

Masculinity and privilege

Analyzing corruption in Vietnam

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss and analyze how constructions of masculinity and femininity are intertwined with land-related corruption in Vietnam. Drawing on masculinity theory and Nancy Fraser's conceptualization of institutionalized injustice and participatory parity the thesis examines the relation between kinship systems and corruption and whether corruption leads to increased use of traditional norms for allocating land.

Based on fieldwork in Vietnam where interviews with 26 persons and several focus group sessions were completed, the thesis is inspired by ethnographic methods. The analysis concludes that although there are many contradictions concerning contemporary constructions of masculinity and femininity, masculine privilege remain a bearing part of allocating and controlling land. This is, in turn, discussed as potentially amplifying corruption levels through a legitimization of inequality and discrimination.

Key words: Vietnam, corruption, masculinity, privilege, land, gender

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1 Introduction

What can feminist theory add to the current discourse and understanding of the various dimensions of corruption in Vietnam? The answer to that question is the overall purpose of this thesis, grounded in masculinity studies combined with the theoretical concepts of recognition/redistribution, status and privilege. My data indicate that masculine privilege is intertwined with corrupt practices, not least based on intra-household power relations and customary systems regulating who takes responsibility for the private and the public affairs of the household. I will in this thesis argue that without an understanding of current constructions of masculinity and femininity, effective counter-measures to widespread corruption cannot be developed. The thesis will contribute both to expand analyses of local South-East Asian masculinities and test masculinity theory on material gathered during fieldwork in Vietnam. To limit the scope, I focus on corruption related to a key resource: access to land, and will primarily analyze and discuss the everyday forms of corruption encountered by ordinary citizens when they come in contact with land administration offices and land confiscation processes. Corruption on a systemic level, involving larger sums, but more difficult to detect, is for these reasons only addressed indirectly.

During 2009-2010 I lived in Hanoi, Vietnam and came in contact with these issues through internships at the Swedish Embassy, the Swedish Development Agency (Sida) and UNIFEM and as a consultant. Taking part in the discussions, programme designs and analysis of anti-corruption projects in Vietnam it was striking that no consideration was given to gender relations. Despite a seeming endless stream of studies, analyses and advanced anti-corruption projects, gender was never mentioned as a concern that might affect both the experience of corruption and the power dimensions affecting who is able to demand bribes, in what situations, or how (perceptions of) masculinity and femininity intertwine with corrupt behaviour and practices. Gender was absent as an important aspect in the design of anti-corruption projects. Sex disaggregated data is, for instance, not normally requested in corruption research and only about one fifth of the most common tools for measuring corruption take gender and poverty into account (UNDP, UNIFEM 2010).

Approaching corruption with a gender lens, I started asking questions about how corruption could be understood when analyzed with feminist theory. Question marks included a potential gendered impact of corruption (i.e. whether men and women are affected differently by corruption), whether studies of underlying power dynamics affecting corruption took gender into account and what was known of gendered dimensions of corruption in different sectors. Would this type of analysis change the anti-corruption efforts implemented by the government of Vietnam cooperating with various development agencies? The

above mentioned UNDP/UNIFEM policy paper describes one aspect of how the impact of corruption differ depending on social and economic status:

While all of society suffers from corruption's weakening of the efficiency, effectiveness and probity of the public sector, corruption has well-known differential impacts on social groups—with poor people among its greatest victims. Corruption reduces resources for poverty reduction and development and deprives poor people of advancement opportunities.

In the end, Sida hired me as a consultant to write a report on the issue with the intention to engender the anti-corruption discourse by giving insight into how different groups experience, perceive and understand land-related corruption (Borgström 2010). As a part of the project I visited Bac Ninh, Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi to interview officials, NGOs and households.

The report did not, however, give room for a more theoretical approach and in the end I only used a fraction of the information I had gathered. I also felt that there was a lot more to say about gender and corruption and that much of the (scarce) literature on the subject was plagued by inconsistencies and confusion. At the same time, interesting new research was published by the Quality of Government Institute at the University of Gothenburg. In their comprehensive research project of corruption, the researchers have found a strong positive correlation between gender equality and low levels of corruption. In their preliminary findings, analyzed data indicates that corruption fundamentally is a collective action problem: if everyone else are corrupt I will lose by being non-corrupt. Since corruption with this perspective is seen as an effect of discrimination and/or a denial of equal rights, gender equality is seen as an important signal for impartiality and fairness, in turn important for decreasing corruption (Rothstein, Uslaner 2012).

A recent poll that supports this claim indicates that female members of the Swedish parliament perceives corruption as a bigger problem than their male colleagues, in turn consistent with a 2008 UNIFEM analysis of Transparency International's corruption perceptions index survey (UNIFEM 2008).

This thesis is thus an attempt to continue the work initiated in my report while applying a more theoretically focused approach. The text is structured around the interview material, with an introductory chapter outlining the context and relation to the research field. At the end of this chapter, the research questions that will guide the analysis are presented. The following chapters include a discussion of the Vietnamese context and the methodological and theoretical choices as well as a critical discussion of the researcher's role. This will be explored by drawing on a feminist understanding of the researcher's role and (informal) power position. The interview material is then analyzed in the fifth chapter. In the last chapter, conclusions are developed, focusing on whether the thesis has been able to shed light on the research questions initially formulated.

1.1 Problem formulation

Land-related corruption in Vietnam might seem like an obscure topic. However, both corruption and the “land sector” have been given increased attention in Vietnam during recent years and capture a number of factors currently putting stress on Vietnam’s leadership, highlighting the need for reforms. An example of this is that the governing Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) in 1994 identified four dangers facing Vietnam of which corruption was one (Thayer 2010).

That Vietnam addresses these problems therefore seems necessary, not least in order to continue the very rapid development during the last 15 years, as expressed by an annual economic growth of 7-8 percent during the last decade (Norad 2011). An underlying hypothesis is that we will miss important dimensions of corruption if we ignore gendered dynamics, positions and distribution of power – both at the household and at higher levels. Masculinity studies, with its close connection to issues of institutionalized privileges provides a non-traditional perspective on corruption linking it to issues such as intra-household division of labour, institutionalized power inequality and the space men and women have for protesting against maltreatment (cf. Rydström, Horton 2011). Patriarchal customs, such as patrilineal inheritance traditions, are for the same reasons likely to be important for understanding land-related corruption. These concepts thus makes it possible to better understand both the causes and effects of corruption and deeper penetrate the many layers of power abuse, privileges and access to rights and information underlying the expressions of corruption when it comes to land.

Studying Vietnam is valuable in its own right, but additional motivation includes both the country’s recent development as well as the interest the region is given in recent years. Concerning the latter, Vietnam plays an important role in current shifts in global politics as, for instance, is articulated by USA’s statement that it will focus its military activities to South-East Asia after withdrawing from Iraq and Afghanistan (Asia Times, April 2012).

A number of feminist scholars have written on the importance of equal access to key resources for equal rights and already Engels noted that women’s subordination to a large degree was based on limited access to vital means for production such as land (Belanger et al. 2010).¹ Central arguments include the importance of land as a safeguard against poverty and as an empowering resource. Land is seen as a fundamental tool for economic independence and as a bargaining tool, for instance used when negotiating equal relations with men. With formal access and right to land, women are with this perspective empowered not only in negotiations within the household, but also externally, for instance in relation to employers (Scott 2003). This was expressed in one of the interviews performed for this thesis:

¹ See Agarwal (1994) for a feminist account of women’s access to land.

As long as we have our farming land we at least don't have to worry about putting food on the table. If we get a job in one of the new factories our land makes it possible to quit if we are not treated well and go back to farming. (Man around 45 years old, Bac Ninh, June 2010)

Land is a key resource in rural areas, central for reducing vulnerability in places where few other forms of employment exist: "Property rights over land are a key determinant of the differentiated livelihood opportunities among rural women and men" (Scott 2003, p. 233). Benedict Kerkvliet goes so far as to say that "agricultural land has been one of the most controversial resources in Vietnam [...] for a large part of the peasantry, the prospect of having land was as important as overthrowing the French" (2006, p. 285). The extent and pace of transformed land use in Vietnam is illustrated by the almost one million hectares of agricultural land that was converted from agricultural to other purposes (industrial or other more effective production) during 2001-2010. The potential rents that corrupt officials and other stakeholders can collect in this process are enormous (CECODES, Davidsen 2010).

The fact that the Vietnamese state (almost exclusively synonymous with the Communist Party of Vietnam) maintains sole ownership of land in Vietnam is one of the many special contextual factors affecting land use and rights in Vietnam – it is still only possible to formally rent land from the state through a land use right certificate introduced in 1993. Emerging from a period in which agricultural production was cooperatively organized (see Kerkvliet 2006 and outline below), Vietnam has rapidly reformed land allocation systems and liberalized land ownership and markets where use rights can be traded and sold. This process, combined with industrialization has led to an explosive situation where common criticism from farmers includes unfair compensation levels as well as the arbitrary legal framework that is easily used by corrupt officials.

Land issues, including the cadastral and land registration agencies at the local levels, and the widespread and rapidly increasing expropriation of land, has led to several large demonstrations during recent years which is normally a rare sight in the heavily controlled Vietnamese society (Kerkvliet 2001).² Several journalists and bloggers have been jailed, and there have been several incidents where the military has been called on to calm protests but ending with killing villagers and farmers over land disputes. While writing this thesis, new reports are published, describing how around 1.000 police officers use tear gas to stave off 3.000 angry farmers in Hung Yen province outside Hanoi in northern Vietnam. The largest religious minority in Vietnam – the Catholics – have on several occasions reacted to how the authorities deal with land-related issues and staged large demonstrations focused on unlawful expropriations and abuse of power. Ethnic

² See also <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6904733.stm>, <http://www.asiaone.com/News/Latest+News/Asia/Story/A1Story20111118-311376.html> and <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/25/world/asia/vietnam-land-dispute-sets-off-clash.html>.

minorities have repeatedly demonstrated over the right for communities to own their land collectively (Kerkvliet 2006).

The developing knowledge on gendered aspects of corruption serves as an entry point for improved understanding of the “many faces of corruption”. In addition, the attention corruption is given in the development aid discourse,³ and the vast amounts of resources that are currently spent in the “battle against corruption” would achieve better results with an improved understanding of how corruption affects the everyday lives of ordinary citizens.

1.2 Research question(s)

To limit the scope and serve the purposes of a manageable analysis, I have narrowed these different, but linked, entry points into one overarching research questions and three sub-questions/themes that will be explored throughout. Inspired by a broad ethnographic approach I have followed a “hunch” that masculinity and femininity matter also when it comes to corruption as a basis for my research: “In short, researchers often have a theory or hypothesis, a ‘hunch’, that they wish to test to find out whether their assumptions are supported by evidence” (O’Reilly 2009, p. 14). An important aspect has been to include the feminist perspective of promoting equality. In practice, this implies asking questions concerning who has an interest for continued corruption and what this says about gendered relations, constructions of masculinity/femininity in relation to privilege and access to resources. Corruption is commonly seen as implying a redistribution of resources from the poor to the wealthy (Rothstein, Uslaner 2012). A related question is thereby whether corruption also results in redistribution of resources from women to men.

The overarching question is therefore broad by necessity and defined as *how are constructions of masculinity and femininity intertwined with corrupt practices related to land use in Vietnam?*

Sub questions further narrowing this broad overarching theme are:

- Does the impact of corruption affect participatory parity and principles concerning equal treatment and non-discrimination?
- Is the impact of corruption perpetuating unequal access to land?
- Does corruption lead to the reproduction of masculine privilege?

³ One example is the world’s largest contributor of development aid – the World Bank – which has defined corruption as “the single most important obstacle to development in many countries” (New York Times 2006).

1.3 State of research – gender, corruption and Vietnam

As with many other research fields, gender has been given little priority as an analytical perspective as regards studies of corruption. The interest for understanding the links between gender and corruption have increased in recent years following the general interest for the impact of corruption on issues such as development, good governance and democratic transition. Based on men and women's different positions, roles and status in societies, questions have included whether women tend to be less corrupt than men, if the impact of corruption in different sectors is different for men and women, and if there are specifically gendered forms of corruption. One of the few qualitative studies of gender and corruption has been conducted by Maaria Seppänen and Pekka Virtanen in 2008 based on fieldwork in Nicaragua and Tanzania. They conclude that current understandings of corruption are relatively shallow:

Current anticorruption strategies are often only weakly based on analyses of the networks of corruption and the behaviour patterns of the actors involved. There seem to be many more studies on anticorruption measures than on corruption itself. (Seppänen, Virtanen 2008)

1.3.1 'Corrupt' terminology

While the main theoretical concepts will be elaborated and described in the third chapter, terminology concerning corruption might be less familiar. This section therefore, briefly, elaborates on the most important concepts regarding corruption and how these are used in the thesis.

Corruption can broadly be defined as "The abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Corruption can be classified as grand, petty and political, depending on the amounts of money lost and the sector where it occurs." (Transparency International 2009). There are a number of forms of corruption such as bribery, nepotism, fraud and embezzlement in, what is commonly divided into two major types:

- Grand corruption – sometimes referred to as political corruption. This takes place on a high level, both in the private and public sectors, for instance affecting policy and legislative functions of a country. An example is when a high-ranking public official or minister accepts a bribe to award a land zone to a specific company or when Saab bribes South African ministers to buy the Swedish fighter jet Jas Gripen. Often involves large sums of money.
- Petty corruption – sometimes called administrative corruption. This type primarily captures the small-scale corruption occurring in everyday life. Examples include paying a teacher to get a higher

grade or when the clerk in the land administration office demands a fee to fulfil a service that should be free of charge. Although the sums tend to be small, endemic petty corruption contributes to lowering public trust in public systems.

Although there are difficulties in drawing the line between mandatory payments and voluntary gifts (for example in the form of fees, gifts, tips or outright bribes) this report takes a broad approach, considering all informal payments to be negative for land administration and allocation in general, favouring those who are able to pay. Even without a clear distinction it is thus clear that corruption hurts the poor disproportionately as it reduces access to rights and services, hinders economic development and reduces already scarce spending on social services (UNDP 2008). These difficulties are illustrated by the fact that there is no universal definition of corruption. Instead, different actors involved in analyzing corruption or implementing anti-corruption projects, tend to use their own definition, which even though they are similar indicate different nuances in whether corruption should be seen as a phenomena only affecting the public sector, both public and private sectors and/or primarily should be seen as an abuse of the equal rights norm.

