accuse NGOs of being unable to represent rural peasants, while at the same time they envy NGO's standing in international circles or access to funds. Their love-hate relationship is further complicated by the fact that NGOs, especially in Central Asia, often take over some roles previously played by political parties (Borras/Edelman 2008: 197) or work together closely with governmental institutions. Only Western governments can grant the legitimacy that Central Asian regimes are interested in gaining. Western NGOs present an obstacle in this endeavour, as Central

Asian regimes perceive them as threats to their authority. Unless they are perceived to be supportive of civil society structures by the West, their access to credits, World Bank loans, or international prestige might be at stake. In authoritarian Kyrgyzstan, NGOs are increasingly intertwined with the political regime or pretend to represent apolitical tendencies in order to stay on good terms with the regime, which limit their transformation potential and their capacity to overcome issues of co-optation, vulnerability to the state, and their funding conditions (Holt-Giménez et al. 2010; Dar/Firdous 2015; Knox/Sharipova 2024b).

The Kyrgyzstani government externalised much of public services to NGOs, which led to double-sided dependencies (Interview AFC, pos. 246-250; Interview NLKDF, pos. 35). Here, the state chooses to maintain its stability by incorporating challengers' potential allies into their repressive structures (Tarrow 2022: 149), as well as restricting their work as outlined in chapter 5.2. As shown by Heuer and Hiermann (2022), non-state repressive agents can play a crucial role in supporting state's threat techniques. In many cases, the term non-governmental organization can be described as a misnomer. Many Kyrgyzstani NGOs, which are strongly dependent on financial support from international development agencies – which are hardly non-governmental – have transformed into donor-oriented NGOs (DONGOs) (Mandel 2002: 285; Interview ADI, pos. 164ff.). In some instances, the government has therefore set up their own NGOs and put deputy ministers and other officials in charge. DONGOs and GONGOs cannot enforce policies or projects that improve peasant's lives in the long-term, but have to adapt to their investor's or funder's, often short-term, approaches.

This process in which NGOs are persuaded or forced to professionalize, institutionalize, and usually shift their focus towards the interest of their financial supporters is referred to as NGO-ization (Mamdani 1995; Bayalieva-Jailobaeva 2014; Lang 2022). Especially international development agency's projects have led to a civil society formation in Central Asia that operates more as a para-civil service and functions as a non-state structure (Interview AFC, pos. 166). Parallel to the state, they act less rigidly organized, but nonetheless serve the needs of the state, particularly where state services have disappeared. Moreover, exogenous political agendas are followed, from which donor organizations or countries benefit more than the local populations (Mandel 2002: 292) and are partly responsible for the weakening of civil society and with it, mobilization potential. As can be observed in the past 30 years of NGO and development work in the country, NGOs in Kyrgyzstan do not possess the necessary means to support the growth of a resilient and rebellious civil society. But despite the addressed issues, Kyrgyzstan still counts roughly 20.000 registered NGOs (and their active role in social service work led most interview partners to agree with the following statement: „NGOs are the immune system of the country” (Interview NLKDF, pos. 115-117; Baxtiyorovich 2023: 154).

5.3.4 Economic marginalization

In addition to political, structural, and cultural factors, economic factors assert influence on mobilization patterns as well. Issues mainly relate to high prices for food and for seeds. Especially border conflicts with Tajikistan repeatedly complicate peasant market structures. Close to the borders to the South and West, peasant farmers sell their produce to Tajik people, who come to Kyrgyz markets and the other way around. Border conflicts interrupt these well-established routines and throw local supply chains into chaos (Interview Bio-Muras, pos. 89). After independence, post-Soviet countries have been involved in even closer relations with their former colonizer Russia than during Soviet times and are therefore still strongly dependent on Russian investments and on Russia as a sales market (Dergousoff/Churokova 2015: 1). Nostalgia is a common feeling among rural populations, who long for past high levels of economic stability, even if they do not wish for a return of communism (Visser et al. 2015: 521; Interview ADI, pos. 195; Interview El Too, pos. 38).

According to one interview partner, for most peasant farmers income generated from agriculture merely amounts to 15% of the family income. This income is usually already spent in autumn, which is the time of harvest when weddings, funerals, and other religiously or culturally motivated festivities are conducted (Interview El Too, pos. 38ff.). The rest of the income is generated by livestock, migrant children, or labour conducted aside from the farm (ibid.; Interview AFC, pos. 17; Satybaldieva 2015: 374). The variety of these different opportunities to sustain a living make subsistence farming less attractive, especially for young people (Interview AFC, pos. 133; Interview ADI, pos. 209; Interview GIZ, pos. 11). Seeing their parents and grandparents struggle to make a living off of farming alone, around 70% of the youth believe they will earn money outside of Kyrgyzstan at some point (Interview AFC, pos. 197). Even though subsistence is still common in rural areas, these structures are decreasing gradually (ibid. 161-164). One reason for why Kyrgyz agriculture does not suffice to sustain people's lives is seen in a lack of competitiveness and the national trend towards a market economy. Peasant farmers do not produce with being competitive in mind, but rather apply what they inherited from their families and/ or copy their neighbours approaches. There is constant pressure and competition, particularly with the introduction of cooperatives, which also affects how land is used. Other herders might steal their land if herders stopped bringing their animals to their plots of land to allow the land to heal. This brings us full circle to the issue of mistrust, which is the primary obstacle for herders functioning as a collective in this regard (Interview AFC, pos. 124, 133; Interview Camp Alatau, pos. 90).

According to Scott (1985), Wolf (1966), and Radnitz (2006: 222), when peasants live on the brink of starvation, village institutions function to provide insurance in the form of redistribution, which is referred to as 'moral economy'. In Kyrgyzstan, even though kinship and neighbourhood structures can serve as safety nets for poor peasants, Satybaldieva (2015: 375f.) suggests that social capital, especially

in rural areas, has eroded over time and led to an increasing individualization and weakening of communities and relationships. As extremely poor peasant farmers lack social support, recognition, as well as education, they have only little chances to form any kind of economic capital. People are not united, increasingly individualizing, and preoccupied in their attempts to earn money, which is why their political strategy is restricted to surviving (ibid.; Interview El Too, pos. 150; Interview ADI, pos. 203; Interview ACF, pos. 174). Peasants tend to live according to a 'safety-first' principle, by which they make decisions aimed at avoiding starvation. Since the political system, which is mostly controlled by wealthy groups, frequently overlooks the concerns of peasant farmers, a political alienation has grown evident between the common people and the state. Further, discrimination and exclusion based on peasant's status can lead to economic marginalization (Dietz/Engels 2021: 669). Being aware of their lack of (financial) resources and institutional means to fight for their rights, peasants prefer to avoid confrontations with rich elites, because they are sure they cannot win (Satybaldieva 2015: 379f.; Radnitz 2006: 222).

5.3.5 Discussion – „Peasants do not fight for food sovereignty“

As it becomes evident from this chapter, a variety of intertwined and correlating factors contribute to the weakening of Kyrgyzstani civil society. After the Soviet-forced overemphasising of the communal and collective was countered with land reforms and a development towards an individualization of food production after independence, rural community networks have decreased in their relevance. Citizens are free to voluntarily decide to stay absent of collective organizing efforts. Nevertheless, a Soviet legacy is still deeply entrenched in formal state institutions as well as in informal patterns in (the constitution of) politics and society, which is unfavourable for the formation of democracy. Furthermore, a persistent, historically rooted mistrust has (subconsciously) developed over decades, which can be described as a circular dynamic, typically reinforcing itself towards more suspicion and further alienation. In the prevailing, rather pragmatic cultural logic, to which interview partners repeatedly referred, the recognition that specific challenges can be addressed collectively is not inherent – to which development projects have largely contributed with established dependency patterns. Suppressive and repressive tactics applied by the state towards challengers and their potential allies, such as NGOs, limit their transformation and mobilization potential.

The Kyrgyzstan-specific cultural differences compared to Western societies are especially striking in cooperation efforts with transnational networks, such as LVC. These invincible cultural obstacles are not only noticeable in Central Asia, but also in Eastern Europe, which is only partly represented in the LVC network, indicating that it seems to be a post-socialist condition (see Gille 2010). Place and character of state structures seem to matter greatly in efforts to transnational cooperation. Language barriers and criteria requirements for memberships, additional to cultural differences, further

aggravate network building. The difference in periphery and centre, which is relevant in the relationship between state and rural citizens, also plays a role in this regard.

Peasants did not disappear with the introduction of a market economy in Kyrgyzstan, like Marx predicted, but have diversified in the past 30 years: Nomadic tribes and transhumance practitioners share their land with small-scale and larger market-oriented farmers, subsistent peasants, or people who practice a mixture of the mentioned forms. Peasant's diversification might be a complicating factor for mobilization, as diverging forms of lived realities clash and contribute to alienation instead of unity. Even though rural peasant farmers largely share an identity and interests, economic marginalization, political alienation, and increased individualization weaken their abilities to unite as a class and expressing their contention loudly, as their main priority is survival. Marx' comparison of peasants and potatoes – presenting the homogenous magnitudes of potatoes in a sack, united in identity, but not in collective action – seems drastic, but not unrealistic in the case of Kyrgyzstan. Peasants were important drivers of the French Revolution (the example Marx' refers to), even though the revolution did not originate from their rural periphery. Long-lasting effects on societal structures failed to materialize in the long-term. In a direct comparison to the three political revolutions in Kyrgyzstan, similarities are evident. It used to be commonly assumed by outsiders, that international actors had contributed to the development of a civil society, based on Western pioneers, which had resulted in a mobilization of people and the initiation of political revolutions. As we know today, this is largely incorrect. Drivers of these revolutions were mainly elites interested in keeping their privileges and status, who mobilized ordinary citizens for their own interest through vertical networks, disguised as a class struggle. The results of the revolutions were the exchange of political leaders, without structural changes to the system and a persistence of inequalities – contrary to the goals ordinary citizens had in mind. These were instrumentalized in a dangerous manner to fight for elite's interests. Like Hardt and Negri (2004: 124) describe for the case of China: „The Chinese revolution itself was really a revolution conducted with the peasantry, not a revolution by the peasantry“. In addition to that, most peasant farmers own the piece of land they live on, even if they are economically marginalized. They do not feel critical urgency for changes, as they can survive and sustain their lifestyle for the most part, relatively independent from centre politics. In that way, they appear inherently conservative, averse to changes and the formation of a class as powerful resistance tool. To quote one interview partner: „Peasants do not fight for food sovereignty.“ (Interview AFC, pos. 207).

It seems, Kyrgyzstani peasant farmers are not capable of representing themselves due to a variety of interwoven structural, cultural, and economic factors that weaken their agency. People are generally not interested in making political statements, they are very careful to stay in good graces with certain powerful elites and are not well connected outside their village. They further refrain from taking their discontent to the streets, because they are aware of the government's inability or unwillingness to

support rural people. In order to achieve their objectives, it might not be necessarily helpful to be politically outspoken (Explorative interview no. 2), as repressive government tactics can reinforce (economic) marginalization. Here we circle back to the beginning: Countries with clearly absent loud and politically demanding mobilizations are quickly labelled as having a weak civil society. That these labels, applied from the outside, are usually precipitated and exemplify the little or superficial examination of local circumstances, is evident. Instead, contention can be expressed in quiet forms of everyday resistance, which will be further explored in chapter 5.6.

5.4 Cooperatives as top-down enterprises

As shown previously in chapter 5.1., cooperatives can act as allies in supporting peasant farmers in their attempt to be sovereign from state and/or market structures. One has to be careful, however, in only ascribing positive attributes and effects to cooperatives. As Isgren (2018: 187) describes, agricultural cooperatives can play an important role in the development of rural social movements, but do not always enable a broader mobilization. They might be state-led or -controlled, politically restricted, captured by elite interest, or mainly focused on economic progress while neglecting social elements. In Kyrgyzstan, living self-sufficiently or sustaining peasant farming has become increasingly difficult due to factors such as climate change consequences, including floods, parched soil, or land degradation, as well as urbanization and lacking rural support structures. In the context of food production, there are two principal options: The first is to produce smaller quantities of a diverse set of vegetables and fruit, make use of comparatively cheap variety-resistant seeds, and sell them at local markets. This option carries high marketing and transportation costs as well as working time for the producers and does not generate the returns or opportunities to expand production in any meaningful way. Although this approach has proven to be effective in the past, it is no longer competitive in the current economic climate (Interview AFC, pos. 95ff.). The second option is to align the production towards market economy standards. This means specializing and focusing production styles in order to sell to large retailers, which export the products outside of the country and offer more money (ibid.). This works best in a form of peasant farmer cooperative, in which people collectively join together in order to improve market conditions as well as to receive better prices in acquiring seeds or machinery. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the reasons for joining a cooperative are mainly economically motivated, as insufficient property and a lack of capital hinder farmers from increasing profits (Giordano/Kostova 2002: 87). However, so far, the chances to create and sustain successful cooperatives are low as the process is not entirely free of (structural) challenges and obstacles that might arise in the long-term. Chayanov (1991) outlined six obstacles (see chapter 2.2.2), of which five can be applied for the case at hand.