The United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC 2003) does not contain a definition of corruption and instead chose to define different acts of corruption such as bribery and embezzlement. This was motivated by future relevance of the convention across different cultural contexts. Below are examples of how the major actors relevant for this thesis define corruption:

- The international non-governmental organization Transparency International (TI): “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.” This includes both private and public sector corruption.
- In Vietnam’s anti-corruption law, the following definition is used: “‘Corruption’ means acts committed by persons with positions and/or powers which abuse such positions and/or powers for self-seeking interests.”
- The World Bank: “the abuse of public office for private gain”.
- The Swedish Agency for Development Cooperation (Sida): "the abuse of trust, power or position for improper gain. Corruption includes among other things the offering and receiving of bribes – including the bribery of foreign officials – extortion, conflicts of interest and nepotism”.
- "The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises define extortion in the following way: "The solicitation of bribes is the act of asking or enticing another to commit bribery. It becomes extortion when this demand is accompanied by threats that endanger the personal integrity or the life of the private actors involved."

The Quality of Government Institute (QoG) is a research unit at the Gothenburg University specialized in research on the characteristics of good governance with a particular focus on corruption. Researchers at the institute argue that the most common definition of corruption (used by the various agencies/institutions above) has serious flaws since it lacks a number of central components. In addition, the QoG argues that the two dominating theories describing the dynamics of corruption probably misunderstands the fundamental nature of what corruption actually is, and how it affects social, political and economic development (QoG 2010). An example is that the standard definition “abuse of public power for personal benefit” is inadequate since it doesn’t define what abuse actually means. A critical question concerns how the norm for executing public power can be defined in general terms. Corruption, should instead be defined as various forms of favouritism in the public sector, not only including bribes but also nepotism, clientilism and discrimination. Corruption is essentially seen as abuse of the equal rights norm (QoG 2010).

1.3.2 Women as inherently less corrupt, essentialism and current research

The first wave of gender and corruption analysis was initiated by David Dollar together with other economists at the World Bank in 1999 when they published the article “Are Women Really the Fairer Sex? Corruption and Women in Government”. In the article, the authors argued that high levels of women participating in public life lead to lower levels of corruption. The study thereby recommended more women on high positions as an anti-corruption measure. The analysis was underpinned by a large cross-country quantitative data set that supported the thesis (Dollar et al. 1999). Supporting this argument, Swamy et al. analysed the World Value Survey to find that women are less likely to be corrupt and have lower acceptance for bribery (Swamy et al. 2001).

The World Bank argument for improving gender equality as a means to reduce corruption was during the coming decade heavily criticized. Critics claimed that the World Bank used essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity and that gender equality was a matter of equal rights, not about improving good governance in other areas (Goetz 2004). Empirical studies later backed this argument and indicated that the “women are morally superior” argument is based on false assumptions concerning women’s higher moral nature (Wängnerud, Grimes 2010). Contradicting the World Bank, research found that democratic and transparent politics lead to low corruption which in turn facilitates women’s entry into government. In other words: more women in politics do not lead to lower levels of corruption. Democratic systems based on equal treatment, transparency and accountability, however, both tend to decrease corruption *and* improve women’s chances of reaching positions of power (Wängnerud 2012).

After falsifying the “women are good” thesis researchers and policy makers have increasingly turned their interest to the gendered dimensions of corruption itself – how corruption might have a *different impact* on women and men, how

reduced resources affect men and women and whether corruption potentially amplify gender inequality. Related to this is if, and how, anti-corruption measures are “gender blind” since they commonly deal with corruption in general, and often avoid analysis of how different social groups might have a different relation to, and experience of, corruption. Research has, for instance, shown that women tend to perceive higher levels of corruption than men (Rothstein, Ulstein 2012), but as of yet, answers to why this is so are lacking. A risk with the gender-biased analysis of corruption is the reproduction of a masculine perspective on the world, addressing and dealing with types of corruption affecting the public sphere while the private sphere is neglected:

The dominant culture gets written in, with women’s roles belittled (Survey research rarely asks about housework, friendships, informal work, and so on and it has been very difficult to get these topics on the research agenda as a result). (O’Reilly 2009, pp. 66)

The theoretical base for emerging research is a broadened understanding of society where people occupy different positions dependent on a number of factors such as gender, ethnicity, income level, age etc. A gender analysis would for instance point to the gendered labour market where women have certain kinds of jobs and men others and are therefore likely to meet corruption in different places. Arguing for a rationality perspective, Lena Wängnerud discusses the possibility that women’s experience of subordination leads to a lower acceptance for corruption. This can be traced to women’s responsibility for the family and the difficulties associated with trying to make ends meet. With this perspective, this may make it rational for women to avoid corruption to a higher degree than men. Concerning access to power, the fact that women politicians in Mexico often have a background in social movements might likewise be a factor preventing women from engaging in corrupt activities: they have more to lose (Wängnerud 2012).

Research on qualitative aspects of corruption is slowly emerging but empirical studies remain scarce. The anti-corruption research organisation U4 in Bergen has published limited material on its homepage (U4 2009) and Transparency International has published a Working Paper titled “Gender and Corruption – Understanding and Undoing the Linkages” (TI 2007). Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) commissioned a report in 2004 titled “Corruption and Gender – Approaches and Recommendations for TA” suggesting a number of approaches to gender and corruption, including gender-sensitive participatory budget planning and analysis. Empirical studies have been carried out, for instance, in Bangladesh, Nicaragua (Seppänen 2008), Tanzania, Tajikistan (Dabalen and Wane 2008) and Nigeria (Ekeanyanwu 2001) but not yet in Vietnam.

To clarify the links and consequences of gender and corruption most researchers agree that more empirical studies are needed which would facilitate an understanding of how, and when, gender is a useful perspective in understanding the mechanisms of corruption. My data (presented in the next chapter) indicates that analyzing gender relations indeed does add value to analyses of corruption, not least by acknowledging intra-household power dynamics, different access to

resources and decision-making. Unpacking masculinity and femininity therefore exposes informal and underlying power relations, in turn important for understanding the situations in which corruption occurs; the ability of individuals to protest and not least who can report maltreatment to the authorities.

A "third wave" in research on gender and corruption is, among others, represented by the above mentioned Quality of Government Institute. Their comprehensive research project of the dynamics of corruption has concluded that one of the few consistent factors related to corruption is gender. In a recent article by one of the institute's researchers, Aksel Sundström, the focus is shifted from the above mentioned debate of women's higher or lower acceptance for corruption to the role of gendered networks. In Sundström's view, this discussion has been characterized by confusing analytical levels. The presented argument is essentially that the two main strands of thought on gender and corruption (women as inherently less corrupt vs. democratic societies increase gender equality and decrease corruption) are not in contradiction with one another but that they describe different stages in the political representation chain. Women are less likely to reach government office due to nepotism within male-dominated networks, but when/if elected women are also less likely to engage in corrupt practices due to their exclusion from the same networks. Instead, a distinction should be made between networks functioning during candidate recruitment and networks that function during the representation of the elected seat (Sundström 2011).

Taking the academic discussion into account, this thesis primarily responds to the need for empirical studies. Contributing with data from a local field site and focusing on land use and administration, the thesis explores corruption based on the analytical terms of masculinity, femininity, privilege and recognition/redistribution. In this way, the various arguments of the researchers presented above can be considered and related to the data generated during the fieldwork. Another option could have been to structure the analysis along the lines of men and women as 'corruptors' and men and women as 'victims' of corruption on the supply side (for instance expressed by Seppänen (2008)).

1.3.3 Gender research in Vietnam

Research and discussion on the rights and status of women has attracted attention in Vietnam since the early 1900s. Although the situation and well-being of women thus has been on the agenda for a long time, gender research has been slower to emerge (Scott, Chuyen 2007). This has, however, changed gradually as a consequence of the gradual opening of Vietnam to the international community following the Doi Moi reforms. An important factor has also been the influx of western development aid agencies who has promoted gender sensitive project planning and implementation including studies. These have tended to focus on practical research as input to policy development with limited effectiveness due to a narrow focus on women in development as opposed to a broader gender perspective.

A number of western researchers have been studying gender in Vietnam since the beginning of the 1990s addressing issues such as violence, resource allocation, sexuality, household relations and demographics. Authors of particular relevance for this thesis includes Helle Rydstrøm who has spent several periods in Vietnam doing ethnographic fieldwork focusing on sexuality, violence, morality and the different constructions of gender and sexuality in urban and rural areas (for instance in Rydstrøm 1998, 2003, 2004, 2006a and 2010). In addition to several books on gender in Vietnam, she has also explored Vietnamese masculinities, in particular in relation to sexuality and the common practice of men buying sex (Rydstrøm 2006b, Rydstrøm and Horton 2011).

Steffanie Scott and Benedict Kerkvliet have both focused on allocation of land and land policy in Vietnam but with different analytic approaches. Scott has written on the Doi Moi reforms and what these have meant for land allocation and use. In Scott's analysis, the reforms have entailed changed relations between the household, the market and the state as well as within households (Scott 2003, 2000). Kerkvliet has written on the history of land use in Vietnam. Specific focus is awarded household strategies for resisting collective farming which indirectly pressured the CPV to adopt the reforms that eventually became the major renovation of Vietnamese policy (Kerkvliet 2006).

Danièle Bélanger has written on current demographic trends and the persistence of social norms in Vietnam. Focusing in particular on how women negotiate son preference, Bélanger argues that women use a wide range of strategies to deal with patrilineal traditions and the responsibility of women to deliver a son who can bring the family's heritage forward while also handling state pressure for "small families" (Bélanger 2004, 2006 and 2010). Among Jayne Werner's research topics are how families consisting of many generations affects gender relations with a particular focus on private and public spheres and how differences between generations leads to contesting constructions of gender identity (Werner 2004).

Domestic gender research in Vietnam has gained increased attention centred around the Institute for Family and Gender Studies, based in Hanoi. Its journal – *Women's Studies* – is published six times per year and includes topics such as gender equality, women in the labour market and theory and methods (Scott, Chuyen 2007). A number of Vietnamese gender researchers also publish regularly in international journals and books both individually and in cooperation with international researchers (See for instance Belanger and Hong 1996, Rydstrøm 2004 and Van Anh 1999). Examples of prominent Vietnamese gender scholars includes Khuat Thu Hong who was the first Vietnamese researcher to address sexual harrassment (Hong 2004).

An interesting difference between Vietnamese conceptions of feminism and mainstream (western) conceptions is highlighted by Scott and Chuyen (2007). In their view, there is a sharp difference between the individualism of western feminism and Vietnamese approaches where women's dual role as individuals and as part of a collective is emphasized. Western feminist perspectives may therefore prevent an understanding of how Vietnamese women make sense of their own

lives, including how many Vietnamese women see the responsibility for their family as a key component of their identity.

2 Việt Nam

This chapter provides a general overview of the Vietnamese context in general and of land policy developments in particular. To understand the current situation it is vital to understand the historical context of land administration, land allocation and land use in Vietnam. Today's complex legal framework is a direct result of substantial changes in policy and the legal framework, primarily during the last 50 years. Vietnam has experienced many deciding and revolutionary events during this period and land has gone from being locally controlled to being centrally controlled with the last two decades giving individuals increased user rights. Despite the movement from collective to individual ownership during this period, the state still formally owns all land in Vietnam (Kerkvliet 2006).

Attitudes and perceptions of rights to land has historical roots beyond the last half century, however, and this section therefore starts with a brief account of pre-colonial traditions. Since this thesis focuses on gendered aspects of land-related corruption, the historical discussion will be related to gender research regarding access to resources in Vietnam. A key component is to identify gendered relationship to land which not least is shaped by kinship systems (Scott 2003). Individual's access to land, in turn, has consequences for corruption as well as men and women's different experience of both land use and land-related corruption.

2.1 Politics and economy in a socialist state

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) has emerged from a turbulent recent history, including wars and major changes in the political system, to encounter an extraordinary economic growth of 7-8 percent annually during the last decade (Rydstrøm 2006b, Norad 2011). The standard of living for people in Hanoi has doubled since 1986 (Phinney 2008). This development has resulted in both improved living conditions for many Vietnamese but also in new challenges. The reforms that were initiated in the 1980s has liberalized and opened Vietnam to the globalized economy but has also led to domestic and international pressure to address growing inequality and corruption, in particular in State Owned Enterprises and government institutions. An analysis from the British development agency DFID states that the reforms are "fast for economic activity, slower for social change and slowest for political change" (Norad 2011, pp. 11). Vietnam's authoritarian regime is thus facing increasing pressure, not least due to high corruption levels. The power of the CPV has been challenged both on ideological, political and economic grounds (Thayer 2010).

Vietnam is governed by the communist party of Vietnam, backed by the military, the state bureaucracy and the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF). VFF is a regime-approved umbrella organization for 29 registered mass organizations and interest groups. The institutional set-up reflects Vietnam's socialist heritage with emphasis placed on state institutions to propose and implement reforms. State institutions, primarily the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), have been given the task to improve gender equality and women's emancipation supported by the Women's Union (Scott, Chuyen 2007).

The Women's Union is the largest mass organization with 12 million members and around 300 staff around the country. It is funded by the state (Thayer 2009). The Women's Union promotes gender equality and women's rights and encourages women's participation in society. It is not particularly radical, however, for instance recommending wives to emphasize their sexual attraction as a means for keeping their husbands faithful (Phinney 2008). Other organizations include the Farmer's Union, Veteran's Union and the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union with 3.5 million members. It is important to note that these organizations are not Non-Governmental Organizations in the western sense, but rather extensions of the state. Leaders in these organizations often also serve in important CPV-bodies in what Carlyle Thayer has called "mono-organizational socialism" (Thayer 2009). The SRV was formed following the reunification of North and South Vietnam in 1976. What was initially a resistance force, from the beginning against the French occupiers and later against the USA during the Vietnam War (in Vietnam referred to as the American war), has been forced to find other sources of legitimacy following the retreat of the American forces in 1973.

Following reunification a number of socialist reforms were introduced, inspired by states such as the Soviet Union and China which included land redistribution, organization of agriculture in cooperatives and nationalization of production. The remodelling of Vietnamese society to a communist style state, met opposition from the beginning, not least related to land allocation and the killings of land lords (Kerkvliet 2001, 2006). That the communist party gained power in the North in 1954 while reunification of the North and the South was delayed until 1975 also meant that reforms were implemented during a longer time in the North than in the South. This still has implications for land use in Vietnam. The split between the North and the South was later illustrated in 1986 when a group of southern veterans organized to protest deteriorating socio-economic conditions as well as increasing corruption calling for openness and real implementation of the Doi Moi reforms (Thayer 2010).

The transformation of Vietnam into a socialist society did not occur without resistance, and the regime has usually responded with repression. Public critique has, however, been more frowned upon than internal discussion via regulated channels (Thayer 2009). Opposition to economic problems as well as the non-transparent regime and widespread corruption on behalf of the CPV together led to reforms during the 1980s – not least based on discontent with land policies (Kerkvliet 2006). Reforms were introduced in 1986 under the banner of "Doi Moi", commonly translated as "renovation" or "reform", including attempts to

introduce a rule of law regime, transfer of power to the National Assembly (parliament) and increasing international integration. With the reforms the communist party softened its version of socialism and the current slogan is “a market economy with a socialist orientation” (Thayer 2009, Rydström 2006b). The communist party has reacted with ambivalence to the protests, on the one hand accommodating complaints and introducing reforms, but on the other with heavily repression including prison sentences and harassment. In relation to corruption, the regime has both encouraged the media to report on corruption cases. When the media are seen to give too much attention to sensitive subjects, however, the regime has acted to close newspapers and imprison journalists (Thayer 2009, Kerkvliet 2001).

Another result of Doi Moi has been that the average standard of living has risen in Vietnam and the removal of many welfare subsidies such as child care and health care. At the same time, consumption as an identity marker has been given increased importance. Concerning gender relations, Phinney (2008) and Nguyen-Vo (2010), note that men’s leisure has been sexualised during this process with masculine status being linked to the ability to pay for prostitutes.

Economic reforms have thus been implemented while political reforms are lagging, not least due to the CPV’s analysis of the rapidly disintegrating Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the 1990s which in many ways showed the Vietnamese leaders what uncontrolled disintegration could mean (Kerkvliet 2001). The party’s monopoly of power has been argued to be the reason for its degeneration as well as its tolerance of corruption and insufficient reforms (Thayer 2010).

Concerning land use and allocation, Kerkvliet (2006) identifies at least four ideas that have dominated the last century in Vietnam. Land as a commodity in a free market is currently prevailing based on the right of individuals and companies to buy and sell land as they wish and own as much as they can manage or afford. This approach was previously heavily promoted by international organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF. The state’s role is with this approach limited to providing and enforcing a legal framework guaranteeing market rules, investments and contractual agreements. In contrast, the socialist tradition, which prevailed during the second half of the 1900s, emphasized equitable distribution of land and prescribed far-reaching state involvement in land administration and allocation. With this approach, the state (as a representative of the people) played an important role in deciding who got to use land and for which purposes. A favoured component included pooled labour and collective farming. A third model is that land should be managed by households through family-based agriculture. Kerkvliet’s last land administration model is based on communal ownership of land.

Vietnam’s current land regime is a form of hybrid containing both free market and collective thinking with the state retaining formal ownership while giving individuals and companies land use right certificates that can be exchanged and inherited (more on this below). During my interviews, some of the experts, however, thought that the forthcoming revision of the Land Law would include the state giving up its exclusive ownership of land in Vietnam.

Economic reforms aiming to move away from a centrally planned economy towards a market economy has at the same time resulted in a decentralization of power. Communes have received renewed control over local budgets and have larger freedom to pursue local or provincial goals (Gainsborough 2003). This development has simultaneously lead to increased opportunities for corruption at the local level. Several assessments of the corruption levels in Vietnam performed by Transparency International and the World Bank indicates that corruption is increasing (Norad 2011).

Protests against the regime has on many occasions been expressed over land disputes which was also indicated in my interviews including a recent case in Bac Ninh. Another example is demonstrations in Thai Binh province during 1997 where farmers confronted local officials over power abuse and corruption (Thayer 2002, 2009) and the large uprising in 1998 when over 500 villagers surrounded government offices in Nam Dinh province (Kerkvliet 2001).

There are now signs of opposition groups joining forces which is a change from what was previously a fragmented landscape of small groups in different parts of the country consisting of activists, intellectuals and overseas Vietnamese. A significant incident occurred in 2006 when several opposition intellectuals and organizations jointly published a manifesto on freedom and democracy in Vietnam under the label Bloc 8406. The group demanded respect for human rights, religious freedom and being allowed to form political parties as well as reduced corruption (Thayer 2009). If the government of Vietnam is unable to address the challenges to its legitimacy from Bloc 8406 and others, Vietnam might very well face increasing domestic unrest as discontent grows without channels through which this can be expressed. What Thayer (2009) refers to as “political civil society” might very well be the force that in the end launches a sufficiently powerful attacks against corrupt civil servants and government officials to actually achieve change.

As regards gender equality, Vietnam stands out in the region when it comes to closing gender gaps over the last 20 years with substantial development in sectors such as education and access to health care. The World Bank’s comprehensive Gender Assessment (2011) includes a number of figures describing the current situation concerning gender equality. Successful developments include high literacy rate for men and women, equal school enrolment between boys and girls, among the highest representation of women in national parliament in the Asia-Pacific region (currently 24 percent) and one of the highest economic participation rates in the world at 85 percent of men and 83 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 60 in 2002. As in many other countries the labour market, however, is structured along clearly gendered lines – women are over-represented in some sectors and occupations, and men in others. This is illustrated by the fact that women are to a significantly higher proportion employed in agriculture self-employment (half of working women compared to a third of working men). Occupational categories are also gendered, for instance illustrated by men in secondary industry working primarily in heavy industries (construction and mining etc.) where as women make up the majority of the workforce in light manufacturing industries (textiles and garments etc.). The same is true for the

service sector where men dominate in transportation, business and financial sectors and women in education, health and cultural services. Furthermore men tend to have higher representation in jobs with decision-making power, status and career possibilities and a substantial wage gap remains. Currently women's earned income is around 75 percent of men's. Vietnam is, however, ahead of many other countries in the region in this aspect. The leadership of the Communist Party 2005-2010 included only 13.5 percent women. In the offices of the National Assembly women are positioned above all in committees focusing on "soft" political issues such as social affairs, culture, education and youth. Women are totally absent in committees in charge of defence and security and scarce in committees responsible for budget and economics. Political participation is on a general level described in the following terms:

While government policies and laws in Vietnam encourage women's political participation, the reality is often different. For those women who manage to enter the political arena, their voices and presence remain marginal in a predominantly male political culture, with political power remaining in the hands of a select group of men. (World Bank 2006)

2.2 Brief background to land use in Vietnam

In this section, the history of land use is described with the intention to inform the analysis of the interviews below. Given Vietnam's turbulent recent history and the drastic shifts between different models for land administration and allocation, the current model both builds on and differs from, earlier versions. Attitudes and perceptions of rights to land, and who in the family has the main responsibility, has historical roots beyond the last half century, and this section therefore starts with a brief account of the pre-colonial time.

2.2.1 The pre-colonial period

In Vietnam men have a long history of controlling land use and land ownership. In pre-colonial Vietnam the community (village) was the administrative unit responsible for land management. Land belonged to the king and land tenure in rural communities was organized so that only male members of the household could receive plots of land from the community which created an advantage for families with many sons. Women could under special circumstances receive land lots, for instance because of old age or being widowed (ISDS 2005).

The most common inheritance tradition was based on a patriarchal tradition through which a family's land was inherited by the eldest son, or the son who stayed with the parents. Girls worked on their parent's land until they married and were expected to move to their husband's parents and work on their land (Belanger et. al. 2010).

Although this practice seems to slowly shift towards more equal inheritance in accordance with existing legislation, it is still widely practiced in large parts of Vietnam today, effectively limiting women's possibilities of receiving formal land rights. According to one of the land experts at the Ministry of Justice in Hanoi:

The tradition for inheritance is that the land is divided among the sons of the family. The Civil Code, however, stipulates that the inheritance should be divided equal among remaining spouses and children. In practice this is not followed. (MOJ, Hanoi May 2010)

Different regions have variations of this tradition, however. In a study on women and land rights, the Institute for Social Development Studies in Hanoi (ISDS) found that the inheritance patterns differed significantly in the north and in the south of the country. In the Northern Province Ha Tay, both agricultural and residential land was inherited by sons. Daughters would only inherit a small piece of land if the family did not have any sons at all. The interviewed households emphasized the importance of having a male "worshiper" who would take care of the family shrine after the parents' death (cf. Rydstrom 2002). According to the interviewed households this duty could not be fulfilled by a woman. A substantial part of the land would therefore be transferred to a male relative or a male friend if the family did not have sons.

In the Southern Province Can Tho, daughters inherited some land (although less than the sons and depending on if the land was large enough to share between several people). In case the household did not have a son, 99 percent expected that they would transfer the land to their daughter and son-in-law. The interviewed households had no objections to a daughter taking care of the family altar (ISDS 2005).

2.2.2 Collectivisation and reunification

Northern and Southern Vietnam had different traditions concerning land use prior to the liberation of South Vietnam in 1975. Following the ousting of the French and the division of Vietnam into two halves, the northern communist party implemented large scale land reforms whereby land was redistributed to peasants. In the South, the American-backed regime implemented directly opposite reforms with a focus on private ownership and the right to accumulate land. The government in Saigon primarily sided with owners of large pieces of land and gave little attention to the situation of poor peasants (Kerkvliet 2006).

Following the Geneva Accords in 1954, the Vietnam Worker's Party (predecessor to the Communist Party of Vietnam) started implementing a planned economy approach in Northern Vietnam, introducing agricultural cooperatives in 1955. The collectivisation process was intensified during the following years, and in 1957 the intention to expand the collectivisation process to the whole country was announced (Que 2001). Based on the conviction that land redistribution would not be enough to ensure equal access to land, the communist government in the North implemented reforms promoting collective farming and shared produce.

The reform was only supported by some farmers in the North and encountered strong resistance in the South when attempts were made following reunification (Kerkvliet 2006).

In 1959 the second constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was adopted, recognizing a range of ownership-types (state ownership, collective ownership, individual ownership, etc.) but encouraged farmers to join the agricultural cooperatives. By the late 1960's around 86 percent of the households of Northern Vietnam were reported to have joined cooperatives (Que 2001). In the cooperatives, workers were divided into categories with different tasks receiving different work-points for their labour giving them right to a share of the total production (ISDS 2005). The point system awarded higher points to the tasks performed by men. Working the same hours (as well as taking care of the household) women earned fewer work points resulting in less share of the total production (Belanger et. al. 2010). Another effect of the collective system was, however, that it tended to increase women's status since their caring-work was given work-points and thus formally acknowledged.

Land administration and allocation in the South followed a different trajectory prior to the reunification in 1975. The 1955 and 1957 agrarian reforms under the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, for instance, aimed to redistribute land to small landless farmers. The collectivisation process in the South started only in the late 1970's following the reunification with the North with limited success. Already by the end of the 1980's most of the land was returned to its previous owners. Besides starting later, the citizens of Southern Vietnam tended to be more sceptical to the collectivisation process, and some authors argue that land even today is viewed more as private property in the South, despite the formal ownership of the state (Belanger et. al. 2010).

Gender analysis have highlighted the relatively gender-equal distribution of tasks in agriculture but also pointed to a gendered division of labour with men and women being responsible for different tasks in the farms. Reports from the cooperative period in the North, for instance, state that tasks were distributed based on gender stereotypes; men were assigned to perceived heavy and technical tasks, women to perceived light and simple tasks (Que 2001).

After an initial increase in productivity, the cooperatives encountered problems, however, and both productivity and efficiency decreased to low levels (Vo 2009). At the same time, members of the cooperatives were reported to pay more attention to their small pieces of land (the so-called five percent land) than to increase the collective production which eventually led to a form of localised control over the production, at times devolved to individual households, informally renting land from the cooperatives. The individual lots tended to be considerably more productive than the cooperative's land, mainly due to households giving them greater attention (Que 2001, Kerkvliet 2006, Scott 2003).

After reunification, the CPV implemented socialist land policy also in the South, introducing tenancy regimes and addressing the situation of landless farmers. Redistribution of land continued throughout the 1980s (Kerkvliet 2006).

2.2.3 Doi Moi and decollectivisation: towards market economy

The failure of the collective farms became evident by the late 1970s as hunger was increasing and the inflation increased dramatically. During the 1980s, farmers increasingly expressed a wish to be able to buy and sell land use rights (Kerkvliet 2006). A coping strategy emerged whereby villagers exchanged land without formal authorization. Officials found this trend impossible to stop and were in the end forced to change the law. International pressure to allow land to be traded on a free market was also a factor during this process coming, for instance, from international organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank. By the end of the 1970's these problems resulted in a major revision whereby the household became the main unit for agricultural production (Kerkvliet 2006). In 1986 the "Doi Moi" (renovation) process was initiated as a response to the problems, introducing significant economic reforms, a shift in agricultural land policy and the abandonment of the collectivization process (Belanger et. al. 2010). The renovation process resulted in a fundamental policy change, and the state began allocating land to households and individuals within a socialist-oriented market economy. The household was reinstated as the main unit of production, radically shifting the dynamics within the household and allocating major responsibilities and rights to the head of the household. The revised Land Law of 1993 included the right to exchange/transfer land use rights.

During the 1980s and 1990s a number of land-related reforms were implemented whereby the main agricultural productive unit was shifted from the cooperatives to the households. With the introduction of the 1993 Land Law, farmers were given the right to exchange land, pass it on as inheritance and use it as collateral for bank loans. This shift transformed the way land is managed and passed on to future generations, which also changed intra-household power dynamics and access to resources. The reforms thus implied a change in the relations between state, market and the household as well as intra-household decision-making and control (Scott 2003). As a result, inheritance has become a more important factor for gaining access to land which with Vietnam's patrilineal inheritance tradition is likely to benefit men.

Another consequence is that women have taken responsibility for some of the care-giving work that previously had been the responsibility of the agricultural cooperative. Although cooperative services, such as health, education and taking care of old and disabled, in general had been of poor quality, this shift added to the work-load of individual women. The changes also meant that care-giving work no longer were awarded with work-points and thus became unpaid household work (Belanger et. al. 2010). Other researchers have argued that another gendered consequence of the Doi Moi reforms includes higher mobility for men and a higher dependency of women on staying in the household (Phinney 2008).

The second Land Law from 1993 marked a fundamental policy change for agricultural production and expanded the legal rights of households and individuals. It also initiated the movement from collective to individual ownership that is still ongoing. The allocation of long-term use rights to land, previously

administered by the cooperatives, gave households the opportunity to improve their incomes and livelihoods and gain control over their land and property. However, men and women faced a different situation regarding the new certificates, mainly due to the way land was allocated. In accordance with the Civil Code and existing Land Laws, the land use certificates only had space for one name – the household head. Since men were usually recognised as the leader of the households, the vast majority of the land use right certificates (LURCs)⁴ were issued to men (Que 2001). Only 10–12 percent were issued to women in the first ten years, generally because they were single or widowed (FAO 2009).

Criticism to the unequal allocation of land included the fact that women were denied formal land rights despite their contributions to family labour. In practice women had no legal proof of their rights to land, which reduced their ability to claim their rights in cases of dispute, divorce or death in the family. This, it was argued, could also reduce the possibility for women to leave abusive relationships and make independent choices (Belanger et. al. 2010).