First, the mismatch between smallholders' short-term needs and the cooperatives' mid-to-long-term imperatives, paired with a top-down approach of cooperative creation and misguided state support

present a rather comprehensive challenge. Peasant farmer cooperatives in Kyrgyzstan are usually state-funded and designed and implemented by international organizations, development agencies, and/or NGOs (Interview AFC, pos. 149). Ever since international development agencies such as Germany's GIZ, US-American USAID, or Switzerland's Helvetas have settled in Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s, they have followed the intention of implementing cooperative structures in rural areas in order to achieve their 'development' goals: For farmers to increase their productivity and their salaries and accordingly, to boost the national economy (Interview AFC, pos. 57ff.). Agricultural advisors from AFC (pos. 122) described their approach like this: „The project, the approach was just to support farmers, to make this export business, which they were already doing anyway, [...] simply better". These processes were established, no matter how participatory they might have been, in a top-down fashion. After independence, the state in contrast supported the individualization of peasant farms and large-scale farming endeavours, realised by diverse land reforms. Despite the government's support for international development agencies in their efforts to establish cooperatives, these two approaches are inherently contradictory and ultimately undermine each other. Critique related to foreign development agency's conception of cooperatives is articulated by local NGOs: „There were so many attempts to build [cooperatives], but it didn't really work out. It's again that we approach this issue from the European perspective [...], but not the localized context." (Interview El Too, Pos. 44). The standard approach international organizations are applying is usually based on the equivalent of their national (German, American, Swiss) successful institutions. Nevertheless, the way they work in practice rather resembles former socialist models of *kolchozes* (Giordano/Kostova 2002: 86). Critical interview partners denounced this approach of Western idea-export to non-Western contexts and claimed for them to follow national agendas in Kyrgyzstan (Interview ADI, pos. 152; Interview El Too, pos. 44; Interview NLKDF, pos. 59). As shown in chapter 5.3.4, the application of Western-specific approaches to cooperative building often neglects local cultural norms, historical roots of food production, and the legacies of previous forms of community work. Instead, already existing forms of informal cooperation between peasant farmers, like sharing agricultural machinery or joint processing, could have been directly targeted and expanded (Lerman 2013; Mogilevskii et al. 2017: 30). Additionally, cooperatives often fail after the initial funding and support from foreign donors ended. „The problem is, [...] there is not a single example in the whole country where farmers have successfully managed a seed fund on their own." (Interview ACF, pos. 85).

Second, a lack of start-up capital and technology, reinforced by internal structures and requirements present a challenge for peasant farmers. Peasant farmers do not only need to comply to regulations that are crucial conditions of the sales market but also need to provide some form of investment when joining a cooperative. One interview partner provided an example related to cotton farming (Interview Anara Baizhumanova, pos. 16): Most established cotton cooperatives focus on organic cotton

production, which requires a drastic conversion of production systems. Even though this conversion requires a financial investment and leads to lower yields in the beginning, in the long-term profits increase. Nevertheless, farmers expressed concern that other farmers might not adhere to the regulations pertaining to the use of pesticides, which could potentially lead to a contamination of the entire chain of cotton and subsequent negative impact on the final quality assessment and the entire value chain as well as impair future cooperation. Ordinarily, farmers sell their products directly to middlemen, often spontaneously, and as veterinary or other quality regulations are still weak and not supervised, these processes require less planning and organization (Interview Anara Baizhumanova, pos. 18). Farmers prefer to sell their products right after the harvesting season, which influences the price of commodities negatively (Interview FAO, pos. 16). Farmers do not simply disregard cooperative regulations out of spite, but especially in low-income families, people sell their products when they need money. They might also not possess the financial or timely resources that are required in the beginning of joining cooperatives (Interview Anara Baizhumanova, pos. 10). Additionally, when members show large differences in terms of their numbers of livestock, size of land, or property, tensions arise. Those wealthier, younger, or large-scale farmers are only hardly enticed with the small profit that cooperatives promise and additionally fear poorer farmers might otherwise disadvantage them. Consequently, the majority of members are typically poorer, older, and less resourced smaller farmers (Explorative interview no. 5; Hu et al. 2023: 2631).

Third, the leadership deficit as well as a lack of management (f.i. administrative or accounting) and farming practices was frequently addressed by interview partners (Interview Anara Baizhumanova, pos. 4ff., 34; Interview AFC, pos. 189, 195; Interview NLKDF, pos. 65). Similar to the cotton cooperatives, in an exemplary case of seed distribution, lacking payment became an issue. If a single farmer does not pay their share, others refuse to pay theirs as well, creating an atmosphere of distrust and persistent bias. Further, a seed fund requires administration in form of a paid professional. In the event of insufficient funds due to members' failure or refusal to pay their shares, the administrative professional cannot be paid, which results in a self-reinforcing process of careless management: „The lesson learnt is that it sounds sexy on paper, of course, but it simply doesn't work.” (Interview ACF, pos. 85; Interview Anara Baizhumanova, pos. 6f.). One organization, which holds potential to take over a leadership role in the cooperative nexus, is the cooperative union called *The Association of Kyrgyz Co-operatives* (JKK). It describes itself as a voluntary association of legally independent cooperatives and unites 220 cooperatives all over the country. It aims to establish and maintain cooperative principles as well as to represent peasant farmer's interests at regional and national levels. Further, they strive to improve the well-being of the rural population and overcome poverty in rural areas (JKK n.d.; Interview FAO, pos. 29). Chayanov (1991) claimed a 'cooperative of cooperatives' was needed to provide a functioning cooperative movement, and to ensure ideal vertical integration.

Fourth, the high cost of social organization and mobilization, or lack of trust, emerged as the main hindrance to successful cooperative formation and persistence. To present a brief background, the question of how cooperatives can attract farmers has been the subject of two distinct theoretical approaches, which have emerged from the interview data. Even though some scholars (f.i. Pallot/Nefedova 2007) assume that people tend to be nostalgic for the security the Soviet Union provided and partly welcome the revitalization of the *kolchozes* as such, they are not fond of the memories of the forceful integration into *kolchozes* per se, during which many people starved and slaughtered their livestock as a sign of protest. Some interview partners claimed that it is exactly the similar appearance of cooperatives to *kolchozes* that prevents people from joining cooperatives and developing trust towards it (Interview ADI, pos. 144-148, 158; Interview GIZ, pos. 41; Interview Anara Baizhumanova, pos. 10). Kyrgyz peasants have grown increasingly individualistic in their approach to food production ever since independence and fear being deceived back into a collective system by the state: „Joining a cooperative is tantamount to wanting to be robbed all over again.” (Giordano/Kostova 2002: 87). Some interview partners often referred to the similarities between Soviet *kolchozes* and modern-day cooperatives. However, most interview partners confirmed the academic tonus, which claims the restraint for joining cooperatives more often stems from a lack of trust in people who are not part of their family or community and towards state organs and international institutions (Giordano/Kostova 2002; Howard 2003; Radnitz 2006; Interview AFC, pos. 174, 182f.; Interview ADI, pos. 153-156; Interview Anara Baizhumanova, pos. 4). As already examined in chapter 5.3.1 and referring to Howard’s (2003) study on weak civil societies in CEE, lacking trust is perceived to be a major factor in struggles to collective action. In general, a functioning cooperative needs peasant farmers to effectively mobilize and organize themselves not only in the process of formation, but also to maintain their cooperative (Hu et al. 2023: 2631). These social costs affiliated with participating in cooperative activities and coordination may be perceived as outweighing the economic benefits. The contemporary Kyrgyz peasantry has been transformed towards market orientation, in which social differentiation, non-farm employment opportunities, and the degradation of traditional cultural networks compound these difficulties. In order to overcome the scepticism that is often prevalent among peasant farmers, leaders are required to cultivate a 'cooperative culture' in the community before economic cooperation can even commence. This process is either prone to end in frustration and failure, or in case of the absence of leaders, cannot be initiated in the first place (ibid. 2632).

This chapter shows, that cooperatives do not function as movements (yet), but as enterprises. As previously outlined in chapter 5.1, Kyrgyzstani peasants have not (yet) perceived cooperatives as a possible powerful ally and therefore are missing out on using cooperatives’ potential as a political opportunity. At the same time, due to the fact that cooperatives are mainly established in a top-down process, that space is not granted to peasants in the first place. The initiative to form cooperatives

should emerge bottom-up and include a product-specific interest of political fight. Chayanov (1991: 11, 15-23) in his *Theory of Peasant Cooperatives* argues that cooperatives can only strengthen peasant farmers if they act as a cooperative movement, which has to be united in a strong cooperative culture and thereby achieve vertical integration. Cooperatives that act as single actors or even as a movement by creating a 'cooperative of cooperatives', might be able to form a peasant class and find a collective voice in demanding changes and creating solidarity networks. Chayanov nevertheless acknowledged, that the circumstances and conditions surrounding cooperatives and their success can be detrimental (Hu et al. 2023: 2612f.). The circumstances during Chayanov's lifetime as well as the current political-economic environment in most countries are adverse to the formation of cooperatives like Chayanov imagined them. So far, regulations inside and outside cooperatives are rather strict and represent unknown territory for most Kyrgyzstani peasants, who have gotten accustomed to weak regulations over the past 30 years. Peasant farmers rather represent a kind of peasant conservatism, as coined by Marx (Katz 1992: 65), in which they only collectively organize in order to maintain their current situation and to prevent changes. In the 'cooperative-as-enterprise' concept however, peasants are adapted to the conditions of capitalist society and market economy. Those cooperatives do not represent an alternative to capitalist agriculture and further reinforce dependency structures. As most interview partners agreed, this development goes against all of the values associated with self-sufficiency, as the high level of specification rather works towards a market economy (Interview AFC, pos. 133, 137; Interview NLKDF, pos. 25). Even though a 'cooperative of cooperatives' (the JKK), that aims to represent peasant farmers, exists, the power that is inherent in such a union has yet to be discovered. Cooperatives that are aligned to follow market economy structures and increase profit can hardly transform into cooperatives as movement, as their entire structure and alignment differ. Market economy-oriented cooperatives (or cooperatives as enterprises) seemingly contribute to the absence of collective mobilization and its possible transformation into a peasant movement.

5.5 Local understanding of food sovereignty as a concept

The discourse on the topic of food security and food sovereignty as well as their understanding and practice has not only appeared as a substantial factor in Visser et al.'s study (2015) on quiet food sovereignty, but has materialized as an important factor in this data analysis, too. Prior to the research stay I conducted an online search on food sovereignty in local media outlets, which left me without finding any note of a discourse. In general, topics related to agriculture and rural development are not very visible in media productions, which is also shown in protest behaviour and public discourses in general. If addressed, they mainly relate to supply chain issues, price volatility, or trade dependencies. This assessment was reflected in my interviews. Even though some interview partners were familiar with the term food sovereignty, they had trouble defining it or differentiating it from food security as a concept. Most were not familiar with the term in the first place. The local Kyrgyzstani FAO

representatives, even though the FAO states in their statutes to follow both food security and food sovereignty goals, were not familiar with the concept of food sovereignty (Interview FAO, pos. 55-61). Most of the official FAO documents that discuss the question of food security versus food sovereignty are outdated (f.i. Gordillo 2013). It does not become clear what the FAO principally stands for, even after conducting this research. The local staff were instead focused on food security as a main goal to follow, which includes increasing the productivity of agricultural production, or improving the nutrition sector and food safety (Interview FAO, pos. 46). Food security as a concept is widespread not only in media reporting, but especially in government policies, following the classical understanding coined by FAO and other international organizations (see chapter 1.4). As the Kyrgyzstani government works closely with international NGOs and institutions, they have adapted to using food security in their official language. Food sovereignty is hardly ever used in government policy and media in Kyrgyzstan. Usually, it works as a synonym for 'national food security' (e.g. Visser et al. 2015: 514), on which government policy is focused on. Even though food sovereignty as a concept is rarely present in local media and public discourse, the concept is certainly not irrelevant. Food sovereignty is generally tightly connected to social movements, which are usually able to form a national-specific discourse and culminate into collective action (Visser et al. 2015: 513f.). Even if the term food sovereignty is used in local discussions, interview partners claimed people would not be aware of its meaning and generally have a rather limited understanding of the political aspect of it: „I think that the people, they don't understand the definition. What is sovereignty?“ (Interview NLKDF, pos. 73).

Only three interview partners, from the NGOs ADI, NLKDF, and El Too, were aware of the term food sovereignty, its background, and its application. ADI is a member of the Nyéléni network and cooperates with EVCV occasionally, which explains their familiarity with food sovereignty. Some of the interview partners spoke of the concept of food sovereignty as obstructive for the formation of a connected movement:

„But we don't have these movements, I don't know why, I think maybe here is the problem of concepts. Maybe for instance food sovereignty, how do people understand food sovereignty, because let's say our traditional diet is meat and pasta, even not pasta, meat and dairy products, in the summer it's dairy products, in the winter meat. Now from what perspective do we understand this food sovereignty, food independence, then you would be like 20 types of food to be self-sufficient, is it the way rural people understand or is it enough for them? They cook some meat, make some soup, maybe for them it's enough. That is the idea.“ (Interview El Too, pos. 26).

The issue with defining and living the practice of food sovereignty can be observed in the case of Kyrgyzstan rather well. Practices of nomadism or transhumance do not involve a diverse diet which covers all nutritional needs – a precondition for food sovereignty and food security as seen from a Western perspective or as is defined in the statutes of FAO and La Vía Campesina. In Kyrgyzstan,

traditionally the diet is limited to meat, dairy products, and wheat (bread or pasta). Vegetables are not a part of traditional culture as in non-sedentary societies agriculture was not part of everyday life. Nomads would sometimes trade their dairy or meat products against wheat or some types of available fruit and vegetables from sedentary people, however they have learnt to be sovereign on their own with the products at hand: their livestock and anything nature had to offer.

Even though the concept of food sovereignty originates from Western as well as non-Western contexts and aims to incorporate a wide range of realities of life, it apparently is perceived as exclusive for some. In one of the explorative interviews (no. 4), an American researcher pointed to the fact that the theoretical phrasing of indigenous or peasant's practices into food sovereignty has to be handled with a high level of sensitivity and caution. She referred to the process of applying labels generated in Western contexts as *foreign-labelling* and as a highly academic debate. She further explained, how usually for rural peasants the concepts food sovereignty and food security are far from their everyday lives. Especially in the Soviet context, such terms need to be historically embedded as well. Colonial Soviet settlers were pejoratively referred to as peasants in contrast to the indigenous nomad peoples, leaving the term tainted until today (Morrison 2015). Related to that, people might have a tremendously different understanding of what it means to be sovereign or self-sufficient. The rural Kyrgyzstani people do not understand sovereignty on an individual level, but rather on a state level, as propagated by the regime. Food sovereignty is also occasionally used as a synonym for (national) food self-sufficiency, which further complicates the establishment of the term as a goal or practice (Visser et al. 2015: 524).