2.2.4 The 2003 Land Law and recent development

By 2003, a new Land Law was introduced giving households land use right certificates for longer periods of time (20-50 years depending on the crop) based on household size. The law gave households the right to lease, transfer, exchange, inherit and use land as collateral (Scott 2003). Objectives for the amendments included the wish to improve the legal framework to better suit Vietnam's industrialisation and modernisation process, increase investment and safeguard the rights of people subjected to land recovery (Vo 2009). As a result of the Doi Moi reforms and the shift to a market-oriented economy, Vietnam has become the world's second largest rice exporter also exporting many other agricultural products (FAO 2009).

Land in Vietnam thus still belongs to the people and is managed by the state through their local branches. Households, organizations and companies “rent” land from the state thereby receiving user rights for a legally determined period. Virtually all land that was previously managed by cooperatives has by now been allocated to households or individual producers. Although the state maintains formal ownership of all land in Vietnam, the use right certificates are generally expected to be renewed when they expire resulting in a sort of “soft” ownership. The freedom to transfer use rights thus draws heavily on a market approach and characteristic of Vietnam's compromise between socialism and allowing free markets. The socialist tradition is still present, however, in the form of allowing individual households only a limited amount of land and a maintained ambition to

⁴ “Land Use Right, House and Land-Attached Assets Ownership Certificates” (LURHOC) is the new term introduced in September 2009, when the previously used Land Use Right Certificate (LURC) and House Ownership Certificate (HOC) were amalgamated. In this thesis the older term Land use right certificate is used.

assure a relatively equitable distribution. Besides this, the formal prohibition on privately owned land is another socialist tradition that lives on (Kerkvliet 2006).

3 Methodological choices

My search for some meaning in the complex web of land-related corruption occurred in the context of researching and writing a report for the purposes of a Western development aid agency (Sida) that was keen to get concrete recommendations and advice for development cooperation programmes. The interviews and field work gave me a very rich material (more on this below) that did not fit into the report which was less focused on theory and analysis. After finalizing and presenting the report in Hanoi in November 2010, there were many aspects of the data that had not been used and deemed irrelevant for the purposes at that time. Considering that the interviews had resulted in 45 pages of field notes and a number of conversations that were not directly related to the purposes of the report, the material seemed relevant for further analysis and subjected to different questions as well as a more theoretical approach.

That I had been inspired by ethnographic methods, including its focus on interviews, observation and contextualization, was positive in the process of approaching earlier fieldwork and my experience from living in Vietnam with new “eyes”. This approach made additional analysis possible since it combines the search for meaning and an emphasis on fieldwork, reflexivity and combination of information gathering practices. This approach was, in addition, a source of inspiration for performing feminist research.

The methods used and the resulting data are thus relevant for the purposes of this thesis as well. While writing this thesis, this, for instance, included identifying the wide variety of sub-themes and subtle comments that I had not addressed while writing the first report. The “restrictions” on how to analyze the material when I wrote the report was in addition not the same this time around and made it even more enjoyable to re-visit the material and approach it from another theoretical angle.

In this chapter, I discuss methodological considerations and describe the interviews as well as how I processed the resulting data, in turn an important part of reflexivity.

3.1 Towards a feminist ethnography?

Ethnography is firmly rooted in the qualitative and interpretive approach to social sciences. Central for this epistemological current is the aspiration to understand the motivations and underlying ideas that affects why people act in the way they do in social life (Aspers 2007). Feminist methodological concerns have included issues such as an egalitarian research process focusing on reciprocity and

intersubjectivity (Tracey 1988, see also Reinharz 1992). Performing feminist research affects not only the content of research but also the process with which the research is carried out. Cathleen Armstead (1995) identifies three ways in which feminist research differs from traditional social science: an attempt to create equal and democratic relationships, acknowledge and respect participants' own knowledge and an agenda for political change (gender equality).

The emancipatory claims of feminism have often been associated with qualitative methods as a means to give voice to oppressed groups, expose power hierarchies, deconstructing the exploitative relation between researcher and researched and, not least, taking the private world into account (Oakley 1998). Ethnography fits very well with this description and might seem like a perfect match for feminist research with its focus on context, long-standing relationships and empowerment of research participants. Both feminism and ethnography thus tend to focus on experience, meanings and context (Skeggs 2007).

The focus on reducing or erasing power inequalities between the researcher and the researched is not an easy task in practice, however, and can lead to obscuring different positions and access to power. To some extent, this touches on the tension in feminist research between the relation between scientific analysis and individuals' own knowledge and ideas and how these are handled when they differ (Armstead 1995). Eventually, the researcher will interpret his/hers material and have the final decision over what will be published or not. This dilemma is present when doing ethnographic fieldwork as described by Judith Tracey:

For no matter how welcome, even enjoyable the fieldworker's presence may appear to "natives", fieldwork represents an intrusion and intervention into a system of relationships, a system of relationships that the researcher is far freer than the researched to leave. The inequality and potential treacherousness of this relationship seems inescapable [...] The greater the intimacy, the apparent mutuality of the researcher/researched relationship, the greater is the danger. (Tracey 1988, pp. 23)

In the end, Tracey argues that there cannot be a fully feminist ethnography since the inherent tensions between empowerment and the underlying power differences between the researcher and the researched cannot be completely resolved. Feminist self-awareness and humble approach to research can, however, inform ethnography resulting in higher quality of the end product (Tracey 1988). To some extent, Tracey's argument touches on broader ethical issues in that ethnographic research can never be fully ethical. Feminism does, with this perspective, not resolve the inherent differences in the research process, but may never the less serve to highlight and problematize these dilemmas (Skeggs 2007).

It is thus up to the individual researcher to apply both ethical norms of how to treat research participants and problematize one's own role and the power relations that cut across field work and interpretations/analyses. Although this has, in particular, occupied feminist and post-colonialist researchers, this is not exclusively characteristic of feminist research but should rather be applied in all forms of research as a matter of "good practice".

With this understanding, it is important to understand that the research relationship is inherently unequal (Murphy, Dingwall 2007). Sound research is with this approach characterized by cultural sensitivity as well as reflection on how the research might affect involved participants. It should also adhere to ethical ground rules for good scientific behaviour:

Like all researchers, ethnographers have a responsibility to protect research participants from harm, but also to have regard to their rights. (Murphy, Dingwall 2007, p. 339)

3.2 The role of the (feminist) researcher

The post-modern critique of traditional research has fundamentally changed the way research is made and it is not really possible for qualitative researchers to argue that we are not a part of the world we study (O'Reilly 2009). Researchers of course always interpret their data, thereby risking to disempower the participants in their study and removing their ability to make sense of their own lives (Murphy, Dingwall 2007). Feminists have debated the need for reflexivity and the problems associated with objectifying the "other" and a crucial question for feminist researchers is to ask whether the analysis re-construct the researched as powerless and without agency (Skeggs 2007). One way of handling this dilemma, is by making one's own position, background and other relevant characteristics visible with the intention to locate research processes in a given context and make relevant characteristics both of the process and of the researcher visible:

What is needed is to be able to locate ourselves in our studies honestly and openly, in an admission that observations are filtered through our own experience, rather than seeking to provide the detached voice of authority. (O'Reilly 2009, p. 191)

An important part of a feminist approach is thus positioning oneself in relation to the research process, and the choices this entails. It is therefore important to reflect on the ways my own attributes – gender, age ethnicity and so on – affected the writing of this thesis. That I differed on many of these characteristics to the people I interviewed can, however, also become an asset if handled with care. Difference can with this perspective rather be seen as an asset enabling me to ask naive questions that a researcher more familiar with the local context would never have proposed (O'Reilly 2009). It is important to recognize, however, that there were places that I did not get access to, not least because I only visited the communities briefly.

Another dimension of reflexivity is discussing the power (in)equality between the researcher and the researched mentioned above. Without imposing my own perspective and understanding, the process at times made it difficult to write a feminist narrative that captures the inconsistencies and fragments in the participants' stories. One of the women I interviewed in Bac Ninh for instance claimed that men are bad while at the same time saying that putting her name on

the land use certificate was not necessary since she trusted her husband. On these occasions, the participants' thoughts somewhat collides with a feminist analysis that, for instance would take this as a starting point for discussing structured inequality and different access to resources. The woman, however, did not seem to think having her name on the certificate was important and instead emphasized the low compensation levels households were offered in case of expropriation. Similar dilemmas are described by Cathleen Armstead in her article "Writing contradictions. Feminist research and feminist writing": "politically speaking, it is virtually impossible to write such an article without privileging either my feminist analysis or their individualized experiential knowledge" (Armstead 1995, p. 633). Another feminist dilemma is illustrated by Beverly Skegg's experience with participants who disagreed with her analysis and denied statements that Skeggs had on tape (Skeggs 2007). These contradictions are in this thesis primarily handled through the adoption of what Murphy and Dingwall calls a "subtle realist" approach:

Subtle realists accept the possibility of multiple, *contradictory* versions of reality which are nevertheless true. (Murphy, Dingwall 2007, p. 346, original parenthesis)

During my research, it was also clear that my age affected the interviews. At the time, I was 29 years old and relatively young compared to the public officials and other researchers on the team I accompanied to some of the field sites (more on this below). As age is a central component in the strictly hierarchical Confucian system, this situated me as inferior to the older public officials and also implied that they (as superiors) should educate me (Rydstrøm 2006b). That this was important was, for instance illustrated in the sessions with older state officials who at times would look very uninterested when I asked questions. Although I was mostly treated with a sort of kind understanding, the response to the senior Vietnamese researchers in the CECODES-team differed substantially with participants being far more attentive and interested. This was not unexpected and I experienced far more interest when talking to farmers and ordinary households.

Another obvious dimension of my research is of course that of being a westerner and what that means when doing fieldwork in Vietnam. As Belanger and others have described, this includes negotiating ethnic and class differences to find a space justifying both the researcher's presence and the reason for locals to participate in the specific study (Bélanger 2006, Scott et al. 2005). A common reply to foreigners in Vietnam is that Vietnam is so special that it cannot be compared to other contexts. Although Vietnam is not as special as some Vietnamese portray it, there is obviously some truth to this statement; understanding one's own culture is hard to begin with. In relation to this, the fact that I had lived in Hanoi almost one year, and spent longer periods in the country on previous occasions was a strength. Without pretending to understand all features of the Vietnamese society, my time in the country offered me both Vietnamese friends and at least some understanding of the cultural norms and socio-political system.

3.2.1 Ethics

Although the purpose of the interviews at the time I collected my material was intended for the purposes of the Sida-report, research ethics were treated in line with the guidelines by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) and at the beginning of all interviews I explained the purpose of the study and questions, that no names would be published and that their participation was voluntary.⁵ To let the informants take part and comment on the field notes was unfortunately not possible, neither to present the finished study to them. To communicate results back to participants is, however, also depending on whether participants' have a true interest for being informed. This should be balanced against the researcher's need to further burden participants stemming more from their own view of ethical research than on the participants' wishes and needs (Murphy, Dingwall 2007). As regards to the persons I interviewed, I would have liked to have been able to return to the field site to discuss my analysis with them. Due to practical reasons this was not possible within the time frame I had for interviewing.

Another choice that had to be made was how open I would be with the persons I interviewed. Ethnographers distinguish between covert and overt research signifying the difference between informing participants about the research focus or withholding information as a means to gain access to the field. Standard research ethics demand that participants are always informed about the purpose of the study which I decided to adhere to. However, what might seem like a clear-cut decision was complicated by the fact that I essentially was researching illegal activity. Overt/covert ethnographies are essentially a grey zone. Karen O'Reilly (2009) illustrates the dilemma and nuances of ethnographic research by referring to participant observations where the researcher initially explains the research project but then hopes that the participants forget and "act naturally". In the end, the question of overt and covert research is mostly about to what extent the researcher informs the study participants. Other critique of covert research includes that it violates "participants' right to autonomy" (Murphy, Dingwall 2007, p. 342).

After considering different alternatives, it seemed that the sensitivity surrounding corruption primarily involved those demanding bribes – public officials at different levels and/or business organizations. Average households would "only" come in contact with corruption through being asked to pay bribes or through embezzlement and fraud and were assumed to be more open about their experiences. In the end, this did not turn out to be a problem even though the officials I interviewed refused to go into specific details of corruption in their area.

When interviewing households and individuals, other ethical considerations become important, however. O'Reilly (2009) notes that it is best to use participants' real names and details where possible. For the purposes of my

⁵ See <http://www.codex.vr.se/texts/HSFR.pdf> for the full text (in Swedish).

research, this was not possible and an important part of getting access to participants' stories about corruption was based on guaranteeing confidentiality. The risk for participants to encounter sanctions as a result of their comments was thus deemed as more important than displaying their names in the final publication. The sensitivity surrounding corruption was also indicated during several interviews and foremost when referring to protests that had led to conflicts with the authorities. When this came up, some of the participants clearly stated that they did not want to talk about what had happened since they might "get trouble". That I did not stay for a long period of time in a specific location also means that identifying my participants is nearly impossible. During the field work, I also felt that the participants were relieved when they understood that I was not a journalist that intended to write about corruption in Vietnam.

An indirect risk could related to the fieldwork is, for instance, asking questions about intra-household power relations and gender roles results in women focusing on their unequal domestic responsibilities and economic dependence. This could, however, be seen both as a positive outcome (empowering) or negative (disrupting a previously satisfying family relation). A greater risk is, however, related to the actual publication whereby coping strategies are described in detail and made public. This can, in a worst case scenario enable those with power to reinforce control and manipulation (Murphy, Dingwall 2007).

I also encountered the problem that other anthropologists and ethnographers have described: difficulties in making my research topic understandable (Murphy, Dingwall 2007). Acknowledging the continuum between covert and overt research, and that signed consent forms does not guarantee the participants' rights, I attempted to explain as best as possible the purpose of the research focusing on key words related to corruption, land use and households.

3.3 The research process

The choice to focus on the land sector was based on the bi-annual 'Anti-Corruption Dialogue' (ACD) in which representatives of Vietnamese government agencies, donor organizations and a limited number of NGOs, meets to discuss corruption in a selected sector. The choice was also based on reports indicating that the land sector is one of the areas in Vietnam that is most seriously plagued by corruption (Norad 2011). The ACD is preceded by research into how corruption is manifested in the chosen sector, potential remedies and implications for relevant agencies and organizations.

A comprehensive study of corruption in the land sector was therefore commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the World Bank and the Swedish embassy in Hanoi. The report was coordinated by the Danish Ministry and the fieldwork carried out by the Vietnamese research organization 'Centre for Community Development Studies' (CECODES). The primary purpose was to "unbundle corruption, identify major risks and forms of corruption in land

management and on the basis of this provide some recommendations for strengthening integrity in land management” (CECODES, Davidsen 2010, p. 14).