One potential explanation for this phenomenon is that the introduction of Western-coined terms may have the unintended consequence of alienating local communities. Despite the fact that the underlying principles may align closely with existing practices in food production, the use of unfamiliar terminology, coupled with the perception of complexity, may inadvertently create a barrier to understanding and acceptance. Food sovereignty as a concept, movement, or practice might be especially difficult for people to grasp, if their local languages provide own expressions. Food security in contrast is a more easily understandable and tangible term that radiates more power (Interview ADI, pos. 30). Further confusion, according to an interview partner, occurs with the term of self-sufficiency (ADI, pos. 22-34). Self-sufficiency is a concept applied by local peasants to compare food secure situations. These relate to warm areas in the South, where a greater variety of food grows than in the North, as well as to seasons. In summer and autumn food is abundant, while in winter and spring the availability of food is increasingly limited. Food was and still is generally perceived or measured in relation to meat, traditional meals, or vodka (Interview El Too, pos. 137; Scott/Chi 2022). Additionally, the concepts of agroecology and permaculture highlight the underlying problem. Agroecology can, according to van der Ploeg (2021: 115), be described as an everyday struggle towards food sovereignty,

a practice of resistance, of subsistence, and of community. In Kyrgyzstan, agroecology and permaculture as concepts are not (widely) known. One of my interview partners, a professor of sociology and an agroecological farmer, spoke about her unsuccessful efforts to introduce and spread the concept among the local population, referring to the only permaculture farm of the country (Interview Olga Tarabashkina, pos. 20).

To conclude, the interview partner from ECVC stated that it will require a significant investment of time and effort to build perceptions of terms such as food sovereignty to begin with:

„That is a part of it, the politicisation, the understanding to what extent food sovereignty goes further than just food security, or why food sovereignty is needed to be able to guarantee food security at all, but that is also something that takes time.” (Interview ECVC, pos. 28).

Politically, striving for food sovereignty entails fighting against the global agri-businesses and for a transfer of power back to food producers. As claimed by interview partners and also shown by Visser et al. (2015), Russians and Kyrgyz people would rather live in a symbiosis with large scale-agriculture and enjoy the merits of an availability of foreign products additional to what their own plots offer (Explorative interview no. 4).

5.6 Everyday practices of resistance and quiet food sovereignty

Due to the fact that I was not able to conduct interviews with local peasants and learn about practices of local resistance first-hand, I mainly relied on literature in this subchapter, in addition to information gained through the expert interviews. Even though these gathered practices are not always directly connected to a strive for food sovereignty, they are nevertheless relevant in finding out about rural structures of resistance and their degree of ‘loudness’.

In a first step, I present some recent acts of collective action that derived from the interview data. One interview partner described the Kyrgyzstani people’s potential for mobilization on the base of two examples. Recurrent border clashes at the Kyrgyz-Tajik border and the Covid pandemic disrupted local market structures and infrastructure. As soon as, Kyrgyzstani people get worried and start demanding a government response. Unlike in Europe, people’s priority is not healthy or valuable food, but instead mainly its availability and affordability (Interview El Too, pos. 28; Interview NLKDF, pos. 43). People were left in despair as prices for basic goods like flour or sugar rose or the purchasing prices of their products dropped, while the government allegedly failed to adequately respond (Interview El Too, pos. 28, 147; Interview Camp Alatoo, pos. 68). In such cases, rural people collectively form voluntary movements to support and help affected people, provide medical care, and share food (Interview El Too, pos. 147). There are community networks in which people help alleviate poverty, solve common problems, and compensate for shortcomings of the state (Radnitz 2006: 214ff). In the absence of state support, crisis support structures emerge bottom-up, leading to the conclusion, that even rural people

mobilize in times of crisis, creating voluntary movements to substitute lacking state response – even if these acts might not have an inherently political motivation. Issues relating to rural development are usually not subject to activist mobilization. According to the Central Asia Protest Tracker, leading causes for protests between 2018 and 2020 were mainly decisions of the court system (15%), calling for the release of political prisoners (15%), and issues of justice, like police brutality or repression (7%) – however, the first two are usually elite-led and do not emerge bottom-up (Oxus Society 2020).

In a second step, different forms of everyday resistance are presented. For the interview data analysis, the code ‘everyday forms of peasant resistance’ was deducted from the eponymous theoretical approach after Scott. As many codes associated with everyday resistance overlapped with codes associated with quiet food sovereignty, in this chapter I aim to set these two in relation to each other.

Most scholars agree on the relevance of opposition and intentional action in resistance acts, but disagree when it comes to subtler or even invisible forms of resistance. Hollander and Einwohner (2004) define seven types of resistance, ranging from overt (potentially violent) to missed or attempted resistance (muted or invisible forms). What counts as a political act is academically disputed (Lilja 2022). Especially under authoritarian rule, resistance has to adapt to spaces in which it can be expressed without entailing repression and therefore cannot be assessed with the tools that classical social movement studies offer. In cases where organized action does not succeed or exist, silent forms of resistance, that are expressed in everyday pattern or practices of life, are usually prevalent. These can be solely emancipatory on an individual or family level, such as access to healthy food or crisis provision, and tend to be low-profile so they stay unnoticed by the powerful. The everyday can be found in patterns, according to Iniguez de Heredia (2017), implying a repetition of certain behaviours in automatic, non-reflective manners following and enforcing rules, norms, hierarchies, policies or laws. Structure and agency play a crucial role in this regard. People’s actions cannot be understood in terms of cultural norms or rational choice alone, but additionally according to personal values. Structures in the form of gender, class, markets or state form enable or constrain individuals to pursue strategies and interests. Scott (1985) defined three categories with which to analyse disguised acts of resistance, which are everyday resistance, hidden transcripts, and expressions of religion, class heroes, or social banditry. Johansson and Vinthagen’s (2020) extension of Scott’s concept next to repertoires of everyday resistance further includes the relationship of agents, spatialization, as well as temporalization. Everyday forms of resistance can also be described as actions or tactics of resisting capitalist absorption and creating spaces outside of profit-oriented compulsions (Dietz/Engels 2021).

As already mentioned in chapter 5.2, Kyrgyzstani farmers do not receive proper or sufficient support from the state and as a consequence have „developed their own immune system” (Interview Camp Alatoo, pos. 68), which is based on traditional norms, values, and laws, intertwined with more

Western-imported constructs of an understanding of law. According to Howard (2003), the persistence of community and friendship networks is one of three constituting factors for weak civil societies in post-socialist countries. Under Soviet rule, people would only trust a small number of family, *awlad* (extended family), and friends. These private relationships were extremely meaningful and genuine, while connections stretching beyond these circles were mainly of instrumental use to acquire scarce goods and services (Howard 2003: 27f.). People had to adopt to the new and difficult reality of Soviet rule, which was never encountered without resistance, as outlined on the base of the Basmachi movement in chapter 4.1. After violent conflicts between locals and Soviet enforcers, the population was left behind in a weakened state, their revolutionary spirits not only broken by being forced into new settled forms of cooperation, but additionally due to the persecution and murder of everyone who was not willing to submit. Patience and resourcefulness were practiced in quietly tending to gardens and relying on neighbours and family in times of crisis. Rywkin (1981) sees everyday practices of resistance during Soviet times in forms of silent dissent, especially in regards to religion – similar to Scott (1985). While Soviet rulers planned to eradicate Islam in favour of Christianity, people transferred their religious culture inside their homes, strengthening it within their families and on individual levels. People retracted to their private spheres and neighbourhoods, also referred to as *mahallas*. Mahallas refer to spatial and social forms of life, in which space is communally used, where social imaginaries are shared, and where kinship ties were strengthened by links based on proximity (Babajanian et al. 2005: 213; Radnitz 2006: 220; Liu 2023: 209). They are rather associated with traditional parts of cities in opposition to modern constructions of coexistence. In the delicate context of interethnic relations, especially in Uzbek- and Tajik-dominated southern Kyrgyzstani cities, the daily conflicts between mahalla committees and the Kyrgyz-dominated city administration over resources and policy has repercussions for the perception of ethnic equity, particularly in light of violent events that occurred in 1990 and 2010 (ibid. 216). As a coping mechanism, people became increasingly apolitical, withdrawing to their private spheres and prioritizing solving immediate and mundane problems rather than trying to demand or enact structural change (Radnitz 2010: 2). Today, these characteristics persist in Kyrgyzstani society and are passed on with each generation.

The framework that governs rural people's lives in Kyrgyzstan today is a mix of religion, traditional customs, and Western-style laws and ideals (Giovarelli/Akmatova 2002; Beyer 2016). Traditional norms of Kyrgyzstani nomad culture are still embedded in initiatives of securing social order in rural communities today, such as ideas of *birimdik* (unity) and *yntymak* (harmony), carried out by *aksakals* (male elders; literally meaning „white beard“), *imams* (Islamic clerics), and local civil society (Lottholz 2017: 137; Interview El Too, pos. 150). Aksakals are seen as authoritative due to their age, experience, and connection within the communities by citizens. Their courts, institutionalized in 1995 to unburden the legal system, tend to enjoy more popularity than legal institutions and still serve as an ideal basis

and mechanism for alternative dispute settlement in rural areas (Lottholz 2017: 136). These traditional and religious elites and their moral order based on solidarity and equity are critical of the increasing influence of capitalist values and seeks to restore the moral economy (Radnitz 2006: 222; Satybaldieva 2015: 383). Village-level institutions are built democratically and the village leaders and elders are generally trusted by village members. However, since they lack fundamental legal knowledge and training, village leaders and court members are not always able to consider written law. According to Lottholz et al. (2020: 7f.), innovations in participatory mechanisms have been partly overlooked by Western observers. Channels of civil participation that diverge from the Eurocentric category of civil society can be built on long-standing local traditions, such as mahallas or self-help groups, based on the concept of *ashar* (voluntarily-based way of co-financing and co-implementing initiatives/ self-help groups). Further, they can be built on Soviet legacy and the persisting ideological influence of Russia, like the network of public consultative bodies, an easily accessible feedback system for citizens to evaluate policy proposals.

Clan-based institutions are rather powerful actors in rural areas as well. They have seized opportunities that arose with increased public debates on traditional values initiated by the government, constituting themselves as heritage custodians (Jacquesson 2023: 667). Clan-based institutions have constructed a discourse around their heritage, idealizing the past to emphasize the significance of genealogies as a framework for national unity and solidarity. By aligning their narratives with state rhetoric and employing recognized heritage practices, these institutions seek to legitimize authoritative expressions of clan identity while undermining non-authorized manifestations, thereby objectifying genealogical knowledge and folklorizing clan communities. One interview partner mentioned that nomadic traditions were in danger, pointing to the manipulative and repressive tactics employed by the state towards its citizens and the growing power and influence of clan-based institutions and Islamic culture (Interview NLKDF, pos. 75). Kyrgyzstani people's nomadic background and their strong ongoing attachment to traditions more than towards Muslim rules contribute to their rebellious disposition. Practicing nomadic traditions in an increasingly modernizing country can be viewed as equal to resisting to the intrusion of Western capitalist norms and values, resisting (quietly) to f.i. sedentarism. Further, living (partly) self-sufficiently serves as a security mechanism in rural areas. Especially the investment in livestock provides a sense of security for times of crisis, as livestock can always be sold or slaughtered. At the same time, with the constant availability of a diverse range of foods and products, due to the expansion of capitalism in the Kyrgyzstani peripheries, practices of self-sufficiency or subsistence become increasingly redundant and are already declining (Interview AFC, pos. 27f.).

Kandiyoti (2002: 244) argues, that Central Asian societies restructured themselves around the very elements that the Soviet rulers had wanted to destroy, like communitarian systems of pre-existing solidarity groups or the internalization of ethnic identity – however within the framework imposed by

the Soviet system. In post-socialist Kyrgyzstan, defined by consumerism and the local incursion of foreign development organizations, individuals struggle with shifting livelihoods and the significance of informal networks and alternative safety nets (Kandiyoti 2002: 252). Trusted small family or community networks remain very prominent and important throughout the post-socialist region today, while instrumental circles have largely disappeared with the development towards market economies. Unlike many Western societies, people in post-socialist societies are still highly invested in their private environment and do not feel much need or desire to join and participate in organizations outside of that realm (Howard 2003: 141).

One example of bottom-up mobilization referred to by interview partners are local user associations. According to several interview partners, these associations were formed after informal networks had already been established. Members realized their efforts would be more effective and their joint investments legally protected in officially registered associations, similar to cooperatives (Explorative interview no. 6; Interview Anara Baizhumanova, pos. 20). Most prominent are the water user and the pasture user associations, which serve to manage access and usage of pastures and water more efficiently and avoid conflicts (Interview AFC, pos. 223). All villagers are automatically included as members of these associations. So far, however, they are deemed to be rather unsuccessful in handling the problems of ongoing land degradation and overgrazing or water overuse and scarcity. Reasons for their ineffectiveness are a lack of respect from villagers towards the associations and a lack of assertiveness as an official enforcement power within the village (Interview AFC, pos. 225; Interview Camp Alatau, pos. 82). The traditionally evolved pasture use rights, that are historically rooted in clan and tribe structures and involve rather complex patterns, are deeply entrenched in today's land use practices. One interview partner even suggested the associations were afraid of enforcing changes to increase efficiency or protect land from degrading because of these prevailing patterns (Interview AFC, pos. 234f.). User associations work with a grassroots democratic approach, which has potential to increase complications. Every member aims to achieve the lowest possible price and the best conditions for water access, while at the same time they are not willing to invest money in combating water losses (ibid.). In this case the state's absence in rural areas becomes evident again. The state externalises the responsibility of nature conservation and water distribution. Existing laws are weak and rarely enforced in the peripheries because the state assumes or expects people to govern themselves. (Interview AFC, pos. 235).

Satybaldieva analysed the interplay of capital and agency in Central Asian politics, describing poor group's everyday politics of resistance as one of the four strategies of local politics in Kyrgyzstan – besides rich elite's „politics of self-enrichment, intellectual, traditional, and religious elites' politics of 'doing the right thing', [and] the mediated politics of intellectual elites" (2015: 385). Even though peasants tolerate much abuse quietly, as outlined before, they feel frustration and anger towards

injustices of the market system and the lack of responsibility of the wealthy towards them. Satybaldieva (2015: 379ff.) shows how peasants still manage to transform their anger into action, describing acts of peasant resistance, such as sabotage or theft against the rich elites. Adding to this, Radnitz (2006: 220-228) describes informal local institutions such as gift exchange, life-cycle events, and rotating credit associations (usually all part of so-called self-help groups), which contribute to solving collective action problems. Even though these practices usually do not have an inherent motive of food sovereignty, they serve as an outlet for anger or vengeance towards the rich and as a strategy for survival in general. Data collected from interviews and literature implies that Kyrgyzstani peasants apply forms of everyday hidden resistance, aligning with Scott's (1985) suggestions, in order to express their discontent, even if these forms stay unnoticed by the recipients.

According to Visser et al. (2015), food sovereignty movements hold an inherent political dimension, which includes an active claiming of rights, a struggle to achieve those rights, and a clear vision to shift control of productive resources back to farmers. An absence of these outspokenly 'loud' factors – if inherently apolitical or muted by external factors – does not necessarily mean an absence of a strive for food sovereignty. Similar to everyday forms of resistance, food sovereignty can be expressed in muted and/or invisible forms. The 'quiet' in the concept of quiet food sovereignty, brought forward by Visser et al. (2015), refers to a lack of active claim-making, being politically outspoken, demanding change and connecting to other similar groups outside of the country's borders. Therefore, making an absolute statement on the existence or absence of a political dimension of local forms of everyday resistance judging only from the collected interview and literature material seems superficial and hasty. Forms of applied everyday resistance that relate to food sovereignty as a practice are more difficult to capture. First of all, as interview partners confirmed (Explorative interview no. 6, 7; Interview Olga Tarabashkina, pos. 24), there is only little research, historically and in the present, on food cultures and practices inside and outside of Kyrgyzstan. Secondly, these practices are often conducted in the private sphere, where they are nearly invisible and mostly not regarded as political acts or relevant practices of food sovereignty by people themselves, but rather as traditions or chores. They are unconsciously anchored and not questioned in their impacts or execution.

An anecdote²¹ that was shared with me by a fellow German living in Naryn, a small city nestled between high mountain ranges, supports this argument. Naryn is a small town, far away from any larger cities and characterized by high mountains and dry soil which is not suitable for agricultural production. When a large supermarket chain opened a new store in the city centre, villagers boycotted it. Even though the supermarket might have increased villager's access to a broader variety of healthy foods,

²¹ This exchange was not part of a formal or explorative interview, which is why I did not include it in my data. Further, I had no chance of checking its validity, therefore I am solely referring to it as an anecdote.

people were averse of seemingly 'modern' change and the competition created for the local grocery stores. After a while, with barely making profit, the store was forced to close and the villagers successful in their fight for keeping the status quo upright. This anecdote supports the argument of peasant conservatism, while at the same time displaying mobilization potential in a quiet way. The boycott was effective without a protest, petition or a similar 'loud' expression of contention.

While the self-sufficiency trend is decreasing (Interview AFC, pos. 27f.), interview partners repeatedly referred to the high relevance of informal networks on community-level, that have the purpose of improving co-existence, communication, and sometimes marketing of products. Most community networks revolve around food and its distribution, working in rather concise circles. Canning and seed saving are practiced by almost all villagers. Canning of vegetables and fruit after harvest enables people to remain independent over the winter. In nomadic culture, canning of food is not usually part of an everyday routine, except for meat and dairy products. As one interview partner described: „Kyrgyz people are nomads, so planting is not about us.” (Interview Anara Baizhumanova, pos. 73). Practices such as canning have emerged in the 1990s, introduced by international development agencies in the course of economic ruptures and hunger periods and are still widely popular today (Interview AFC, pos. 41). Seed saving initiatives are becoming more and more popular, according to an interview partner (Interview ADI, pos. 36). The all-female network Dejkan Muras, which has been initiated by ADI, before having been taken over by community networks, aims to revitalize local vegetable seeds and empower women in self-sufficiency.

According to several interview partners, people use *sogum* (distribution networks among family and close friends) to share f.i. meat with each other. Once a month after slaughter, portions of meat are shared in a rotating system (Explorative interview, no. 6). Most rural peasants own livestock, even if just a few. Interview partners explained this behaviour with different reasons, one being traditional ideas of nomadic culture and an entrenched social ranking which displays status according to the number of livestock people own (Interview Olga Tarabashkina, pos. 24). Another is that livestock not only provides meat, milk, and wool, but also serves as a financial backup in times of crisis of inflation (AFC/CAIConsulting 2020: 96) and adds to autonomy aspirations.

Kitchen garden plots were mentioned most often as tools to achieve self-sufficiency by interview partners (Interview Anara Baizhumanova, pos. 41, 83; Interview Bio-Muras, pos. 81). Also, Jehlička et al. (2019) describe kitchen garden plots as an alternative conceptualisation of resilience, as preventative, proactive, transformation-enabling, and future-oriented tools to counter the expansion of capitalism. The practice hails from Soviet times, when gardening was partly patriotic duty, promoted by the Soviet state, but more often a matter of survival. Cardona and Markwick (2019) posit, that in promoting self-sufficiency in gardening, the Soviet state transferred a significant portion of its

responsibilities for food production to its citizenry. Today, this tactic is still or again applied by the state. Peasants are neglected in their practices of food production, as delineated based on lacking state support structures or subsidies as well as a lack of law enforcement and failing to ensure national food security in border and trade conflicts with Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, or Russia.

Peasants show a high tolerability of circumstances, which can be associated with the past experiences of long-time Soviet repression and suppression. Due to being largely neglected by the government they often do not regard themselves as relevant (political) actors in the realms of food production and see their plots rather as a fall-back option in times of crisis, or for personal health benefits. Peasants are chronically suppressed not only by the recent introduction of restrictive laws and the utilization of repressive tactics of contention suppression by the state, but are further purposely kept in their poor status. Rural peasants feel a historically embedded fear and scepticism towards state institutions, conditioned through Soviet legacies and continued economic instability ever since independence. In avoiding a devastating loss (like being under scrutiny, arrested, or punished in any other way) they apply survival and resistance strategies inwards, into structures of mahallas, practicing traditions of nomadic culture as a safe space, and engaging in quiet forms of food production and self-sufficiency. Claiming (even if silently) their right to produce their own food and striving for autonomy can be considered political. However, independence and autonomy in food production are inherent to nomadic culture and therefore might not be perceived as a political act as such (see Vinthagen/Johansson 2020: 29).

Although difficult to assess without conducting ethnographic research and including peasant farmer's voices directly, it can be carefully stated that the political dimension in the strive for food sovereignty seems to be suppressed by a variety of intertwined factors and is not inherently absent. The previously raised question about what can be considered a political act in the first place reminds us, that a Western conception of 'political' as outspoken and loud may differ from the political understanding of non-Western non-democratic societies. Traditional forms of herding, religion, and culture are still practiced and very present in rural regions, even though increasingly under pressure by the encroaching capitalist expansion and additionally weakened by persisting Soviet legacies of mistrust and scepticism towards the state as well as individuals. These deeply entrenched structures, patterns, and traditions are rather obstructive in the formation of contentious collective action or bottom-up mobilization that is not only visible in times of crisis, but goes beyond an everyday struggle towards aiming to evoke change in the long-term. At the same time these everyday practices present alternative forms of contention which cannot be analysed or described with established theoretical constructs of Western academia alone.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this research was to investigate challenging factors for food sovereignty movement emergence in post-Soviet countries. I aimed to shed light on a chronically underrepresented region in media and academia, and possibly add one tile to the incomplete mosaic of food sovereignty studies in the post-socialist space. In order to obtain a locally informed understanding of civil society organization and to avoid overstretching the original and rather narrow definition of civil society, (Howard 2003; Babajanian et al. 2005; Larner 2011), an extension to the concept derived from culturally or historically Western countries, was necessary in order to increase its cosmopolitan relevance. For this endeavour, Kyrgyzstan was chosen as a case study to gain a comprehensive understanding of its national-specific patterns of contention and to add in gaining an understanding of forms of contention in post-socialist countries in general.

I applied a triangulated methodical approach, in which I conducted 20 explorative and formal semi-open expert interviews, supported by relevant literature from related research disciplines and media reports. The main outcomes of this research are six intertwined and overlapping factors challenging the emergence of food sovereignty movements in Kyrgyzstan. The (relative) absence of political opportunities or inability to perceive and make use of them is conditioned by the threat of increasingly authoritarian repression and suppression. Besides threats emanating from the state, its simultaneous weakness has in the past and present contributed to a weakening of civil society. Factors such as Soviet legacy, a persistent mistrust among the population towards individuals and state institutions, and the current cultural logic, in which outspoken collective action is not inherent, further contribute to the phenomenon. The profit-oriented focus of peasant farmer cooperatives, mainly pursued by international development agencies, so far prevent cooperatives to function as movements. Diverging perceptions in understanding food sovereignty between East and West further complicate a uniform familiarization and approach with the concept. Lastly, in avoiding further repression and economic marginalization, peasants have gotten accustomed to applying survival and resistance strategies towards structures of mahallas, practicing traditions of nomadic culture, and engaging in quiet forms of food production and self-sufficiency.

Kyrgyzstani people cannot be described as unresisting per se. In their history of occupation and colonization, a variety of forms of resistance against oppressors and colonizers can be observed, even if fragmentarily documented. The Soviet state largely eradicated people's revolutionary spirits, which are suppressed by strict authoritarian rule and long-lasting Soviet legacies until today. Nevertheless, political opportunities that arose towards the end of the Soviet Union were used and contention led to independence and decolonization. Today, mass mobilizations are mostly confined to urban centres and a result of elite-driven aims to exchange politicians instead of bottom-up displays of contention

and a desire for long-term changes. Against the assumption of peasant studies' belief in the inherent potential of peasants in forming a united class which fights for its interests, facilitated through transnational networks, for the case of Kyrgyzstan, Marx' thesis of peasant conservatism does not seem to be irrelevant. Kyrgyzstani peasant farmers have not united and formed their own class voice, yet. They remain fragmentarily scattered across the countryside, increasingly individualized and economically marginalized. Political protest they participated in was however elite-led and rather conducted with the peasantry, instead of initiated by the peasantry. Long-lasting effects on societal structures failed to materialize, revealing elites as primary beneficiaries. So far, NGOs have represented peasant's voices or what they perceive peasant voices to be. This suggests a shift from bottom-up class formation towards an institutionalized form of representation. NGOs seem to be class-blind in this regard, being tightly linked to governments or international institutions and rarely truly independent in their choice of actions.

As peasant farmers do not seem to perceive themselves as relevant political actors in their role as food producers, they simultaneously cannot perceive and/or use the few opportunities that are granted to them. However, contradictory to what Marx assumed, Kyrgyzstani peasants might not be absent from shaping revolutionary acts due to an inherent conservatism alone, but rather due to the structural and cultural conditions present. Today's societal patterns have been formed over centuries and remain deeply embedded in people's subconscious. An internalization of suppressive mechanism has made peasants accustomed to tolerating and accepting circumstances as they are. Even though rural peasant farmers largely share an identity and class interests, the withdrawal into private spheres of family, community, or neighbourhood networks has reinforced an increasing individualization, mistrust, and political alienation. Peasants do not feel critical urgency for changes, as they can usually live off their plots or kitchen gardens, relatively independent from centre politics. In that way, they appear inherently conservative, averse to changes and the formation of a class as powerful resistance tool. Deeply entrenched structures, patterns, and traditions relating to community networks, customary law, religion, self-sufficiency, and livestock herding are rather obstructive in the formation of long-lasting contentious collective action or bottom-up mobilization. At the same time these everyday practices present alternative forms of contention, expressed quietly and politically muted and therefore difficult to be recognized, underlining the necessity of more detailed research.

Even though „peasants do not fight for food sovereignty” (Interview AFC, pos. 207) in an outspoken and rebellious manner so far, the question arises, if the veiled food sovereignty spirit might have potential to transition or develop into a politically outspoken movement of some sort. Visser et al. (2015: 526) for their case of Russia claim that even if a 'loud' movement was to emerge, it might immediately be captured by the state for national interests and misappropriated towards nationalist, patriotic, or even right-wing cause. In light of the recent backlash of authoritarian rule, the emergence

of a rural food sovereignty movement in Kyrgyzstan seems rather unlikely. However, according to deprivation- or frustration-theories, social movements inevitably emerge when a certain point of discontent or intolerability is reached. In case people's foundation of living is acutely threatened, potential for mobilization might quickly rise and lead to expressions of contention, as can already be observed in Kyrgyzstan.

This research has shown that to dive deeper into exploring forms of everyday resistance and quiet food sovereignty, long-time ethnographic research is needed. Also, to avoid superficial explanations of current peasant motives towards contention, incorporating the voice of local peasants should be a priority in future research, additional to incorporating a broader range of actors, f.i. politicians or cooperative leaders. Invincible cultural obstacles become obvious not only in Central Asia, but also in Eastern Europe, China, or Russia, which are only partly represented in the network of La Vía Campesina, pointing to a post-socialist condition. Acknowledging that food sovereignty as a practice of everyday resistance is widespread in post-socialist countries can advance the concepts global reach and make the food sovereignty movement more inclusive, build new transnational linkages, and unite struggles of peasants in non-democratic settings. Food sovereignty is at the same time a slogan, paradigm, movement, practical policy, and utopian aspiration (Edelman 2014: 959f.). Its broadness should be used and extended to include quiet forms of contention as well, especially if TAMs are serious about their claims of global unity.

As of now, in Kyrgyzstan these quiet forms of resistance might be a lot more effective than full-blown 'loud' movements would be, because the state does not offer much space for social mobilizations. Peasants might not be able to perceive the political opportunities inherent to cooperatives as movements or transnational agrarian movements yet, but interview partners were confident that with time, perceptions and attitudes would change. They acknowledged that people power is not always a boon for democracy or necessarily has to drastically alter the political system, similar to Radnitz (2006: 229f.): „Change is slow and old habits die hard”.