In line with current perspectives on corruption, in which gender is largely missing as an analytical category, the study would not include gender as an analytic category and instead focus on overall processes in which corruption takes place. This was motivated both with the macro-focus of the study, but was also based on the idea that gender was irrelevant for understanding land-related corruption. Since I had written a shorter paper during my time at the Swedish embassy highlighting some of the links between gender and corruption in the health sector, Sida hired me to write a parallel report. The purpose was to complement the CECODES-study adding in-depth analysis on gendered aspects of corruption. Since researching gender and corruption was a new topic, primarily discussing internationally on an abstract theoretical level, I was free to develop the research framework, selection of method, research questions and selection of informants.

3.3.1 Research design

Based on the politically sensitive nature of corruption, and the low reliability of corruption-statistics, I decided to use qualitative methods based on interviews and field visits to provinces where land reforms were being implemented. This implicated a focus on lower level “petty corruption” related to land administration, expropriation of land and how constructions of gender are intertwined with household coping strategies and the broader context in which corruption takes place. This was a deliberate choice despite the fact that the biggest problem with land-related corruption is likely to occur at higher levels where larger sums change hands. An example of grand corruption is, for instance, when provincial and/or national level officials strike deals with companies that give the companies access to attractive land nearby important infrastructure or urban regions (Kerkvliet 2001). One example of this type of corruption is described by Gainsborough (2003) outlining the Tamexco corruption case which included bribing a local official in exchange for a verification of artificially inflated land values. The transaction can in these cases result in the company gaining access to the land well under the market price in return for a small “favour” for the responsible civil servant or politician. It can be speculated that this has an impact on the compensation levels that eventually find its way to the evicted households although this is almost nearly impossible to prove. At this level, the discussions are of course held behind closed doors in a very discrete way.

As was mentioned in the introduction, the small sums that are demanded in everyday transactions are none the less detrimental for households with small incomes and can be as important to analyze as grand corruption in closed board rooms.

A focus on the local level for these reasons seemed more relevant than a macro-level study. Furthermore, macro aspects of corruption were one of the purposes of the CECODES-report through mapping corruption “value chains”. Another approach for my report could, however, have been to focus on the legal framework, a comparative study with other countries in the region or a more theoretical discussion of the links between gender and corruption. This seemed less relevant for the Vietnamese context, with its tendency to have an excellent legal framework and where the problem rather lies with implementation (Thayer 2010). In the end, interviews seemed like the best alternative that would also give first-hand material and the opportunity to talk to people about how they perceive and make sense of corruption in their everyday life and how this intertwines with constructions of masculinity/femininity.

3.3.2 Gaining access

I thus started out with a broad problem formulation concerning that “gender matters” when it comes to corruption and land use and set out to explore this topic further. In line with Patrik Asper’s description of the research process, the questions were narrowed following reading up on the subject as well as interaction with the field (Aspers 2007). The research process started with a “general gathering stage” during which I read the majority of existing published material on gender, corruption, the history of land use and learnt about the legal- and policy frameworks. My own experience from living almost one year in Vietnam, was important at this stage, giving me insights and contacts that I would not have had access to if I had recently arrived in the country.

During this stage, I considered different alternatives for gaining access to the field and came to the conclusion that I did not want to only interview experts in Hanoi, with its multitude of development professionals, government offices and company headquarters. To some extent, this seemed disconnected from the everyday life in the countryside. Instead I started out with a broad question of how gender affects the experience and impact of corruption after which I tried to figure out “where the action is” as a basis for the selection of provinces and informants, driven by a search for meaning (O’Reilly 2009). My previous experience had, in addition, been that officials were surprisingly open to discuss corruption, but only in general terms, for instance regarding problems in other provinces or areas, sectors other than their own and the way Vietnam, after all, was doing a good job preventing corruption. An example was when the representatives of various provincial agencies and mass organisations in Bac Ninh province did not want to go into detail when asked about existing forms of corruption related to land planning, confiscations and land allocation. Complementary interviews with households and experts on land use and rights I therefore deemed were necessary in order to be exposed to different versions of the same problem.

Given that corruption is a highly sensitive subject, the contact with the CECODES-team was clearly an asset for gaining access since they had connections in government agencies and a team that was working on practical

details surrounding the provincial visits (involving a lot of dialogue, persuasion and formal permits). Foreign researchers working independently in Vietnam is a relatively new phenomenon following restrictions on moving freely in the country (Scott et al. 2005). During my fieldwork it was clear that official permits were a fundamental part of gaining access to the field, not least for a highly sensitive subject such as corruption. The sensitivity of the subject was not least illustrated by the fact that several provinces that CECODES had chosen for their report declined to participate and host the research team for a few days. When I tried to contact directly the responsible authorities (primarily the Government Inspectorate, in charge of anti-corruption monitoring), it became clear that I would not be permitted to freely travel around on my own to interview households and officials. This became a concern while I was developing the theoretical and methodological framework, since I on an early stage had decided that interviews with households, officials and NGOs working on related issues was needed to shed light on the sensitive and elusive dimensions of corruption. On one occasion I was denied access to a province when the local authorities declined the participation of an international researcher (more on this below). Similar restrictions have been reported by other researchers. Fiona Miller's fieldwork in the Mekong delta was, for instance, strictly regulated by the local authorities who stipulated the amount of time she could spend in the village, reviewing the interview questions in advance and kept a list of who she interviewed (Scott et al. 2005). Rydstrøm was initially under surveillance during her fieldwork until the authorities found her trustworthy (Rydstrøm 1998).

I thus decided to use CECODES as an entry point to the provinces and attempted to accompany the team to Lang Son, Bac Ninh and Ho Chi Minh City with the intention to be a part of the team while asking different questions. If I could get accepted as a participant in parts of CECODES' itinerary I would also gain formal access to the provinces and be able to travel around on my own, performing complementary interviews.

In this way the design phase of the research thus included compromise between my own wishes and ideas and the political reality of Vietnam with its controlled environment, restrictions on freedom of speech and movement and dependency on institutions to grant "field visits". Not being able to travel freely was an obvious challenge when preparing the field work and something that limited the process. Without claims for immediate generalisation of the findings, this could, however, be handled and this thesis is not to be read as a "micro-cosm" of the state of affairs in Vietnam generally. Although land-related corruption is a problem in many parts of the country (for instance illustrated by the newspaper articles referred to above), corruption and gender relations are likely to differ between provinces. Southerners are for instance perceived to more openly express criticism while northerners are more reluctant. The same has been found in relation to the majority Kinh-population vis-à-vis minority groups (Scott et al. 2005).

3.3.3 Sampling: choosing where to go and who to talk to

Sampling was an ongoing process, continually developed during the research process. In line with an iterative-inductive approach it evolved gradually as the study developed (O'Reilly 2009). Broad criteria were to meet and interview officials and household members that directly or indirectly had come in contact with land-related procedures (and thereby perhaps also with corruption). During the reading period, and during the initial interviews with NGO-representatives in Hanoi, it became clear that land-related corruption was common almost everywhere in Vietnam leading to the hypothesis that most households had some kind of experience of it.

Sampling of which provinces to visit and who to talk to in the provinces was handled both through practical limitations, but also through my intention to visit provinces with ongoing land-transformation processes. Since my initial research focus was rather general, I did not, however, have a natural guidance on where to go to best enlighten the topic I wanted to know more about. Sampling is related to generalization and although the qualitative approach does not provide for rational generalization, the description of how the selection took place gives the reader the opportunity to assess whether the findings in this thesis can be generalized to other contexts. Although I did look for consistencies and patterns, I am never the less careful not to imply generalized findings when in fact, it is likely that different parts of Vietnam experiences different forms of corruption in different ways. One way to handle generalization is through the term “moderatum generalizations” which describes how findings, to some extent, can be transferred to other contexts in the form of instances of something outside the analysis (Williams 2000). Another is to let the reader determine to what extent the analysis is transferable to other situations. A key component is to critically acknowledge that despite the rich data that has been collected, researchers are always dealing with a fragment of the total picture. In my case not least importantly sorted through cultural filters, a translator and language barriers.

The choice of provinces was based on the fact that these provinces all had a reputation of land-related corruption associated with large scale land reforms, but also that I could get formal access to perform interviews. Bac Ninh, situated two hours North of Hanoi, is the smallest of Vietnam's provinces but with the highest population density. Bac Ninh intends to become an industrial hotspot and have during the last few years expropriated large areas of farm land to develop industrial zones and create space for international companies to set up production. The choice to go to Bac Ninh was thereby motivated by the fact that experts in Hanoi had argued that land transformation processes tends to include conflicts over compensation awarded to families. Expropriations also lead to more contacts with public officials for individual households. Another reason for choosing Bac Ninh was its proximity to Hanoi and that the province thereby had more ambitious industrialisation plans than provinces further away from urban centres.

The landscape in Bac Ninh is characterized by rice paddies and other farm land, road construction and many new industrial hangars, often located close to the main roads. The capital – Bac Ninh City – is a sleepy small town with cafés,

restaurants, karaoke bars, shops and a few hotels. Villages are scattered around the landscape.

Lang Son, on the North-East border to China, is also implementing large scale land reforms primarily but is focusing focused on forestry and catering to Chinese companies. Situated on one of the main corridors between Hanoi and China, this area is subject to large scale infrastructure projects and the border region is characterized by cross-border trading. With several ethnic minority groups, this area experienced other land-related problems than Bac Ninh which was the main motivation for including this province.

The rapid influx of people to Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) has meant that Vietnam's largest city has grown substantially in the last 20 years (population now estimated at around 10 million), putting pressure on urban planning and expanding the city limits to what is still agricultural land on its current outskirts. HCMC is the most modern city in Vietnam and considered the financial capital. The city centre is filled with sky scrapers and high-end shops including international brands. Ho Chi Minh City thus represented other land-related issues than in country side provinces and was on these grounds chosen to be included in the study. To go to a southern province would also enable a modest comparison between north and south. The historical division between North and South has, for instance, resulted in what many describes as a more "laid-back" attitude compared to the political centre in the North.

The first trip was scheduled to go to Lang Son in May 2010, but just before leaving I was told that the provincial authorities of Lang Son refused to let a western researcher accompany the team. After a few days with frantic correspondence it was clear that the provincial authorities would not change their minds. I therefore had to abandon the plans to visit Lang Son. The reasons for not letting me go along is unknown, although NGOs with projects in Lang Son that I interviewed in Hanoi mentioned rumours of large scale corruption on behalf of the local authorities. Instead I focused my energy on the trips to Bac Ninh and Ho Chi Minh City while adding interviews with experts on land, gender and/or corruption in Hanoi. Retaining flexibility while adjusting to these external conditions was thus key to be able to go to the field at all. Similar experiences have been reported by many other international researchers attempting to do fieldwork in Vietnam. Rydstrøm's experiences from trying to get a research permission in 1994 eventually forced her to hire a co-worker since meetings with national, provincial and local authorities took so much time that the planned language courses were impossible to complete (Rydstrøm 1998).

"Snow-balling selection" (Aspers 2007) was used as a method to gain access to participants in the three provinces, for instance in the form of getting advice on who could be interesting to talk to, or where land-related corruption was a specific problem. An example of this is when two women I interviewed outside Bac Ninh City mentioned big protests in a village nearby. Following this, I and my interpreter went to the village and to try to find people willing to be interviewed. Without access to extensive public records of land use, ownership or socio-economic status, I found that this method served the purposes of the thesis well. In Bac Ninh, a key informant from the Vietnam Fatherland Front agreed to be

interviewed following the group session and later helped with introductions to several households in the country side that he knew had land-related problems. Through the group sessions I got in contact with representatives of local Women's Union chapters that I could later interview on my own and other valuable contacts. Illustrating the difficulties facing researchers doing fieldwork in Vietnam, I was told that CECODES' informants would be chosen randomly, based on property and taxation registers. In practice, however, the selection process was coordinated by the local authorities casting some doubts regarding how the selection had been made and who the authorities thought appropriate for CECODES to speak to.

3.3.4 The interviews

On the trips to Bac Ninh and Ho Chi Minh City I accompanied the CECODES-team and sat in on their focus group sessions with provincial and district level officials and focus group sessions with households invited to "hearings" to voice their thoughts on land-related corruption. Despite some limitations I was able to ask additional questions in all sessions I attended and thereby got access to formal arenas that would otherwise have been off-limit.

Following the group sessions with CECODES I spent 3-5 days on my own exploring different parts of HCMC and Bac Ninh, sitting down at coffee shops, small restaurants and visiting villages to find participants that were willing to be interviewed. In Bac Ninh I participated in two focus group sessions with 17 persons (6 women, 11 men). Outside the group sessions I interviewed 12 persons together with my translator (8 women, 4 men). In HCMC, three focus group sessions with 25 persons (17 men, 8 women) were followed by interviews with 5 households and individuals (5 women, 2 men). In Hanoi I interviewed three persons representing the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (1 man, 2 women). I also interviewed six persons working at research organisations or NGOs, specialized in gender and land issues (1 man, 5 women).⁶

Different types of interviews results in different data, and the interviews I used can be characterized as semi-structured since they were based on a number of themes related to the research topic. Semi-structured interviews fitted the timeframe and purpose of the research well enabling some degree of control of the interviews making sure that the discussion did not wander too far outside the primary aim. At the same time, this method also allows space for following up on unexpected thoughts and reflections (Bryman 2007).

Two different interview guides were used (one for officials and one for households and individuals) but unexpected side-tracks relating to issues outside the specific question were encouraged and followed up. The guide was primarily

⁶ See Thayer (2009) for a critical discussion of the role of NGOs in Vietnam.

used as support during the interviews to stay “on track” and not all questions were used in all interviews. As opposed to a more long-term ethnographic approach where time and relationships are central (Heyl 2007), this method enabled shorter interaction with participants. For households questions concerning demographics were included such as size of household, age and occupation. Central themes evolved around who in the household that is responsible for land-matters, if they had experiences from applying for a land use certificate, experiences of corruption and land-related customs such as inheritance. For officials, the themes focused on their responsibilities, household representatives they had come in contact with and land use right certificates.

The challenge was to approach a sensitive subject slowly while being sufficiently structured to be able to access relevant information during the restricted time frame. The balance between ambition and practical restrictions were thus constantly under negotiation, something that has also been experienced by other researchers (Scott et al. 2005).