7. Bibliography

- Abashin, S. (2015): Soviet Central Asia on the Periphery. *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 16(2), 359-374.
- Abazov, R. (2004): *Historical Dictionary of Kyrgyzstan*. Oxford et al.: The Scarecrow Press.
- Abu-Lughod, L. (1990): The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women. *American Ethnologist*, 17(1), 41-55.
- AFC (Agriculture & Food Consulting) and CAIConsulting (2020): *Livelihood Survey. Jergetal and Burgundu Communities, Jalal-Abad Province*. NaWi/SDC Project Kyrgyz Republic, Jalal-Abad and Bishkek.
- Agarwal, B. (2014): Food sovereignty, food security and democratic choice: Critical contradictions, difficult conciliations. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 1247-1268.
- Akram-Lodhi, H. and Kay, C. (2010a): Surveying the agrarian question (part 1): Unearthing foundations, exploring diversity. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(1), 177-202.
- Akram-Lodhi, H. and Kay, C. (2010b): Surveying the agrarian question (part 2): Current debates and beyond. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(2), 255-284.
- Akram-Lodhi, H. (2018): *What is Critical Agrarian Studies?* <https://roape.net/2018/03/28/what-is-critical-agrarian-studies/> [10.09.2024]
- Akram-Lodhi, H./ Dietz, K./ Engels, B./ McKay, B. (2021): *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Amnesty International (2024): *Kyrgyzstan at a Crossroads: Unprecedented Crackdown on Civil Society Threatens Country's Standing on Human Rights and International Cooperation*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/kyrgyzstan-unprecedented-crackdown-on-civil-society-threatens-human-rights-and-countrys-international-standing/> [10.09.2024]
- Anderson, J. (1999): *Kyrgyzstan. Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* London and New York: Routledge.
- Andrée, P./ Clark, J./ Levkoe, C./ Lowitt, K. (2019): *Civil Society and Social Movements in Food System Governance*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Anheier, H. and Salamon, L. (1999): *Global civil society: Dimensions of the nonprofit sector*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies.
- Babajanian, B./ Freizer, S./Stevens, D. (2005): Introduction: Civil society in Central Asia and the Caucasus. *Central Asian Survey*, 24(3), 209-224.
- Bassler, Y. (2012): *Die versunkene „Insel der Demokratie“. Eine historisch-institutionalistische Analyse des politischen System Kirgistans*. München: Münchener Beiträge zur Politikwissenschaft.
- Baur, N. and Blasius, J. (2019): *Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung – Ein Überblick*. In: Baur, N. and Blasius, J. (eds.) *Handbuch Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung* (2nd ed.). Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 1-28.
- Baxtiyorovich, J. (2023): The Dynamics of Non-Governmental Organizations and Their Development in Central Asia (In the Case of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan). *Central Asian Journal of Theoretical and Applied Sciences*, 4(6), 151-156.
- Bayaliev-Jailobaeva, K. (2014): A new look: professionalization of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan. *Central Asian Survey*, 33(3), 360-374.
- Beishenaly, N. and Dufays, F. (2023): Development of agricultural cooperatives in Kyrgyzstan: Who are the lead actors? *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, 94(4), 1173-1198.
- Beissinger, M.R. (2002): *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Bekebayeva, A./ Nurbayev, Z./ Nursultanova, L./ Azmukhanova, A./ Yerimbetova, K. (2019): Formation and development of women's non-governmental organisations in Central Asia. *Space and culture, India*, 6(5), 136-155.
- Ben Hassen, T. and El Bilali, H. (2022): Impacts of the Russia-Ukraine War on Global Food Security: Towards More Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems? *Foods*, 11(15), 2301.
- Berger-Kern, N./ Hetz, F./ Wagner, R./ Wolff, J. (2021): Defending Civic Space: Successful Resistance Against NGO Laws in Kenya and Kyrgyzstan. *Global Policy*, 12(5), 84-94.
- Bernstein, H. (2006): Is There an Agrarian Question in the 21st Century? *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 27(4), 449-460.
- Bernstein, H. (2009): V.I. Lenin and A.V. Chayanov: Looking back, looking forward. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(1), 55-81.
- Bernstein, H. (2020): Shanin, Chayanov and peasant studies of Russia and beyond. *Russian Peasant Studies*, 5(4), 32-38.
- Beyer, H. and Schnabel, A. (2017): *Theorien Sozialer Bewegungen. Eine Einführung*. Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag.
- Beyer, J. (2016): *The Force of Custom. Law and the Ordering of Everyday Life in Kyrgyzstan*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Biernacki, P. and Waldorf, D. (1981): Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. *Sociological Methods and Research*, 10(2), 141-163.
- Bilewicz, A. (2020): Beyond the modernisation paradigm: Elements of a food sovereignty discourse in farmer protest movements and alternative food networks in Poland. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 60(4), 754-772.
- Blatter, J./ Janning, F./ Wagemann, C. (2007): *Qualitative Politikanalyse. Eine Einführung in Forschungsansätze und Methoden*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Blom, C./ Steegeman, P./ Voss, C./ Sonneveld, B. (2022): Food in the cold: Exploring food security and sovereignty in Whitehorse, Yukon. *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, 81(1), 2025992.
- Borras Jr., S./ Edelman, M./ Kay, C. (2008): Transnational Agrarian Movements: Origins and Politics, Campaigns and Impact. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8(2 and 3), 169-204.
- Borras Jr., S. (2004): *La Vía Campesina: An Evolving Transnational Social Movement*. Transnational institute (TNI), Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
- Borras Jr., S. (2023): La Vía Campesina – transforming agrarian and knowledge politics, and co-constructing a field: a laudation. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 50(2), 691-724.
- Bródy, L./ Farkas, J./ Gál, I./ Milánkovics, K./ Nagy, E./ Sági, M. (2023): Local food as resistance: Integrating women's experiences in the Hungarian food sovereignty movement. *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, 9(4), 141-158.
- Brower, D. (1996): Kyrgyz Nomads and Russian Pioneers: Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Turkestan Revolt of 1916. *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 44(1), 41-53.
- Bustanov, A. (2015): *Soviet Orientalism and the Creation of Central Asian Nations*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Buxton, C. (2009): NGO networks in Central Asia and global civil society: Potentials and limitations. *Central Asian Survey*, 28(1), 43-58.
- Buxton, C. (2011): *The Struggle for Civil Society in Central Asia. Crisis and Transformation*. Sterling: Kumarian Press.
- Buzurtanova, M. (2022): *Choices of the post-Soviet Eurasian states amid globalization: Contextualizing the role of civil society in Central Asia*. In: Upadhyay, A. (ed.) *Transitions in Post-Soviet Eurasia. Polity, Identity and Strategic Choices*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 220-232.

- Calvário, R. and Desmarais, A. (2023): The feminist dimensions of food sovereignty: Insights from La Via Campesina's politics. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 50(2), 640-664.
- Chayanov, A. (1991): *The theory of peasant co-operatives*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Chen, X. and Moss, D. (2019): *Authoritarian Regimes and Social Movements*. In: Snow, D./ Soule, S./ Kriesi, H./ McCammon, H. (eds.) *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (2nd ed.). Hoboken and West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 666-681.
- Clapp, J./ Newell, P./ Brent, Z. (2017): The global political economy of climate change, agriculture and food systems. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 45(1), 80-88.
- Clapp, J. and Iskason, R. (2018): *Speculative Harvests. Financialization, Food, and Agriculture*. Rugby: Practical Action Publishing Ltd.
- Clapp, J./ Moseley, W./ Burlingame, B./ Termine, P. (2022): Viewpoint: The case for a six-dimensional food security framework. *Food Policy*, 106, 102164.
- Clay, E. (2003): *Food security: Concepts and measurement*. In: FAO (ed.) *Trade reforms and food security: conceptualizing the linkages*. Rome: FAO, 25-34.
- Coppenrath, F. and Baldassari, V. (2021): *Kyrgyzstan elects Sadyr Japarov and opts for presidential government*. <https://novastan.org/en/kyrgyzstan/kyrgyzstan-elects-sadyr-japarov-and-opts-for-presidential-government/> [10.09.2024]
- Costa Buranelli, F. (2020): Authoritarianism as an institution? The case of Central Asia. *International Studies Quarterly*, 64(4), 1005-1016.
- Curiel, O. (2021): *Constructing Feminist Methodologies from the Perspective of Decolonial Feminism*. In: Espinosa-Miñoso, Y./ Lugones, M./ Maldonado Torres, N. (eds.) *Decolonial feminism in Abya Yala: Caribbean, Meso, and South American contributions and challenges*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 43-59.
- Dall'Agnola, J. and Sharshenova, A. (2024): *Researching Central Asia. Navigating Positionality in the Field*. Cham: Springer.
- Dall'Agnola, J. and Sharshenova, A. (2024): *The Central Asian Research Setting: An Introduction*. In: Dall'Agnola, J. and Sharshenova, A. (eds.) *Researching Central Asia. Navigating Positionality in the Field*. Cham: Springer, 1-10.
- Danilov, V. (1989): The issue of alternatives and history of the collectivisation of Soviet agriculture. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 2(1), 1-13.
- Dannecker, P. and Englert, B. (2014): *Einleitung*. In: Dannecker, P. and Englert, B. (eds.) *Qualitative Methoden in der Entwicklungsforschung*. Wien: Mandelbaum, 9-19.
- Dannecker, P. and Vossemer, C. (2014): *Qualitative Interviews in der Entwicklungsforschung*. In: Dannecker, P. and Englert, B. (eds.) *Qualitative Methoden in der Entwicklungsforschung*. Wien: Mandelbaum, 153-175.
- Dannecker, P. and Heis, A. (2020): 'Transdisciplinarity': A framework of knowledge production in North-South partnerships? *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 13(2), 165-174.
- Dar, F. and Firdous, T. (2015): The Role of NGOs in the Socio-Political Development of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan: A Comparative Study. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 3(2), 213-230.
- Decolonialidad Europa (2013): *Charter of decolonial research ethics*. <https://decolonialityeurope.wixsite.com/decoloniality/charter-of-decolonial-research-ethics> [04.09.2024].
- Della Porta, D. and Diani, M. (2015): *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (2003): *Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research*. In: Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1-12.

- Denzin, N.K. (1989): *Interpretive Interactionism*. New Bury Park: Sage.
- Dergoussoff, D. and Churokova, G. (2015): *Perceptions about implications of the Eurasian Economic Union on food security in Kyrgyzstan*. Bishkek: Central Asian Studies Institute.
- Desmarais, A. (2002): The Vía Campesina: Consolidating an international peasant and farm movement. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 29(2), 91-124.
- Desmarais, A. (2008): The power of peasants: Reflections on the meanings of La Vía Campesina. *Journal of rural studies*, 24(2), 138-149.
- Dietz, K. and Engels, B. (2021): *Radical transformation: Creating alternatives to capitalism in the countryside*. In: Akram-Lodhi, H./ Dietz, K./ Engels, B./ McKay, B. (eds.) *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 666-675.
- Djanibekov, U./ Villamor, G./ Dzhakypbekova, K./ Chamberlain, J./ Xu, J. (2016): Adoption of sustainable land uses in post-Soviet Central Asia: The case for agroforestry. *Sustainability*, 8(10), 1030.
- Doolotkeldieva, A. (2015): *Social mobilizations, politics and society in contemporary Kyrgyzstan*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Exeter.
- Dörre, A. and Schütte, S. (2018): Potentials and Challenges for Development in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan. *Berlin Geographical Papers*, 48.
- Edelman, M. (2013): *What is a peasant? What are peasantries? A briefing paper on issues of definition*. Intergovernmental Working Group on a United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, Geneva.
- Edelman, M. (2014): Food sovereignty: Forgotten genealogies and future regulatory challenges. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 959-978.
- Edelman, M. (2024): *Peasant Politics of the Twenty-First Century: Transnational Social Movement and Agrarian Change*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Edelman, M. and Borras Jr., S. (2016): *Political Dynamics of Transnational Agrarian Movements*. Rugby: Practical Action Publishing Ltd.
- Edelman, M./ Weis, T./ Baviskar, A./ Borras Jr, S.M./ Holt-Giménez, E./ Kandiyoti, D./ Woford, W. (2014): Introduction: critical perspectives on food sovereignty. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 911-931.
- Edelman, M. and Woford, W. (2017): Critical Agrarian Studies in Theory and Practice. *Antipode*, 49(4), 959-976.
- Eisinger, P. (1973): The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities. *The American Political Science Review*, 67(1), 11-28.
- Ercilasun, G.K. (2017): *Famine in Kyrgyzstan in the 1930s and 1940s*. In: Dadabaev, T. and Komatsu, H. (eds.) *Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan Life and Politics during the Soviet Era*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 39-52.
- Fairbairn, M. (2010): *Framing resistance: International food regimes and the roots of food sovereignty*. In: Wittman, H./ Desmarais, A./ Wiebe, N. (eds.) *Food sovereignty: Reconnecting food, nature & community*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 15-32.
- FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund), WFP (World Food Programme), WHO (World Health Organization) (2024): *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024 – Financing to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms*. Rome: FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd1254en> [10.09.2024].
- Féaux de la Croix, J. and Penati, B. (2024): *Environmental Humanities in Central Asia: Relations between Extraction and Interdependence*. Taylor & Francis. <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/75839> [09.09.2024]
- Féaux de la Croix, J. and Reeves, M. (2023): *The Central Asian World*. London and New York: Routledge.

- Fendrychová, L. and Jehlička, P. (2018): Revealing the hidden geography of alternative food networks: The travelling concept of farmers' markets. *Geoforum*, 95, 1-10.
- Ferguson, C./ Green, K./ Swanson, S. (2022): Indigenous food sovereignty is constrained by „time imperialism“. *Geoforum*, 133, 20-31.
- Ferret, C. (2023): *Changing pastoral livelihoods*. In: Féaux de la Croix, J. and Reeves, M. (eds.) *The Central Asian World*. London and New York: Routledge, 482-498.
- Figueroa-Helland, L./ Thomas, C./ Aguilera, A. P. (2018): Decolonizing food systems: Food sovereignty, indigenous revitalization, and agroecology as counter-hegemonic movements. *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, 17(1-2), 173-201.
- Finkel, E. and Brudny, Y. (2012): No more colour! Authoritarian regimes and colour revolutions in Eurasia. *Democratization*, 19(1), 1-14.
- Flick, U. (2019): *Gütekriterien qualitativer Sozialforschung*. In: Baur, N. and Blasius, J. (eds.) *Handbuch Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung* (2nd ed.). Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 473-488.
- Flick, U. (2021): *Doing Interview Research. The Essential How to Guide*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Foltz, L. (2022): *Saving Food in Bulgaria: Practicing Food Sovereignty in Everyday Life*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Oregon.
- Foucault, M. (1998): *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. London: Penguin.
- Freedom House (2023): *Freedom in the World 2023: Kyrgyzstan*. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-world/2023> [10.09.2024]
- Freedom House (2024): *Nations in Transit: Kyrgyzstan*. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/nations-transit/2024> [09.09.2024]
- Friedman, H. (2005): From Colonialism to Green Capitalism: Social Movements and Emergence of Food Regimes. *Research in Rural Sociology and Development*, 11, 227-264.
- Friedmann, H. (2019): The Awkward Class: A foundation for peasant studies. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 46(5), 1096-1105.
- Friedman, H. (2021): *Origins of peasant studies*. In: Akram-Lodhi, H./ Dietz, K./ Engels, B./ McKay, B. (eds.) *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 15-24.
- Froschauer, U. and Lueger, M. (2003): *Das qualitative Interview*. Wien: Facultas.
- Galinsky, A./ Wang, C./ Bodenhausen, G. (2013): The Reappropriation of Stigmatizing Labels: The Reciprocal Relationship Between Power and Self-Labeling. *Psychological Science*, 24(10), 2020-2029.
- Gamson, W. and Meyer, D. (1996): *Framing political opportunity*. In: McAdam, D./ McCarthy, J./ Zald, M. (eds.) *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 275-290.
- Gel'man, V. (2003): Post-Soviet Transitions and Democratization: Towards Theory Building. *Democratization*, 10, 87-104.
- Giffen, J./ Earle, L./ Buxton, C. (2005): *The Development of Civil Society in Central Asia*. Oxford: Intrac.
- Gille, Z. (2010): Is there a Global Postsocialist Condition? *Global Society*, 24(1), 9-30.
- Gioia, P. and von Redecker, S. (2018): *Queerfeldein*. Zeitschrift Luxemburg. <https://zeitschrift-luxemburg.de/artikel/queerfeldein/> [10.09.2024]
- Giordano, C. and Kostova, D. (2002): *The social production of mistrust*. In: Hann, C. (ed.) *Postsocialism. Ideals, ideologies and practices in Eurasia*. London: Routledge, 74-92.
- Giovarelli, R. and Akmatova, C. (2002): *Local institutions that enforce customary law in the Kyrgyz Republic and their impact on women's rights*. Agriculture & Rural Development e-paper. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

- Goldstone, J. and Tilly, C. (2001): *Threat (and Opportunity): Popular Action and State Response in the Dynamics of Contentious Action*. In: Tilly, C./ McAdam, D./ Perry, E./ Goldstone, J./ Aminzade, R./ Tarrow, S./ Sewell, W. (eds.) *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 179-194.
- Gordillo, G. (2013): *Food Security and Sovereignty. Base Document for Discussion*. FAO. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/61f3f359-669c-40ff-88c6-b39b48135f3a/content> [10.09.2024]
- Gorlach, K./ Losták, M./ Mooney, P. (2008): Agriculture, communities, and new social movements: East European ruralities in the process of restructuring. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 24, 161-171.
- Görlich, W. and Habermann, F. (2018): *Transnationale soziale Bewegungen: Die Reproduktion von Ungleichheit in Theorien und Praktiken globaler zivilgesellschaftlicher Politik*. In: Ataç, I./ Kraler, A./ Schaffar, W./ Ziai, A. (eds.) *Politik und Peripherie. Eine politikwissenschaftliche Einführung*. Wien: Mandelbaum Verlag, 321-333.
- Grosfoguel, R. (2013): The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 6(1), 73-90.
- Guardiola, J. and García-Quero, F. (2014): Nature & Buen Vivir in Ecuador: The battle between conservation and extraction. *Alternautas*, 1(1), 100-107.
- Hajdu, A. and Mamonova, N. (2020): Prospects of agrarian populism and food sovereignty movement in post-socialist Romania. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 60(4), 880-904.
- Hanks, R. (2005): *Central Asia: A global studies handbook*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2004): *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: The Penguin Press.
- Helfferrich, C. (2009): *Die Qualität qualitativer Daten. Manual für die Durchführung qualitativer Interviews* (3rd ed.). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Hering, L. and Jungmann, R. (2019): *Einzelfallanalyse*. In: Baur, N. and Blasius, J. (eds.) *Handbuch Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung* (2nd ed.). Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 619-632.
- Heuer, V. and Hierman, B. (2022): Manhandling and mediation: Unpacking the repressive repertoire in Kazakhstan's 2016 anti-land reform protests. *Asian Security*, 18(3), 239-256.
- Hoare, J. (2021): *Gender, Activism, and International Development Intervention in Kyrgyzstan*. Leiden: Brill.
- Hofman, I. and Visser, O. (2014): *Geographies of transition: The political and geographical factors of agrarian change in Tajikistan*. Discussion Paper, No. 151. Halle: Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO).
- Hofman, I. (2018): Soft budgets and elastic debt: farm liabilities in the agrarian political economy of post-Soviet Tajikistan. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 45(7), 1360-1381.
- Hollander, J. and Einwohner, R. (2004): Conceptualizing Resistance. *Sociological Forum*, 19(4), 533-554.
- Holt-Giménez, E. (2006): *Campesino a campesino: voices from Latin America's farmer to farmer movement for sustainable agriculture*. Oakland: Food first books.
- Holt-Giménez, E./ Bunch, R./ Irán Vasquez, J./ Wilson, J./ Pimbert, M./ Boukary, B./ Kneen, C. (2010): Linking farmers' movements for advocacy and practice. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(1), 203-236.
- Holt-Giménez, E. and Shattuck, A. (2011): Food crises, food regimes and food movements: Rumbblings of reform or tides of transformation? *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 109-144.
- Howard, M. (2003): *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Hu, Z./ Zhang, Q./ Donaldson, J. (2023): Why do farmers' cooperatives fail in a market economy? Rediscovering Chayanov with the Chinese experience. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 50(7), 2611-2641.
- Human Rights Watch (2024): *Kyrgyzstan. Events of 2023*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/kyrgyzstan> [10.09.2024]
- Iashina E./ Evgrafova, L./ Dzhancharova, G./ Ukolova, A./ Kovaleva, E. (2023): Analysis of the dynamics of food security in the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union. *Frontiers of Sustainable Food Systems*, 7, 1114469.
- Imanaliyeva, A. (2023): *Kyrgyzstan: Flag-tinkering, another Japarov nation-building exercise*. <https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstan-flag-tinkering-another-japarov-nation-building-exercise> [10.09.2024]
- Iniguez de Heredia, M. (2017): *Everyday Resistance, Peacebuilding and State-making: Insights from „Africa’s World War”*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Isgren, E. (2018): ‘If the change is going to happen it's not by us’: Exploring the role of NGOs in the politicization of Ugandan agriculture. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 63, 180-189.
- Iskender, B. (2024): *Kyrgyzstan Blocks TikTok*. <https://www.occrp.org/en/news/kyrgyzstan-blocks-tiktok> [10.09.2024]
- Ismailbekova, A. and Almazbekova, Z. (2024): Under the Pretence of Tradition: Media Repression in Kyrgyzstan. *Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS)*, 9. <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-spotlight/under-the-pretence-of-tradition-media-repression-in-kyrgyzstan> [10.09.2024]
- Ivanov, Y. (2022): *Revolutions in Kyrgyzstan*. In: Goldstone, J./ Grinin, L./ Korotayev, A. (eds.) *Handbook of Revolutions in the 21st Century. Societies and Political Orders in Transition*. Cham: Springer Nature, 517-548.
- Jacquesson, S. (2010): Reforming pastoral land use in Kyrgyzstan: From clan and custom to self-government and tradition. *Central Asian Survey*, 29(1), 103-118.
- Jacquesson, S. (2023): *Clans as heritage communities in Kyrgyzstan*. In: Féaux de la Croix, J. and Reeves, M. (eds.) *The Central Asian World*. London and New York: Routledge, 658-671.
- Japp, K. (1984): Selbsterzeugung oder Fremdverschulden: Thesen zum Rationalismus in den Theorien sozialer Bewegungen. *Soziale Welt*, 313-329.
- Jardine, B./ Khashimov, S./ Lemon, E./ Kyzy, A. (2022): *Mapping Patterns of Dissent in Eurasia: Introducing the Central Asia Protest Tracker*. The Oxus Society. <https://oxusociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2020-09-28-mapping-patterns-of-dissent-in-eurasia.pdf> [10.09.2024]
- Jarosz, L. (2014): Comparing food security and food sovereignty discourses. *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 4(2), 168-181.
- Jehlička, P./ Daněk, P./ Vávra, J. (2019): Rethinking resilience: Home gardening, food sharing and everyday resistance. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 40(4), 511-527.
- JKK (Союз кооперативов Кыргызстана [Union of Cooperatives of Kyrgyzstan]) (n.d.): *Список членов СКК*. <https://cooperativ.kg/spisok-chlenov-skk/> [10.09.2024]
- Johansson, A. and Vinthagen, S. (2014): Dimensions of Everyday Resistance: An Analytical Framework. *Critical Sociology*, 1-19.
- Johansson, A. and Vinthagen, S. (2020): *Conceptualizing ‘Everyday Resistance’. A Transdisciplinary Approach*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Johnston, H. (2015): „*The Game’s Afoot*”. *Social Movements in Authoritarian States*. In: Della Porta, D. and Diani, M. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 619-633.
- Kandiyoti, D. (2002): *How far do analyses of postsocialism travel? The case of Central Asia*. In: Hann, C. (ed.) *Postsocialism. Ideals, ideologies and practices in Eurasia*. London: Routledge, 238-257.

- Karpazli, E. (2016): *Kyrgyzstan still burying the past 100 years after Urkun*.
<https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/kyrgyzstan-still-burying-the-past-100-years-after-urkun-1833>
 [04.09.2024]
- Katz, C. (1992): Marx on the Peasantry: Class in Itself or Class in Struggle? *The Review of Politics*, 54(1), 50-71.
- Kautsky, K. (1988[1899]): *The Agrarian Question*, 2 vol. Translated by Pete Burgess. London: Zwan Publications.
- Kern, T. (2008): *Soziale Bewegungen. Ursachen, Wirkungen, Mechanismen*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 175-187.
- Khalid, A. (2021): *Central Asia: A New History from the Imperial Conquests to the Present*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Kim, H. (2018): Contending Visions of Local Agriculture in a Non-Agricultural State: Food Sovereignty in Singapore. *Journal of Globalization Studies*, 9(2), 92-106.
- Kloop (2024): *Рейд против «прозападной» молодежи. Как силовики во время обысков «учили жизни» бишкекских тусовщиков*. <https://kloop.kg/blog/2024/04/17/rejd-protiv-prozapadnoj-molodezhi-kak-siloviki-vo-vremya-obyskov-uchili-zhizni-bishkekских-tusovshhikov/> [10.09.2024]
- Knox, C. and Sharipova, D. (2024a): Consultative Authoritarianism in Central Asia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 1-25.
- Knox, C. and Sharipova, D. (2024b): Authoritarianism and civil society in Central Asia: Shifting boundaries. *Journal of Civil Society*, 10.1080/17448689.2024.2324874.
- Kozhogulova, V./ Mardaliev, L./ Kozhomkulova, A./ Sheralieva, Z. (2023): *Sustainable development of the agricultural sector of Kyrgyzstan in an integrated environment*. AIP Conference Proceedings, 2612. <https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0113043> [09.09.2024]
- Kriesi, H. (1991): *The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements: Its Impact on Their Mobilization*. Discussion Paper FS III 91-103, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin.
- Kriesi, H./ Koopmans, R./ Duyvendak, J./ Giugni, M. (1995): New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis. *Contemporary Sociology*, 26.
- Kuckartz, U. and Rädiker, S. (2024): *Fokussierte Interviewanalyse mit MAXQDA. Schritt für Schritt* (2nd ed.). Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien.
- Kurmanov, B. (2024): *Digital Citizen Activism in Central Asia: Beyond Contestation and Cooperation*. In: Mihr, A. and Pierobon, C. (eds.) *Polarization, Shifting Borders and Liquid Governance. Studies on Transformation and Development in the OSCE Region*. Cham: Springer, 155-176.
- Kyrgyz Government (2018): *National Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2018-2040*. Bishkek. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/kyr203822.pdf> [10.09.2024]
- Lakhtikova, A./ Brintlinger, A./ Glushchenko, I. (2019): *Seasoned Socialism. Gender and Food in Late Soviet Everyday Life*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lang, S. (2022): *Ngo-ization of Civil Society*. In: Gonçalves, G. and Oliveira, E. (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Nonprofit Communication*. New York: Routledge, 32-38.
- Larner, W. (2011): *Economic geographies as situated knowledges*. In: Pollard, J./ McEwan, C./ Hughes, A. (eds.) *Postcolonial Economies: Rethinking Material Lives*. London and New York: Zed Books, 81-106.
- Le Mons Walker, K. (2008): From Covert to Overt: Everyday Peasant Politics in China and the Implications for Transnational Agrarian Movements. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8(2 and 3), 462-488.
- Lenin, V. (1899): *The Development of Capitalism in Russia: The Process of the Formation of a Home Market for Large-Scale Industry*. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1899/devel/> [10.09.2024]
- Lerman, Z. (2013): Cooperative development in Central Asia. *Policy Studies on Rural Transition*, 4. FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.