I was prepared for difficulties in trying to approach a sensitive subject like corruption during the interviews. I was, however, surprised by the directness with which local officials would condemn corruption and I was generally surprised by the openness with which people were willing to talk to me about their housing and/or land situation as well as intra-household dynamics. A quote from a representative of the District Planning and Investment Ministry in Bac Ninh is illustrative of the tone with which local officials talked about corruption:

The laws on corruption in Vietnam are not adequate and do not address the roots of the problem. In Bac Ninh, we have a lot of problems with corruption regarding land. But the corruption starts with the central government as a consequence of the laws they make. All ministries have to implement different laws which can confuse and complicate rather than make the process simple. One problem is that there are too many laws. The ministries at the provincial levels don't have time to implement them all. It would be better to have one law in the future for all ministries to follow. (Man, around 50 years old, Bac Ninh June 2010)

I was able to ask questions other than those defined by the CECODES-team, which primarily focused on household division of labour and local practices concerning land use. In the focus group interviews where several mass organizations participated, representatives of the Women's Union tended to answer my questions both in Bac Ninh and in Ho Chi Minh City. I quickly found that meeting with the Women's Union outside of the group sessions provided much more interesting and elaborate responses than those articulated when other officials were present. In Bac Ninh and Ho Chi Minh City, I conducted separate interviews with the WU. The unwillingness on behalf of officials and/or mass organization representatives to discuss land as mediated through gender relations, can be attributed to several potential explanations. One is obviously related to my own position as a young westerner unfamiliar with the Vietnamese context. Another explanation proposed by Scott, could be the general reluctance to discuss inequality and the low interest for studying policy implementation as opposed to the policy itself (Scott et al. 2005).

When interviewing farmers and people I met in the villages, it was more difficult, however, to talk about a sensitive subject like corruption directly. Although the participants in these contexts on several occasions would voice relatively harsh critique of corrupt officials, I adopted an approach whereby I approached corruption indirectly through asking questions about land use, whether the household had been in contact with land or cadastral offices and what the situation regarding land in the area was (had there been expropriations, were they happy with information from the authorities etc). With this entry-point, most of the participants mentioned some form of corruption they had been exposed to (or heard of) which gave me the opportunity to ask follow-up questions.

The role one chooses to take in the research process also results in different types of access. During the research process I changed roles from a more formal tone during the group sessions arranged by CECODES to an informal role when I and my translator were travelling on our own talking to people and trying to find persons willing to be interviewed.

3.4 Working with an interpreter

With only a basic understanding of Vietnamese, I worked with an interpreter during the interviews. This entails specific considerations and Scott et al. (2005) emphasize that the positionality of the interpreter needs to be problematized in addition to that of the researcher. During their fieldwork, Scott, Miller and Lloyd found that the cultural sensitivity of the interpreter greatly affected their interviews. At times, the interpreters would, for instance, express prejudice against rural people or ethnic minorities, in turn affecting access and the response from locals. At the same time, ambitious interpreters can clearly help foreign researchers understand a local context and act as an ice-breaker approaching locals and introducing the research project. I share Scott, Miller and Lloyd's experience with the interpreter misunderstanding his/hers role by trying to answer questions themselves as opposed to translating the replies from the study participants although this only happened from time to time. My interpreter was a 42-year old man from Bac Giang province who had previously completed a degree in social work in Hanoi. As we became friends in Hanoi, I felt I could trust him. Our friendship also meant a higher degree of flexibility compared to the use of professional interpreters working on hourly compensation. Compensation was determined in the beginning based on an estimated number of days we would be travelling in the country side and I also covered his expenses when we travelled to Ho Chi Minh City. His background in Bac Giang (neighbouring Bac Ninh) also meant that he contributed with much knowledge of the local situation and his academic background included an understanding cultural differences and of the research project. He had previously interviewed in the country side as a part of his studies. Other challenges were obvious in Ho Chi Minh City, with the North-South divide at times expressed in derogatory remarks about northerners, at one point directed to my translator from the North. Although this clearly affected

access in this context, the value of working with an interpreter I could trust was determined to outweigh the potential difficulties. Having “access” to my interpreter also “outside” business hours also meant that we could discuss and analyse the interviews on a daily basis.

3.5 Interview material

During the interviews I took notes that I summarized after each day together with my translator who could clarify certain aspects or explain details that I had written down simultaneously. The records from all the interviews finally added up to around 45 pages of text. Tools in this process included summarizing, organizing and sorting the text into themes relevant for the research questions with the intention to find patterns or underlying assumptions/meanings (Aspers 2007). Organising the data around the theoretical concepts enabled identification of patterns and what themes that had been repeated by different participants during the fieldwork. Five themes were chosen, based on the interviews as well as the theoretical framework. Colour-coding was used to sort and structure the data around the five themes which to a large degree was overlapping. The categories was then used in the analysis and corresponds to 1) kinship/patrilineal traditions, 2) land use right certificates, 3) women as guardians of land, 4) impact of corruption, 5) general articulations of masculinity/femininity.

Key features during the sorting process was not only to find patterns but also to identify what the participants seem to take for granted (including silences), or hints that what the participants said differ from what they do (Aspers 2007). This was not least important for the notes from the interviews with officials which could be compared with comments by the households.

Taking notes are not as straightforward as it might seem, however, and always involve reducing observations and interviews into condensed representations that are filtered through the researchers own eyes. Selection of what is important is done before, during and after the interviews based on what one believes is important for shedding light on a given topic. As a part of analysing the data, reflecting on silences both on behalf of myself and of the participants is therefore important.

As described by Emerson et al. (2007), the final body of field notes were not particularly coherent and consistency and was rather a text where different impressions, answers and interview settings had been compiled. My style of taking notes, focused on recording what the participants said in response to the questions I posed and our discussion around relevant topics. In addition, I tried to describe the settings in which the interviews took place and briefly describe the persons I met with and talked to. Methods other researchers define as field notes are personal journals/diaries and scratch notes etc. (Emerson et al. 2007). I found it useful to separate as much as possible my own perception and interpretation from the data, postponing the analysis to the writing process while being aware

that my account of the interviews never are completely “objective” or clear from theoretical pre-understanding.

3.6 The fieldwork – opportunities and weaknesses

Other researchers have pointed out the challenges associated with doing fieldwork in Vietnam. Scott et al. (2005) for instance, write about difficulties related to a general lack of information and the low reliability of published material as well as the difficulties in gaining access to information from government institutions. It is not uncommon for state officials to ask researchers for compensation for gaining access to updated data or other material related to the research project. One challenge during my fieldwork related to restrictions on movement and not being given access to one of the provinces I had chosen for the fieldwork (cf. Rydström 1998). Although this was handled through additional interviews in Hanoi, the trip to Lang Son would have added to my understanding of the relation between corruption, gender and masculine privilege. The cooperation with the CECODES-team was a good solution concerning access, but also meant that I did not decide who was a part of the group sessions. CECODES and their government contacts had, however, arranged for all of the relevant agencies and mass organisations to be a part of the focus groups so I did feel that these sessions gave as good information as I had hoped for. The cooperation also presented clear opportunities for visiting the country side following the group sessions. This experience highlights the fact that researchers tend to need approval of a host institution to do field work in Vietnam. Another contextual feature which affected the fieldwork is the tendency among Vietnamese scholars to confirm policy decisions or illustrate the success of certain reforms (Scott et. al. 2005). Similar to the position of Vietnamese NGOs (Thayer 2006), this is indicative of a one-party state with extensive overlapping between different government bodies.

Being inspired by ethnographic methods also leads to certain standpoints concerning generalization, however. An increase in the number of cases does, with this perspective, not necessarily serve to strengthen the analysis. Spreading the study over several cases might instead serve to diminish the explanatory power as opposed to studying fewer cases in more detail (Wolcott 2008). That the interviews took place with the purpose of writing a report for Sida could also be considered a weakness. That I based the fieldwork on making some sense of the links between gender and corruption enables further analysis with a different perspective. That the research took place in this context also provided me with contacts that I would not have made otherwise. New opportunities have in the past often been related to studies related to development projects whereby new spaces for Vietnamese and foreign researchers to cooperate have emerged (Scott et al. 2005). A challenge related to this was to not be mistaken as a donor who wished to invest in a local development project. This could have meant that locals focus on “constructed needs” they believe that foreigners can help them with. Several researchers have expressed the difficulties in explaining that the objective of the

interviews is to understand the local context as opposed to preparing investments (Scott et al. 2005). Approaching a sensitive subject is another challenge that has been experienced by other researchers. As in any other context, this entails considering that participants will not reveal their opinions in fear of repercussions or sanctions:

People were reluctant to talk about everyday practices that may run counter to given policies or social norms. Of course, everyone knew that disputed practices existed, but to openly acknowledge these strategies of resistance and their incongruity with official discourses or norms was generally not viewed as appropriate in general, and certainly not as an appropriate topic for research. (Scott et al. 2005, p. 33)

The reasons for this is of course manifold with roots in Vietnam's history and cultural traditions, one example being the Confucian legacy emphasizing respect for authorities, another is the depreciation of qualitative methods and fear of losing face if reforms were found to not work (Scott et al. 2005).

In the end, all research projects have to be adjusted in accordance with the available time and being realistic about what can be achieved within the given frame (Wolcott 2008). In my case, this meant compromising between my own ideas of the research process (not least having more time) and the practical realities in Vietnam.

4 Theoretical framework – masculine privilege and the right to be recognized

In this section, the theoretical framework that will structure the analysis is elaborated. Based on masculinity studies, privilege and power, the second section expands on the predominately western understanding of masculinities. Research of Asian masculinities is still scarce, and local analysis is needed to identify global links and the ways different types of masculinity constructions interacts and forms new hybrids (Louie 2003). In many places in Asia, there is accordingly some degree of discomfort with a Eurocentric application of gender theories without taking local experiences and particularities into account and this has also been used to criticize feminist research in Asian countries as being based on a “Western influence” (Rydstrøm 2010). The framework is combined with Nancy Fraser’s conceptual framework for understanding different forms of inequality.

4.1 Masculinities

Men and masculinities, men’s power and privileges were for a long time taken for granted and not as a specific topic for feminist researchers to problematize in terms of sex and/or gender (Hearn 2003, Robinson 2002). In line with the wish to empower women and display that other perspectives on the social world was possible, gender studies was called women’s studies until the final decades of the 20th century. That the majority of earlier (and a surprising amount of current) research had been based on men’s experiences and perspectives was not described or illustrated (Hearn 1992). This changed, however, when interest for how oppressive norms was reproduced grew as illustrated for instance in analyses of whiteness in ethnic terms and of masculinity in sex/gender terms. A number of researchers have thus turned their searchlight on men’s un-challenged privileges and how masculinity is reconstructed.

A central question in masculinity studies has been to define masculinity. Is there a singular masculinity, and if so, what are its characteristics? Raewyn Connell’s conclusion is that the relational character of gender should be the centre of attention through the interplay between personality and social relations. Femininity and masculinity are hence given meaning in relation to each other where they function as a social delimitation and cultural opposite (Connell 2003).

With this perspective, masculinity is linked to power and change as seen through a social-constructivist lens. Masculinity is not about biology or ”natural traits”, but reproduced through constant performance (Connell 2003). Identity is

not individual and private, but rather seen as a process based on context and compromise; the ways masculinities are performed changes spatially and over time. Masculinity is therefore not something that can be equated with a specific man but rather as something which men has to relate to (Connell, Messerschmidt 2005). This, in turn means that identity is not something eternal or given by nature, but instable and contradictory that needs to be performed to be upheld. Identity is with this understanding firmly rooted in a changeable social context (Hearn 2003).

Combining feminist theory with Gramsci's hegemony concept, Connell's influential concept of hegemonic masculinity is defined as the ideal that over time has become naturalized and seemingly legitimate. Hegemonic characteristics constantly changes in response to challenges from other/alternative types of masculinity as well as femininity. Bearing parts of the theory are the relational focus and subordination, participation and marginalization (Connell 1995).

A central aspect of using hegemony as a theoretical concept is that it underscores the existence of multiple masculinities engaged in hierarchical struggle over acceptance and domination. This, then, opens the door for analyzing masculinity and femininity historically and the identification of shifts whereby one dominant version of masculinity is replaced by another. Analyzing different forms of masculinity enables an understanding of how other power dimensions interplay with constructions of masculinity and femininity. Working class masculinity offers different opportunities/abilities for performing gender than the middle and upper classes. The factory floor and the air-conditioned offices involve different dynamics for performing gender (Connell 2003).

As with all identity constructions, masculinity, however, is constantly risking destabilization and are always to some degree instable and threatened. Pluralizing masculinities does not by default lead to fragmentation of masculine privilege, however, but might instead serve to re-legitimize (hegemonic) masculinity by focusing on alternative, or "softer" versions (Robinson 2002). Violence is one response to threatened gender identities and is deeply intertwined with masculine practices in Vietnam. This is not least due to the recent wartime experience but also identified as a response to challenges to the current hierarchical order and men's superior position (Rydstrøm 2006b).

Hegemonic masculinity is at the same time not reproduced by itself but requires constant attention to appropriate "ways of being a man", as well as devaluing of alternative masculinities, (for instance in the form of homophobia) and of women. A key characteristic of lower status masculinities is related to femininity as well as other economic, social and political markers such as class, ethnicity and political affiliation. Combined, these result in a social and cultural exclusion of groups not fitting the dominating hegemonic norm. Resistance to dominant forms of masculinity is often based in ethnic marginalisation, class formation, stigmatised sexualities as well as from political branches of the women's movement (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Even though Connell's use of hegemony has been widely used in masculinity studies to capture cultural ideals, masculinity cannot be solely reduced to culture and discourse. In one of their later interventions, Connell and Messerschmidt

emphasize that gender needs to be analyzed in relation to material phenomena as well. This includes wage labour, violence, child care and social welfare systems etc. (Connell, Messerschmidt 2005). This aspect of masculinity will be further explored below in the analysis when the discussion of masculinity is combined with Nancy Fraser's framework for understanding social injustices.

Critique against the use of hegemonic masculinity includes weak empirical evidence when analyzed concretely. This is for example expressed in the multitude of masculine practices that is detected in different societies. Although Connell and Messerschmidt acknowledge the parallel existence of many different forms of masculinity this critique is particularly useful for not reducing hegemonic masculinity to a one-dimensional category. In line with this ambition, masculinity should instead be seen as a contested field where struggles over meaning, power and status are constantly played out (Connell, Messerschmidt 2005).

4.2 Asian masculinities

Although Asian masculinities have been a focus for some research, this has in practice meant studying Asian immigrants living in USA or Europe. With the addition of *Asian Masculinities* (2003), Kam Louie and Morris Low added a focus on masculine practices in Asian countries – a topic that had been relatively under-researched. Louie and Low, contributes to the debate on contemporary masculinities by criticizing the Western perspective that characterizes the field and notes that most of what has been written on Asian masculinities concern Asian minorities living in Western countries. Asian men tend to be described as “less ‘sexual’ and more ‘intelligent’ than both black and white men” (Louie 2003). With this perspective, hegemonic masculinity needs to be problematized and contextualized to be useful. Without nuancing, it risks hiding heterogeneity and diversity thereby stereotyping all types of masculinities into a predefined set of categories. Studies of masculinities needs instead to be situated in a specific context which would indirectly illustrate the presence of different versions of hegemonic masculinity in different places at different times (Hibbins 2003).