- Lerman, Z. and Sedik, D. (2018): Transition to smallholder agriculture in Central Asia. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 18(4), 904-912.
- Levine, J./ Isaeva, A./ Eddy, I./ Foggin, M./ Gergel, S./ Hagerman, S./ Zerriffi, H. (2017): A cognitive approach to the post-Soviet Central Asian pasture puzzle: New data from Kyrgyzstan. *Regional Environmental Change*, 17, 941-947.
- Lilja, M. (2022): The definition of resistance. *Journal of Political Power*, 15(2), 202-220.
- Lindqvist, B. (2015): *The Playfulness of Resistance: Articulations of Urban Grassroots Activism in Post-Socialist Vilnius*. In: Jacobsson, K. (ed.) *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 33-54.
- Lipsky, M. (1968): Protest as a Political Resource. *The American Political Science Review*, 62(4), 1144-1158.
- Liu, M. (2023): *Theorizing Central Asian neighbourhoods as social interdependence, state encounter, and narrative*. In: Féaux de la Croix, J. and Reeves, M. (eds.): *The Central Asian World*. London and New York: Routledge, 209-221.
- Loring, B. (2008): Rural Dynamics and Peasant Resistance in Southern Kyrgyzstan, 1929-1930. *Cahiers du monde russe*, 49(1), 183-210.
- Lottholz, P. (2017): *Post-liberal statebuilding in Central Asia: A decolonial perspective on community security practices and imaginaries of social order in Kyrgyzstan*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Birmingham.
- Lottholz, P. (2018): *Building Secure Communities in a Post-Liberal Age: A View from Kyrgyzstan*. <https://voicesoncentralasia.org/building-secure-communities-in-a-post-liberal-age-a-view-from-kyrgyzstan/> [10.09.2024]
- LVC (La Vía Campesina) (1996): *Via Campesina - The Right to Produce and Access to Land. Food Sovereignty: A Future without Hunger*. <http://safsc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/1996-Declaration-of-Food-Sovereignty.pdf> [10.09.2024]
- LVC (La Vía Campesina) (2009): *Declaration of Rights of Peasants - Women and Men*. <https://viacampesina.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2011/03/Declaration-of-rights-of-peasants-2009.pdf> [10.09.2024]
- LVC (La Vía Campesina) (n.d. a): *About La Vía Campesina*. <https://viacampesina.org/en/international-peasants-voice/> [10.09.2024]
- LVC (La Vía Campesina) (n.d. b): *La Vía Campesina - Regions and Member Details*. <https://viacampesina.org/en/members-list/> [23.09.2024]
- Mack, G. and Surina, A. (2005): *Food Culture in Russia And Central Asia*. London: Greenwood Press.
- Maksimov, A. and Ten, A. (2020): Agricultural Cooperation in The Kyrgyz Republic: Potential, Problems and Prospects. *Amazonia Investiga*, 9(27), 552-559.
- Malloy, E. (2020): *Memoir – Kyrgyzstan in a time of hunger*. <https://eurasianet.org/memoir-kyrgyzstan-in-a-time-of-hunger> [10.09.2024]
- Malseed, K. (2008): Where There is No Movement: Local Resistance and the Potential for Solidarity. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8(2 and 3), 489-514.
- Mamdani, M. (1995): The politics of democratic reform in contemporary Uganda. *East African Journal of Peace and Human Rights*, 2(1), 91-101.
- Mamonova, N. (2018): Patriotism and Food Sovereignty: Changes in the Social Imaginary of Small-Scale Farming in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 58(1), 190-212.
- Mamonova, N. (2023): Food sovereignty and solidarity initiatives in rural Ukraine during the war. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 50(1), 47-66.

- Mamonova, N./ Visser, O./ Spoor, M. (2013): *The re-emerging peasantry in Russia: 'peasants-against-their-own-will', 'summertime peasants' and 'peasant-farmers'*. XXV European Society of Rural Sociology (ESRS) Congress 'Rural Resilience and Vulnerability: The Rural as Locus of Solidarity and Conflict in Times of Crisis', 29 July-1 August 2013. Florence, Italy.
- Mamonova, N. and Visser, O. (2014): State marionettes, phantom organisations, or genuine movements? The paradoxical emergence of rural social movements in post-socialist Russia. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(4), 491-516.
- Mandel, R. (2002): *Seeding civil society*. In: Hann, C. (ed.) Postsocialism. Ideals, ideologies and practices in Eurasia. London: Routledge, 279-296.
- Markowitz, L. and Radnitz, S. (2021): Studying states and regimes in Central Asia: Contributions to comparative politics and future challenges. *Central Asian Survey*, 40(4), 576-591.
- Marx, K. (1964): *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*. Translated by J. Cohen (ed.) and with an Introduction by Hobsbawm, E. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Marx, K. (1978 [1852]): *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press.
- Mayring, P. (2002): *Einführung in die Qualitative Sozialforschung*. Weinheim and Basel: Beltz.
- McAdam, D. (1982): *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McAdam, D. (1996): *Conceptual origins, problems, future directions*. In: McAdam, D./ McCarthy, J./ Zald, M. (eds.) Comparative perspectives on social movements. Political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 23-40.
- McAdam, D./ McCarthy, J./ Zald, M. (1996): *Comparative perspectives on social movements. Political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McAdam, D./ Tarrow, S./ Tilly, C. (2001): *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McDowell, C. (2023): *Kyrgyzstan and the Legacies of Collectivisation: Under the Soviet Shadow*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- McEwan, C. (2008): *Postcolonialism and Development*. London and New York: Routledge.
- McFadyen, J. and Rankin, J. (2016): The Role of Gatekeepers in Research: Learning from Reflexivity and Reflection. *Journal of Nursing and Health Care*, 4(1), 82-88.
- McGlinchey, E. (2009): *Central Asian protest movements. Social forces or state resources?* In: Wooden, A. and Stefes, C. (eds.) The Politics of Transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus. London: Routledge, 124-138.
- Meuser, M. and Nagel, U. (1991): *ExpertInneninterviews - vielfach erprobt, wenig bedacht: ein Beitrag zur qualitativen Methodendiskussion*. In: Garz, D. and Kraimer, K. (eds.) Qualitativ-empirische Sozialforschung: Konzepte, Methoden, Analysen. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 441-471.
- Meyer, C. (2001): A Case in Case Study Methodology. *Field Methods*, 13(4), 329-352.
- Meyer, D. (2004): Protest and Political Opportunities. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 30, 125-145.
- Meyer, D. and Minkoff, D. (2004): Conceptualizing Political Opportunity. *Social Forces*, 82(4), 1457-1492.
- Mihr, A./ Sorbello, P./ Weiffen, B. (2023): *Securitization and Democracy in Eurasia: Transformation and Development in the OSCE Region*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-16659-4>.
- Mogilevskii R., Abdrazakova N., Bolotbekova A., Chalbasova S., Dzhumaeva S., Tilekeyev K. (2017): *The outcomes of 25 years of agricultural reforms in Kyrgyzstan*. Discussion Paper, No. 162. Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO).

- Moore, D. (2001): Is the post-in postcolonial the post-in post-Soviet? Toward a global postcolonial critique. *PMLA*, 116(1), 111-128.
- Moreda, T. (2015): Listening to their silence? The political reaction of affected communities to large-scale land acquisitions: insights from Ethiopia. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 42(3 and 4), 517-539.
- Morrison, A. (2015): Peasant settlers and the 'civilizing mission' in Russian Turkestan, 1865-1917. *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History*, 43(3), 387-417.
- Mortimer, G. (2024): Growing revolt: What is behind Europe's farmers' protests? *The Spectator*, 3, 20-21.
- Nicholson, P. and Borrás Jr, S. (2023): It wasn't an intellectual construction: the founding of La Via Campesina, achievements and challenges – a conversation. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 50(2), 610-626.
- Nourzhanov, K. (2015): Bandits, warlords, national heroes: interpretations of the Basmachi movement in Tajikistan. *Central Asian Survey*, 34(2), 177-189.
- Nyéleni (2007): *Declaration of Nyéleni*. <https://nyeleni.org/IMG/pdf/DeclNyeleni-en.pdf> [10.09.2024]
- Nyéleni (n.d.): *Contact people*. <https://nyeleni-eca.net/index.php/map> [26.09.2024]
- O'Brien, K. (1996): Rightful Resistance. *World Politics*, 49(1), 31-55.
- OSCE/ODIHR (Venice Commission) (2008): *Opinion on the Amendments to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on the Right of Citizens to Assemble Peaceably, Without Weapons, to Freely Hold Rallies and Demonstrations*. https://w.legislationline.org/sites/default/files/documents/10/111_FoA_KYR_2008_eng.pdf [10.09.2024]
- Otunchieva, A./ Borbodoev, J./ Ploeger, A. (2021): The Transformation of Food Culture on the Case of Kyrgyz Nomads – A Historical Overview. *Sustainability*, 13, 8371.
- Pallot, J. and Nefedova, T (2007): *Russia's Unknown Agriculture: Household Production in Post-Socialist Rural Russia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pannier, B. (2024): *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy sinks into Authoritarianism*. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/04/kyrgyzstan-central-asias-island-of-democracy-sinks-into-authoritarianism/> [20.09.2024]
- Patel, R. (2009): Food Sovereignty. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(3), 663-706.
- Perez-Vitoria, S. (2005): *Les paysans son de retour*. Arles: Actes Sud.
- Perry, C. (2011): *Dried, Frozen and Rotten. Food preservation in Siberia and Central Asia*. In: Saberi, H. (ed.) *Cured, Fermented and Smoked Foods*. Blackawton: Prospect Books, 240-247.
- Petrova, T. and Tarrow, S. (2007): Transactional and Participatory Activism in the Emerging European Polity. The Puzzle of East-Central Europe. *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(1), 74-94.
- Petrović, S. (2019): Food Sovereignty in Serbian Context. Food Production System Critical Analysis Framework. *Ama - Center for the Care of People and Nature*.
- Pierobon, C. (2018): The Development of Civil Society in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. An Analysis of the National and International Context. *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 54, 107-133.
- Pungas, L. (2023): *Dachas and food democracy - What makes a (good) food citizen?* *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 7, 1052298.
- Pungas, L. (2024): *Dachas for Future? Beispiele aus dem Osten für ein gutes Leben für alle*. Doctoral Dissertation, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena.
- Putz, C. (2024): *Kyrgyz 'Mass Media' Law Withdrawn by Presidential Request*. <https://thediomat.com/2024/03/kyrgyz-mass-media-law-withdrawn-by-presidential-request/> [10.09.2024]

- Radnitz, S. (2006): *It Takes More than a Village: Mobilization, Networks, and the State in Central Asia*. Doctoral Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Radnitz, S. (2010): *Weapons of the Wealthy. Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Reichertz, J. (2019): *Empirische Sozialforschung und soziologische Theorie*. In: Baur, N. and Blasius, J. (eds.) *Handbuch Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung* (2nd ed.). Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 31-48.
- Rickleton, C. (2023a): *Less Flower, More Sun? President-Backed Initiative to Change Flag Causes Outcry in Kyrgyzstan*. <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-president-change-flag-outcry/32711880.html> [10.09.2024]
- Rickleton, C. (2023b): «Ещё один удар по верховенству закона». Жапаров получил право вмешиваться в решения Конституционного суда. <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/32622271.html> [10.09.2024]
- Rivetti, P. (2017): Methodology Matters in Iran Researching Social Movements in Authoritarian Contexts. *Anthropology of the Middle East*, 12(1), 71-82.
- Rootes, C. (1999): Political Opportunity Structures - promise, problems and prospects. *La Lettre de la Maison Française d'Oxford*, 10, 71-93.
- Roth, R. (2001): *NGO und transnationale soziale Bewegungen: Akteure einer „Weltzivilgesellschaft“?* In: Brand, U./ Demirović, A./ Görg, C./ Hirsch, J. (eds.) *NGOs in der Transformation des Staates*. Münster: Westphälisches Dampfboot, 43-63.
- Ruffin, H. and Waugh, D. (1999): *Civil Society in Central Asia*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.
- Rywwin, M. (1981): Dissent in Soviet Central Asia. *Nationalities Papers*, IX(1), 27-34.
- Sahadeo, J. and Zanca, R. (2007): *Everyday Life in Central Asia Past and Present*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles et al.: Sage.
- Samson, D./ Cely-Santos, M./ Gemmill-Herren, B./ Babin, N./ Bernhart, A./ Bezner Kerr, R./ Blesh, J./ Bowness, E./ Feldman, M./ Gonçalves, A./ James, D./ Kerssen, T./ Klassen, S./ Wezel, A./ Wittman, H. (2021): Food Sovereignty and Rights-Based Approaches Strengthen Food Security and Nutrition Across the Globe: A Systematic Review. *Frontier in Sustainable Food Systems*, 5, 686492.
- Sampson, S. (2002): *Beyond transition: rethinking elite configurations in the Balkans*. In: Hann, C. (ed.) *Postsocialism. Ideals, ideologies and practices in Eurasia*. London: Routledge, 297-316.
- Satybaldieva, E. (2015): Political Capital, Everyday Politics and Moral Obligations: Understanding the Political Strategies of Various Elites and the Poor in Kyrgyzstan. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 67(3), 370-387.
- Scoones, I. (2021): Pastoralists and peasants: Perspectives on agrarian change. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 48(1), 1-47.
- Scott, C. and Chi, G. (2022): *Case: Food in Kyrgyzstan*. In: Szanto, D./ Di Battista, A./ Knezevic, I. (eds.) *Food Studies. Matter, Meaning, Movement*. Ottawa: Food Studies Press, 201-212.
- Scott, J. (1985): *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Scott, J. (2009): *The Art of Not Being Governed. An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Scott, J. (2020): *Foreword*. In: Johansson, A. and Vinthagen, S. (eds.) *Conceptualizing 'Everyday Resistance'. A Transdisciplinary Approach*. New York and London: Routledge, ix-xi.
- Sevilla Guzmán, E. and Martínez-Alier, J. (2006): *New rural social movements and agroecology*. In: Cloke, P./ Marsden, T./ Mooney, P. (eds.) *The Handbook of Rural Studies*. London: Sage, 472-484.