In the Chinese context, it is interesting to consider the influence of Confucianism on Chinese masculinity, which is also relevant in Vietnam. As opposed to Western masculinities, often focused on physical strength, Chinese masculinity includes a scholarly tradition which is emphasized besides military prowess. Still today, education is seen as something that enhances masculine authority, for instance displayed in the listing of politicians' academic merits. Contemporary Chinese literature frequently includes depictions of what in Western eyes would be described as effeminate males. In the Chinese context, however, these “soft” men are primarily seen as attractive for women (Louie 2003). Another contrast is captured by the term ‘containment’, illustrating the Chinese ideal of restraint and control of sexual passion, contrasted by Western ideals of conquest. A contrast is also Chinese constructions of female sexuality for

which restraint has not been seen as a key characteristic or ideal. Instead, women have been thought to lack self-control and therefore needs to be disciplined. Femininity has, in this way, been linked to passivity and submission in China where as masculinity is seen as building on mastering, control and dominance:

In terms of sexuality, therefore, the opposite of masculinity does not mean femininity. It means in effect the lack of sexual dominance and control, whether it be through impotence or castration. (Louie 2003, p. 8)

During the 20th century, however, the Chinese construction of masculinity was under considerable stress following military defeats by virtually all foreign nations. The old ideals of the scholar-soldier seemed unsuitable for modern times and China was for long characterized as the “sick man of Asia”. Influences from Japan were, and are still, influential in China, and Japan has repeatedly highlighted the differences between Japan and other Asian countries. During the Second World War, Japan promoted a national identity as ethnically white. Japan’s eagerness to modernize (to a large extent synonymous with westernization), had obvious implications for constructions of Japanese masculinity, not least in relation to the popularity of western style military clothing and the replacement of the samurai with the a businessman-ideal emerging in tandem with Japans economic growth during the second half of the 1900s (Low 2003).

The rapid economic growth of the Chinese and Vietnamese economies and their increasing importance on the world’s political and economic stage, will also involve re-casting constructions of masculinity and femininity adapted to new circumstances in these nations histories. As Louie has argued, a gradual shift towards more democratic roles for men is being witnessed in both China and Japan. Although this is less researched in Vietnam, the same process is likely to occur there as well. As with the Japanese influence on Chinese masculinity, the ways in which Asian countries influence each other needs more attention (Louie 2003). What can be concluded is that the rapid hybridization of masculine identities will continue in the future with developing Asian countries forced to relate to other forms of being a man. An example of this hybridization is illustrated in Phinney’s study of Vietnamese men’s extramarital practices, where many of the informants stated that access to western ideas concerning sexuality had influenced and changed their gender identity (Phinney 2008).

Not much has been written on Asian masculinities in general, and Vietnamese masculinity in particular.⁷ In one of the recent analyses that focus on Vietnam, the term ‘machismo’ is introduced into the South-East Asian context by Rydstrøm and Horton in their article “Heterosexual masculinity in contemporary Vietnam: privileges, pleasures and protests” (2011). Machismo is by the authors used to describe an expression of “male-centred privileges and they way in which they foster chauvinism against women (or other men)” (Rydstrøm, Horton 2011). In

⁷ Exceptions include Rydstrøm (2006b), Rydstrøm and Horton (2011) and Phinney (2008).

the view of the authors, this perspective enables an “examination of heterosexual masculinity in patrilineally organized Vietnam. This is of course, related to patrilineal inheritance traditions relevant for the purposes of this thesis.

Machismo is with this perspective used as a theoretical concept illustrating how heterosexual masculine privilege is institutionalized as a bearing part of social relations in contemporary Vietnam. A key component is the patrilineal tradition that structures both the inheritance of culture and of resources. Women are in this tradition mainly responsible for supporting the male head of the household.

The constant negotiations surrounding dominating (or hegemonic) masculinities are, however, changing some of the traditional patterns. That women traditionally cannot achieve the same status as a man, regardless of her age, is currently changing by new ways of organizing households and power structures (Rydstrøm, Horton 2011). During my interviews it was, for instance, common that women accepted a supporting role also in regards to land issues and tended to worry more about the future of the household, despite the fact that it was seen as the man’s responsibility. In this, way, and through going to protest rallies that might be harmful for their husbands they protect and assist the male in shouldering their responsibility as breadwinners.

As in China, Confucianism is an important part of social relations in Vietnam. Bearing parts of masculinity constructions are the concepts of patrilineal ancestor worship and methods for inheriting the family blood line and honour. In this tradition, a son links his patrilineal ancestors with future men in the family and is therefore crucial for the survival of the kin since it is thought to “biologically and symbolically [...] be a materialization of history” (Rydstrøm 1998, p. 19). The eldest son is thus thought to reproduce the patrilineage which, in turn, is seen as an obligation leading to honour. The status for women has therefore been intimately connected to whether she is able to give birth to a male heir (Rydstrøm 2006b). The Vietnamese history of warfare is another important component of local masculinity constructions, influencing both gender relations and ways of incorporating violence in masculine practices (Rydstrøm 2006b, 2003).

The practice of ancestor worship has direct consequences for gender relations with men given awarded a superior position in relation to women due to their role in the reproduction of the father’s lineage. Men are thus responsible for making the important decisions while women tends to be responsible for the household and maintaining harmony in the home (Rydstrøm 2006b, 2003). This was illustrated during my interviews, although a majority of the households I interviewed also claimed that important decisions were taken jointly. Strictly hierarchical gender relations and decision-making power were, for instance commented by one of the gender experts I met in Hanoi:

In Vietnam men make the big decisions. Women make small decisions, for instance for clothes and food. The husband and wife normally discuss issues like this [land], but in the end the decision is up to the husband (Hanoi June 2010)

Another aspect of structured gender relations is heteronormative sexuality, which in the Vietnamese context is related to the Yin/Yang (Am/Duong in Vietnamese) concepts of opposite and complementary traits. Corresponding with categories such as active and superior (men) and passivity and inferiority (women) these forces are supposed to complement each other and result in harmonious relations, both in the household and on an aggregated level (Rydström 2006b). Heteronormative sexuality is in this way the “glue” that maintains the binary gender order and the separation between masculinity/femininity (Brod 2002). This is accordingly illustrated by studies of sexual practices in Vietnam, which has found that the greatest risk of contracting HIV for married women is by having sex with their (infidel) men (Phinney 2008).

Harriet Phinney’s research, indicates that the Doi Moi reforms have aggravated gender power imbalances, stating that the opportunities for engaging in extramarital sex (and thereby risking infecting their spouses with HIV). Opportunities to have extramarital affairs is in Phinney’s research thought to have become more prevalent following Doi Moi, not least due to fewer restrictions on movement and morality (Phinney 2008). This is echoed by Nguyen-Vo who claims that the neo-liberal reforms and the promotion of the freedom to consume has “unleashed a new nativist and masculinist sexuality, fuelling the sex trade” (Nguyen-Vo 2010, p. 50). The strong emphasis on privatization in these reforms are thus thought to have facilitated new consumption patterns whereby men’s sexuality is commercialised and sexualized leisure have become a symbol for social dominance based on economic means (Nguyen-Vo 2010).

The analysis of masculine sexuality has however, tended to be rather conservative and in order to decrease social deterioration. The Women’s Union, for example, recommends women to maintain their sexual appeal as a tool for reducing males’ infidelity (Phinney 2008). The other side of a growing sex industry is thus a growing market for beauty products, fitness clubs and fancy clothes shops. To place the responsibility of men’s infidelity on wives illustrate the structural power differences between men and women emphasizing men’s needs as the baseline for social interaction. This is exemplified in Phinney’s study (2008) in which both men and women informants spoke about the right for men to seek sex outside the marriage to satisfy perceived needs. That men’s responsibility is not an issue is also illustrated by the reluctance of many men to use condoms, even though they are aware of the risks of contaminating their wives with sexually transmitted diseases.

The history of gender relations in Vietnam highlights the hierarchical nature of the social system and the privileges awarded to men. Gender equality is an anomaly within this cultural tradition although Vietnam has an excellent legal framework. As with many other areas in Vietnam, obstacles for gender equality includes implementation, and corruption could be one of the factors affecting both individual’s respect for formal laws and the ability of public institutions to enforce them. The inability to enforce laws is therefore likely to result in maintaining the practice of customary norms and practices. It can also be speculated that just as men perceive that they have the right to seek sex outside their marriage, they might also find privileges based in personal connections or unlawful payments as

a “right”. This needs to be analyzed not in terms of individual choices or poor morality but as a part of the gendered social organisation.

4.3 Recognition, (re)distribution and representation

Besides basing the analysis on privilege and power related to masculinity, I have found Nancy Fraser’s theoretical framework for social justice useful when working with the interview material. Fraser’s involvement in the redistribution/recognition debate was initiated with the publication of *Justice Interruptus* in 1997 in which she proposed “a new conceptual framework for critical theory, linking a socialtheoretical analysis of subordination to a moral-philosophical account of injustice” (Fraser 2007, p. 305). Fraser’s intervention is based on critical theory and the model is intended to present a conceptualization of different types of injustices in order to guide the most effective resistance strategies. Focused on the social relations underpinning resistance strategies, as well as the outcomes of struggles, the framework includes both process and end-results. Critical questions include whether persons (or groups) can participate on equal grounds and if so, whether their interventions change unequal power relations. Contextual conditions are also emphasized, and if these are sufficient for guaranteeing all to participate on equal grounds. Individuals’ freedom is seen as depending on institutionalized patterns that either can prevent or promote interaction and the recognition of all opinions and right to engage in matters affecting their lives:

In my approach, persons are socially situated but potentially autonomous fellow actors, whose (equal) autonomy depends on their ability to interact with one another as peers – not only in political reasoning, but in *all* the major arenas and practices that comprise their form of life. (Fraser 2007)

Fraser’s argument is essentially that the struggle against oppression has lost focus at a time when resistance increasingly tends to be articulated in terms of cultural recognition. What is needed is rather a theory of justice which incorporates both recognition and redistribution. While retaining the importance of recognition, Fraser thereby argued for a re-introduction of economic redistribution as a fundamental component of the struggle against oppression (Fraser 1997). The diagnosis underpinning the framework includes the simultaneous increase of identity-politics with an aggressive neo-liberal hegemony. Under these circumstances, identity-politics cannot succeed since it doesn’t sufficiently take the other main dimensions of oppression into account.

Taking the global political and economic context into account is important when analyzing land-related corruption in Vietnam. Despite the fact that Vietnam is ruled by the communist party, it has rapidly reformed a wide number of sectors to better align with demands from international companies and organizations, not least since becoming a member of the World Trade Organisation in 2006.

Vietnam is deeply involved in the global economy at this stage and an increasingly popular producer of agricultural products such as coffee as well as textiles and other manufacturing products. Neo-liberal reforms focused on de-regulation and privatization has been implemented, for instance in the form of land reforms where agricultural land has been converted to more productive industrial land (Kerkvliet 2006). Although the state retains sole ownership of land, this is likely to change in the near future and these transformation processes present vast opportunities for corruption (CECODES, Davidsen 2010).

The global context in which Vietnam's land reforms are taking place is thus a time of economic globalization and the domination of neo-liberal policies promoting free markets and entrepreneurship. In line with this, the Vietnamese state has been reduced from an important actor to being a facilitator for functioning markets. Farmers selling their produce on free markets in competition with others are thought to increase productivity (Nguyen-Vo 2010, Belanger et. al. 2010).

The re-introduction of the household as the main agricultural productive unit has also lead to changes in intra-household power relations and decision-making dynamics. Gender analyses of the reforms have indicated that the authority of the head of the household has been strengthened during this process potentially resulting in the reproduction of patriarchal traditions. In some places, reports indicate that women have taken over agricultural production all together while men have migrated to find new employment opportunities (Belanger et. al. 2010).

Fraser's intervention is based on a concern that struggles for recognition are displacing and undermining politics of redistribution rather than leading to mutual strengthening. If culture is taken as the sole ground for injustice, gender discrimination can be approached without an understanding of how links between androcentric norms in the labour market and the devaluing of "feminine" employment categories are developed (Fraser 2000). Although this is primarily based in a western context of social movements, the perspective is thought to have relevance also for the Asian context. Taking this into account, this thesis discusses whether injustice is institutionalized in the Vietnamese context thereby depriving some of the necessary resources, information and voice needed to participate. An underlying argument is that since corruption is fundamentally an expression of inequality and discrimination (Rothstein, Uslaner 2012), a system which is based on strict hierarchies is likely to amplify and legitimize corrupt practices since unequal treatment is engrained in social relations. With this perspective, a reduction of corruption is also positive for gender equality since both requires higher respect for equal treatment and non-discrimination. The discussion of Vietnamese masculinities above, which illustrates the gender-bias when it comes to important decisions and male privileges concerning important resources such as land can also be related to this conception of (in)justice. Institutionalized gender inequality in this form, would with Fraser's analysis require a redistribution of power and formal access to land to change gendered injustice.

Access to decision making power, is another aspect that is affected by corruption and can be illustrated by obstacles for women to have their voices heard in accountability mechanisms. This makes it harder for women to change

their own situation. When positions in local or national government are based on personal contacts and nepotism rather than merit, poor women (and men) have fewer chances to advance (U4 2009a).

Arguing for increased attention to the multiple dimensions of injustice, Fraser, however, also suggests that seeing maldistribution as secondary to misrecognition essentially is a reversal of the tendency in orthodox Marxism to prioritize the economic base on behalf of the cultural and political superstructure (Fraser 2000, 2006). The effects of seeing maldistribution as a secondary effect of misrecognition will, with this perspective, serve to reify and essentialize group identity and in turn, serve to simplify group-identity and deny intra-group power struggles. In the long-run, this form of identity politics ignores tensions between groups and struggles for authority within groups and fosters separatism and group isolation.

Misrecognition should, as opposed to this form of identity politics, be seen as being prevented from participating in social interaction. A more sustainable approach entails seeing recognition in terms of social status and analyzing the status of group members to participate as full partners in social interaction – participatory parity:

To be misrecognized, accordingly, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down upon or devalued in others' attitudes, beliefs or representations. It is rather to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem. (Fraser 2000)

Obstacles to participatory parity might therefore be institutionalized, preventing a certain group to participate on equal terms with others which, by Fraser, is considered profoundly unjust and undemocratic. The participatory parity concept can be applied to all major arenas of the social world, including the household and personal life and different actors can be excluded from some of these arenas while being included in others. This is exemplified in a recent article where Fraser responds to four critics:

Historically, many women have lacked the standing and resources to participate in official politics, while enjoying the cultural and material prerequisites for participating meaningfully (if not fully equally) in family life. Homosexuals, in contrast, have until very recently lacked the standing to participate openly in sexual relations and family life, even in contexts where some of them have had access to decently remunerated work. (Fraser 2007)

While revising the framework, a third dimension has been added to capture the political dimensions of oppression and resistance – representation (Fraser 2007). Representation is with this understanding a tool for illustrating the way decisions are made in a specific context including who is included/excluded from participating in the decision-making process. Representation can thus be seen as the arena where the struggles for recognition and/or distribution take place.