- Shagaida, N. and Uzun, V. (2015): Food security: Problems of assessing. *Voprosy ekonomiki*, 5.
- Shanin, T. (1972): *The Awkward Class. Political Sociology of Peasantry in a Developing Society: Russia 1910-1925*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sheranova, A. and Uraimov, M. (2023): The Declining Role of Political Elites in Revolutions in Post-communist Eurasia: The October Revolution in Kyrgyzstan. *Central Asian affairs*, 10(2), 183-208.
- Shkaruba, A./ Skryhan, H./ Likhacheva, O./ Kireyeu, V./ Katona, A./ Shyrokostup, S./ Sepp, K. (2021): Environmental drivers and sustainable transition of dachas in Eastern Europe: An analytical overview. *Land Use Policy*, 100, 104887.
- Sidle, R./ Khan, A./ Caiserman, A./ Qadamov, A./ Khojazoda, Z. (2023): Food security in high mountains of Central Asia: A broader perspective. *BioScience*, 73(5), 347-363.
- Siebert, A. (2020): Transforming urban food systems in South Africa: Unfolding food sovereignty in the city. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47(2), 401-419.
- Skocpol, T. (1982): Review: What Makes Peasants Revolutionary? *Comparative Politics*, 14(3), 351-375.
- Smith, J. and Jehlička, P. (2013): Quiet sustainability: Fertile lessons from Europe's productive gardeners. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 32, 148-157.
- Smith, J./ Kostecký, T./ Jehlička, P. (2015): Quietly does it: Questioning assumptions about class, sustainability and consumption. *Geoforum*, 67, 223-232.
- Snow, D./ Soule, S./ Kriesi, H./ McCammon, H. (2019): *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (2nd ed.). Hoboken and West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Sorbello, P. (2024): 'Swiping Right'—The Ethics of Using Tinder as a Recruitment Tool in the Field. In: Dall'Agnola, J. and Sharshenova, A. (eds.) *Researching Central Asia. Navigating Positionality in the Field*. Cham: Springer, 27-36.
- Spoor, M. (2012): Agrarian Reform and Transition: What can we learn from 'the East'? *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 39(1), 175-194.
- Stake, R. (2005): *Qualitative Case Studies*. In: Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage, 443-466.
- Steimann, B. (2011): *Making a Living in Uncertainty: Agro-pastoral Livelihoods and Institutional Transformations in Post-Socialist Rural Kyrgyzstan*. Human Geography Series, 26, Zürich and Bishkek: University of Zürich.
- Talant, B. (2021): *Kyrgyz parliament sneaks through „fake news” law with president's blessing. A local watchdog says the bill „introduces censorship.”* <https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyz-parliament-sneaks-through-fake-news-law-with-presidents-blessing> [10.09.2024]
- Tarrow, S. (2022): *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (4th ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tauger, M. (2004): Soviet Peasants and Collectivization, 1930-39: Resistance and Adaptation. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 31(3 and 4), 427-456.
- The Oxus Society (2020): *Central Asian Protest Tracker*. <https://oxussociety.org/viz/protest-tracker/> [09.09.2024]
- Tilekeyev, K./ Onah, M./ Iamshchikova, M./ Enikeeva, Z. (2023): *The role of food systems in the transition of diets and prevention of malnutrition in Kyrgyzstan*. In: Fang, C. and Gurinović, M. (eds.) *Sustainable and nutrition-sensitive food systems for healthy diets and prevention of malnutrition in Europe and Central Asia*. Budapest: FAO, 209-246.
- Tlostanova, M. (2010): *Gender Epistemologies and Eurasian Borderlands*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Tlostanova, M. (2015): Can the Post-Soviet Think? Intersections. *East European Journal of Society and Politics*, 1(2), 38-58.

- Turgunbaeva, A. and Pikulicka-Wilczewska, A. (2024): *Kyrgyzstan, an 'unprecedented crackdown' on free press raises alarm*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/7/18/in-kyrgyzstan-an-unprecedented-crackdown-on-free-press-raises-alarm> [10.09.2024]
- Trauger, A. (2015): *Food Sovereignty in International Context. Discourse, politics and practice of place*. London and New York: Routledge.
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (2023): *Advancing Digital Transformation in Kyrgyzstan: A Joint Effort for Sustainable Development*. <https://www.undp.org/kyrgyzstan/press-releases/advancing-digital-transformation-kyrgyzstan-joint-effort-sustainable-development> [04.09.2024].
- Upadhyay, A. (2022): *Transitions in Post-Soviet Eurasia. Polity, Identity and Strategic Choices*. London and New York: Routledge.
- van der Ploeg, J. (2013): *Peasants' and the Art of Farming. A Chayanovian Manifesto*. Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.
- van der Ploeg, J. (2021): *Peasants*. In: Akram-Lodhi, H./ Dietz, K./ Engels, B./ McKay, B. (eds.) *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 109-119.
- van der Ploeg, J. (2023): Social differentiation of the peasantry (Chayanovian). *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 50(4), 1261-1273.
- Vanner, C. (2015): Positionality at the Center: Constructing an Epistemological and Methodological Approach for a Western Feminist Doctoral Candidate Conducting Research in the Postcolonial. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 14(4).
- Velicu, I. and OGREZEANU, A. (2022): Quiet no more: The emergence of food justice and sovereignty in Romania. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 89, 122-129.
- Venice Commission (2020): *Kyrgyzstan: Urgent Amicus Curiae Brief Relating to the Postponement of Elections Motivated by Constitutional Reform*. Opinion No. 1007/2020, Strasbourg. [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-PI\(2020\)015-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-PI(2020)015-e) [10.09.2024]
- Visser, O./ Kuns, B./ Jehlička, P. (2021): *Beyond Confrontation: Silent growers, Symbiosis, and Subtle Peasantness in Post-Socialist Eurasia*. In: Akram-Lodhi, H./ Dietz, K./ Engels, B./ McKay, B. (eds.) *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 305-315.
- Visser, O./ Mamonova, N./ Spoor, M./ Nikulin, A. (2015): 'Quiet Food Sovereignty' as Food Sovereignty without a Movement? Insights from Post-socialist Russia. *Globalizations*, 12(4), 513-528.
- Watts, M. (2021): *The agrarian question*. In: Akram-Lodhi, H./ Dietz, K./ Engels, B./ McKay, B. (eds.) *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 53-66.
- Weber, M. (1978): *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wegren, S. and Trotsuk, I. (2013): *Prodovolstvennaja bezopasnost v Rossijskoj Federatsii [Food Security in the Russian Federation]*. In: Nikulin, A./ Pugacheva, M./ Shanin, T. (eds.) *Krestyanovedenie. Teoriya. Istoriya. Sovremen-nost. Uchenye zapiski*, 8. Moscow: Izdatelsky dom „Delo“, 270-301.
- WFP (World Food Program) (2021): *Kyrgyzstan. Annual Country Report*. Bishkek.
- Wimmer, A. and Glick-Schiller, N. (2002): Methodological nationalism ad beyond: nation-state building, migration and the social science. *Global Networks*, 2(4), 1470-2266.
- Wolf, E. (1966): *Peasants*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Wood, C. (2024): *Kyrgyzstan Adopts Law Targeting Foreign-Funded NGOs*. <https://thediomat.com/2024/04/kyrgyzstan-adopts-law-targeting-foreign-funded-ngos/> [10.09.2024]
- Wooden, A. and Stefes, C. (2009): *The Politics of Transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Enduring legacies and emerging challenges*. London and New York: Routledge.

- Woods, M. (2003): Deconstructing rural protest: the emergence of a new social movement. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19, 309-325.
- Wu, X. (2023): Weed-fed Pigs: Food Sovereignty in the Blind Spot. *Journal of Ethnobiology*, 43(2), 115-124.
- Yin, R. (2014): *Case study research*. Los Angeles et al.: Sage.
- Zhang, L. (2022): *From Left Behind to Leader: Gender, Agency, and Food Sovereignty in China*. In: Desa, G. and Jia, X. (eds.) *Social Innovation and Sustainability Transition*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 177-189.
- Ziegler, C. (2015): *Civil Society and Politics in Central Asia*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Ziegler, C. (2016): Great powers, civil society and authoritarian diffusion in Central Asia. *Central Asian Survey*, 35(4), 549-569.

Appendix

Coding tree

Political Opportunities

- Volatile political opportunities
 - Availability of potential influential allies
 - Transnational networks
 - Cooperatives
 - NGOs
 - International institutions and development agencies
- Stable political opportunities
 - Overall regime structure
 - Weak state capacity/ state strength
 - Corruption

Threats

- Non-violent tactics
 - Lacking support structures for rural people
 - Laws and policies
 - Foreign Agent Law
 - NGO-ization

Weak Civil Society

- Acts of protest
- Limits to mobilization
 - Lack of initiative
 - Lack of trust
 - Cultural logic
 - Soviet legacy
 - Development stage(s)
 - Development aid
 - Economic marginalization
 - Transnational Agrarian Movements
 - Loss of identity
 - Criteria
 - Language Barriers
 - NGO-ization
- Cooperatives as enterprises

Lack of skilled labour
Cooperatives as kolchoses
Other

Practices of everyday resistance

Local and/or traditional structures of management
Community/ family networks
Self-help groups
Quiet food sovereignty
Self-sufficiency
Kitchen garden plots
Nomad culture
Seed saving

Local understanding of food sovereignty

Food security

Other

Flowers along the way

Quotes

Data

Interview partner overview

Explorative interviews

1. 01.09.2023: Dr. Jeanine Dayeglu – (Universität Wien)
2. 21.09.2023: Dr. Oane Visser (Erasmus University Rotterdam)
3. 25.09.2023: Dr. Andrei Dörre (Freie Universität Berlin)
4. 09.10.2023: Dr. Katherine MacDonald (Syracuse University)
5. 20.11.2023: Dr. Kanat Tilekeyev (University of Central Asia)
6. 21.11.2023: Dr. Azamat Azarov (University of Central Asia)
7. 22.11.2023: Marlen Tynaliev (FAO Kyrgyzstan)
8. 27.11.2023: Gulzada Kudaiberdieva (Bioservice.kg)
9. 18.12.2023: Nawaz Hassan (LVC South Asia)

Formal interviews

1. 07.11.2023: Kuvatbek Bapaev (FAO Kyrgyzstan)
2. 10.11.2023: Zhyrgal Kozhomberdiev (Camp Alatau)
3. 11.11.2023: Käthe Brakhan (GIZ)

4. 16.11.2023: Akylbek Kasymov (Bio Muras)
5. 16.11.2023: Aida Jamangulova (ADI)
6. 17.11.2023: Anonymous (ECVC)
7. 18.11.2023: Torsten Swoboda and Hartwig Ungethuem (AFC)
8. 22.11.2023: Akylbek Rakaev (Nomadic Livestock Keepers' Development Fund)
9. 25.11.2023: Dr. Olga Tarabashkina (Professor at AUCA)
10. 28.11.2023: Nuraiym Syrgak (El Too)
11. 29.11.2023: Anara Baizhumanova (Spot-On consulting)

Exemplary interview guideline

1. Welcome, introduction

- 1.1 Introducing myself, explaining my research, handling of data
- 1.2 Set time frame, explain interview process, and ask for consent for recording

2. Background information

- 2.1 Ask about their position and a brief introduction
- 2.2 Briefly: What does your respective organization stand for in general and what are the main objectives?

3. Terminology

- 3.1 What are your first associations with the terms food security and food sovereignty?
- 3.2 What specific role do the concepts play in your organization's work in general and what exact role in Kyrgyzstan? How are they used?

If applicable:

- 3.2.1 Why security and not sovereignty?
- 3.2.2 How are the goals of food security* pursued/implemented? What are strategies?
- 3.3 Do the terms play a role for the population and if so, which ones?

4. International cooperation

- 4.1 Do you know about La Vía Campesina?

If applicable:

- 4.1.1 Do you have a history or future plans of cooperation?
- 4.1.2 Are there any barriers to cooperation/ to becoming a member?
- 4.2 Do you cooperate with any trans- or international grassroots movements working on similar issues?

4.3 How well are you connected to international or transnational organizations?

4.3.1 Do you feel included in international happenings such as conferences?

4.3.2 What might be barriers to international connection?

5. National level

5.1 Are there any bottom-up peasant networks you know of (local/national)?

5.1.1 If yes, are you cooperating with them?

5.2 What about state-funded ones? Do their aims differ from bottom-up ones?

5.3 Do you know how local peasant farmers are traditionally organized?

5.3.1 And why they are not organized on an international level?

5.4 Which partners do you work with?

5.4.1 How are they selected?

5.4.2 What characterizes the cooperation?

→ Follow-up questions here depending on the answer

- What exactly are you collaborating on?

- How is the contact with peasant farmers established and how is it organized?

5.5 Is there cooperation on a political level?

5.5.1 Are there policy implications or on which levels do you see success?

5.5.2 What is the government's attitude towards your work?

5.6. Are you involved in work with agricultural cooperatives?

If yes:

5.6.1 Do cooperatives pursue political demands and if yes, which ones?

5.6.2 What are strategies to engage peasant farmers to join cooperatives?

6. Food culture

6.1 What would you say are traditional food practices (of food sovereignty) that are practiced in Kyrgyzstan?

6.2 How many of these initiatives are practiced outside of just the home, collectively in groups?

6.3 How and because of which factors are food cultures and practices changing?

7. Conclusion/ open questions (depending on the interview partner)

7.1 What would be concrete potential for improvement, what are obstacles and re-occurring issues in your work?

7.2 What are biggest issues for rural families at the moment?

7.3 What do you think about the new NGO law? Do you think it might affect your work in any way?

7.4 Do you have any tips for further interview partners?

7.5 Do you have any available data to share with me?

7.6 Will there be any interesting events in the next weeks that I could attend?

7.7 Is there anything else you would like to share or conclude with? Or did I forget to mention anything? Do you have any questions for me?