The three main dimensions of injustice and subordination – the political (representation), economic (distribution) and cultural (recognition) – are thus

distinguished although Fraser emphasizes that they are intimately intertwined and all express a form of institutionalized power abuse that prevents all from participating on equal terms. This is, in turn important for identifying key areas for resistance. An example of this multilayered analysis can, for instance be, to approach sexual practices and many men's extramarital sexual relations not only as effects of individual decisions, but also as a consequence of broader aspects of social organisation and masculine privilege (Nguyen-Vo 2010, Phinney 2008). Using gender relations as an entry-point for analyzing social injustices and inequality thus highlights the ways in which ideas, values and authority are intertwined with local practices and histories (Rydstrøm 2010). All forms of subordination should therefore be analyzed as consisting, in different ways, of all of these three axes, integrating all dimensions of institutionalized injustice and oppression:

Culture, moreover, is a legitimate, even necessary, terrain of struggle, a site of injustice in its own right and deeply imbricated with economic inequality. Properly conceived, struggles for recognition can aid the redistribution of power and wealth and can promote interaction and cooperation across gulfs. (Fraser 2000)

The theoretical distinction between the different forms of injustice also applies for the potential remedies that may de-institutionalize injustice. With this logic an economically based oppression requires redistributive action whereas oppression based on cultural grounds requires a restructuring of the status order and transformed recognition. In practice, these theoretical distinctions are not likely to appear individually. Concerning gender and corruption in Vietnam, the institutionalized inheritance traditions, for example, both lead to men's privileges when in accessing and controlling land, but also advantages regarding political participation and mobility outside the household. For women, gendered discrimination of this kind will thus not only give women lower status, but will also affect their position in the labour market (Fraser 2007).

Recurring critique against Fraser's framework has been based on a perceived prioritization of economic redistribution on behalf of newer (western) social movements voicing identity-based claims for justice. These critics have argued that Fraser echoes an orthodox Marxism where the economic base is seen as superseding the superstructure (for instance Butler 1997 and Alcoff 2007, compare also Hartmann 1997 for an account of Marxist feminism). Fraser, however, has repeatedly emphasized that the very foundation of her thinking is to combine redistributive with recognizing claims in a broader theory of social justice. Fraser thus argues that the intervention was motivated by the de-coupling of identity-politics from economic distribution characterizing among others the gay and lesbian movement. The framework is thus designed to emphasize the mutual dependence of these two dimensions of subordination; that they are intimately intertwined (Fraser 2007).

In line with this, Fraser has responded to the criticism by underlining her ambition to produce a multi-dimensional framework that incorporates *both*

cultural recognition oriented towards status hierarchies and distributive dimensions focused on class inequalities.

While not outlining the arguments of all authors involved in the debate concerning the theoretical understanding of social justice, Fraser's modified version is deemed useful for the analytical purposes of this thesis. When analyzing masculine privileges and the different dimensions of land use, Fraser's participatory parity concept is useful since it differs between participation, recognition and distribution. Related to corruption, this can for instance mean that masculine privilege concerning land inheritance and decision-making comprise the economic and cultural dimensions of Fraser's framework. Value systems that privilege certain kinds of masculinity while reducing femininity to lower status will, with this perspective, lead to gender-specific subordination. This kind of misrecognition of women's needs shapes institutionalized injustice and requires a restructuring of the relations of recognition based on mutual recognition and respect (Rydstrøm 2010). The concept of "participatory parity" therefore serves to expose and analyze the ability of men and women to act as peers, for instance in the form of being able to protest and take part in public debates concerning corruption.

For the purposes of this thesis it is interesting to consider what this perspective on social justice means for resistance and the promotion of equality and the rights of the poor. Claims for recognition in terms of group interests are in the Vietnamese context frowned upon with the Catholic Church seen as one of the most dangerous threats to the CPV. However, the current land reforms follow capitalist logic.

5 Gender, land and corruption in Vietnam

In this chapter the interview data is used as a starting point for understanding gendered dimensions of corruption in the attempt to answer the research questions posed initially. The overall question is how constructions of masculinity and femininity are intertwined with land-related corruption with additional focus on whether corruption affects participatory parity and leads to the reproduction of masculine privilege. The analysis is also focused on discussing expressions of masculine privilege and what this might mean for corrupt practices. On an overall level, the links between gender and corruption are elusive, not least due to the multiple levels of power involved in chains of corruption including the household, social organisations, companies and the state. In addition, the covert nature of illegal activities increases this challenge. Many of the participants I interviewed, however, had a general feeling of injustice and maltreatment:

Most people working for the government are neither rich nor poor, but the staff in the land office are rich as they get access to information earlier than others and can take advantage. (Man, around 40 years old, HCMC June 2010)

Staff in the land office gets very rich, everyone knows that. Somehow this happens because many companies come to meet them and sometimes they can get very rich. (Woman around 50 years old, Bac Ninh June 2010)

5.1.1 Kinship and tradition

Male privilege is clearly illustrated when it comes to land. As was shown above, men tends to be seen as superior to women in Vietnam, in line with the Confucian heritage emphasizing a structured hierarchy based on patrilineal heritage traditions and belief that sons are able to reproduce the father's bloodline (Rydstrøm 2006b). The rituals in which ancestors are celebrated and worshipped are thereby a symbol of patrilineal continuity and the kinship systems can be seen as a separate system for the distribution of land outside the market and formal legal system (Belanger et. al. 2010). The patrilineal tradition results in men inheriting and controlling land whereas women access land through their relation with their father, their husband or their brother. The de-collectivisation process has with the "masculine character" of land allocation resulted in a large majority of all land use right certificates being registered in the names of the male head of

household. Inequality in relation to land was expressed in several of the interviews, for instance as expressed by the following quotes:

In Vietnam men make the big decisions. Women make small decisions, for instance for clothes and food. The husband and wife normally discuss issues like this [land], but in the end the decision is up to the husband (45-year old woman, Hanoi June 2010)

When parents die they always give the land to the oldest son. That is the tradition. When a woman gets married and gets children she shares the land with her husband. If a couple don't get children, however, the husband takes back all the land. (48-year old woman, Bac Ninh June 2010)

My parents' land will be inherited by my brother. I hope to get married so I can move to my husband's family and make a living there. There is an unmarried woman in my village and her parents have let her build a small house on their land but the brother has inherited the land and the big house. (Woman around 20 years old, Bac Ninh June 2010)

The normal way is for the husband to take care of land issues for the household and it is normally the man's name that is registered on the [land use right] certificate. The man is most appropriate for taking care of these questions since he can have a better understanding of what will happen. (Women's Union, HCMC June 2010)

In this way, the participants express the way land is "coded" as a male privilege and the different relations men and women have to both ownership and control. Despite the relatively progressive legal framework which stipulates equal allocation of land, the patriarchal tradition seems to prevail. The Confucian legacy with its strict hierarchies can therefore be associated with both institutionalized maldistribution and misrecognition in Fraser's terms.

Intra-household power relations clearly privilege men giving them the ability to participate in public life in other ways than women. Men's role as the family breadwinner also includes maintaining an understanding of socio-economic trends and future policy changes and engages with public life. According to Phinney (2008), this also involves a higher degree of mobility, access to social spaces closed for women and more leisure time. Although this cannot be directly related to the idea that men benefit from corruption generally, men and women's different roles and positions within the household is likely to result in different experiences of corruption as well as different arenas on which resistance and negotiations can be articulated. Fraser's concept of participatory parity can also be invoked here, to illustrate the way institutionalized inequalities in the form of maldistribution have consequences for recognition and representation (Fraser 2000). With the understanding outlined above, recognition is based on the status of social actors. When women are disregarded in the allocation of resources, they will also be restricted from participating on the same terms as men in discussions and decisions concerning land and how to deal with corrupt officials.

Corruption associated with registering land or other land-related services leads to higher and arbitrary costs when coming in contact with public offices. When

interviewing representatives of the Ministry of Justice in Hanoi the participants stated that a large degree of land affairs are done outside of the formal system:

We estimate that 70-80 percent of all land transactions are done without going through the legal procedure in order to avoid the registration fee, paperwork etc. We do not know if this is to avoid paying “extra” for services but it is possible. (MOJ, Hanoi May 2010)

Similar statements regarding settling business transactions and other matters outside of the formal system are expressed in these quotes:

Most people do land-deals without the authorities because they are very afraid of them and do not know the procedure, regulations etc. and also need to pay for service. (45-year old woman, Hanoi June 2010)

Many people divorce outside the courts and even in the courts traditional customs often prevail – the land belong to the husband. (52-year old woman, Hanoi May 2010)

When a couple divorce a communal group is sometimes gathered to decide who should get the assets outside the legal system. (45-year old woman, Hanoi May 2010)

Some of the persons I interviewed thus seemed reluctant to contact the authorities due to the arbitrary costs that depend on the integrity of the individual case officer rather than on the official fee. The interviews were contradictory on this point, however, with some saying that they had no problems in their contacts with the authorities. Corruption in these processes can never the less be assumed to lead to an increase in transactions being settled outside the formal institutions whereby cultural norms gain importance as opposed to the relatively progressive legal framework. The importance of a shift from formal laws to cultural traditions is that the mechanisms described above may be awarded a higher significance if contacts with the authorities are avoided which is likely to imply sharper prohibitions against women’s land rights. It can thus be speculated that male privilege and institutionalised maldistribution is given more space if households chose to solve land matters outside the formal channels. International researchers have questioned whether neo-liberal reforms by which land markets are created actually benefit small farmers and female producers (Belanger et. al. 2010).

It is also vital to relate these processes to contextual expressions of the neo-liberal paradigm that has characterized Vietnamese politics and reform efforts (Nguyen-Vo 2010). The privatization of land and the development of markets that have been a major part of the Doi Moi reforms have, with this perspective, also led to new opportunities for corruption, not least due to increasing land prices. Furthermore men tend to have higher representation in jobs with decision-making power, status and career possibilities and a substantial wage gap remains. Currently women’s earned income is around 75 percent of men’s. As in many other countries men tend to have higher positions within each occupation, however. For example the leadership of the Communist Party 2005-2010 include only 13.5 percent women. In the offices of the National Assembly women are

positioned above all in committees focusing on “soft” political issues such as social affairs, culture, education and youth (World Bank 2006). It can therefore be assumed that it is men who occupy the positions in the state hierarchy that enables receiving bribes. This is of course difficult to prove, but some of the participants discussed this in the following way:

It is normally more men than women work in the government but this is especially true for the land offices. The higher the level, the fewer the women and I believe that men are more corrupt than women. Women also work harder than men in the government offices. (45-year old woman, HCMC June 2010)

It is mostly men working for the government at the local levels and women work in the head offices. There are mostly men in the land offices because they have good knowledge and relationships regarding land. Men are suitable to work in the land office because they have the proper education and skills for that job (42-year old woman, HCMC June 2010)

Officers in the land offices are very rich as they know in advance which land will be expensive in the future. Men are more corrupt than women because they have a stronger mind. (Women’s Union, Bac Ninh June 2010)

Opportunities for corruption on the supply side thus have a gendered dimension as well with men tending to occupy the higher positions in hierarchies where the majority of informal payments end up. The Women’s Union in Bac Ninh also touched upon the gendered nature of corruption by saying that more men work in the land offices than women. The given explanation was that the families let boys study that subject but also that men in the land offices do not want to work with women.

Since there are few empirical studies of gender and corruption, a comparative discussion of men and women’s relation to the supply side of corruption is difficult. In a recent study from Nicaragua, however, the author argues that women doctors don’t have the same opportunities for corrupt acts in private clinics outside the hospitals, as they combine their role as doctors with their responsibility of the household (Seppänen 2008). Similar findings from Mexico, includes that female politicians with a background in social movements have more to lose from engaging in corrupt activities (Wängnerud 2012).

The interviews also indications that the patrilineal tradition is starting to disappear, potentially also opening up for reduced corruption as an expression of equal treatment: “The LURC is normally in the name of the husband but can contain two names. If their daughter get married and the land is a gift from her family the LURC will be in her name” (Women’s Union, Bac Ninh June 2010). The Women’s Union in Bac Ninh, said that couples share their land in case of a divorce although there are cases when the husband’s family keep all. This was echoed by participants who said that whose name is on the certificate is not important since the couple would share 50/50 in case of a divorce. If one of the spouses takes care of the children, he or she would get a bigger part. At the same time, the WU stated that most land used to be inherited by the eldest son. Since

1993, however, the children share inherited land to some extent although girls tend to get less.

Concerning gendered relations, Connell identifies hegemonic masculinity as signifying the legitimization of men's power illustrating gendered power structures, including the relation between different forms of masculinity (Connell 2003). Although many of the men I met in the countryside and on the outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City were far from exercising hegemonic masculinity, their privileges when it comes to land-issues in the local context, illustrates the relation between different forms masculinities. The relative deprivation of these households, who were struggling to make ends meet resulted in few, if any, possibilities of being on the receiving end of a transaction involving bribes. The power relation between households and the authorities was unquestionably in favour of the traditionally strong state:

We have to give back the land if the government so decides. It is their land. (Man, around 45 years old, Bac Ninh, June 2010)

The intersection of the patrilineal tradition with neo-liberal reforms in a post-socialist state therefore also reveals interesting aspects concerning the relation between men. Since the oldest brother typically would inherit the family's land, younger brothers is often facing few opportunities to receive support from their parents leading to class differences between sons (Belanger et al. 2010). This can be related to Connell's discussion of hierarchies within masculinity constructions with seniority as a fundamental component in the Vietnamese context. The interviews also gave surprising insights and reminded of the dangers of not reflecting on one's own preconceptions and hypotheses when doing fieldwork. That corruption is defined as a major problem in Vietnam, was contradicted by one of the participants working for an organisation in Hanoi. She meant that corruption is not the most important challenge facing poor farmers in the countryside:

Very few people pay bribes in mountainous areas simply because they don't know or just don't have any money. (56-year old woman, Hanoi June 2010)

The 2008 Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey contradicts this, however. In the survey 65 percent of the respondents thought that corruption was a major problem for their household and that it was most serious in the courts, the police, land use and in health service (VHLSS 2008).

5.1.2 Land use right certificates (LURCs)

Land use right certificates was repeatedly brought up by the participants as a crucial topic for their everyday lives. Since the state formally owns all land in Vietnam, individuals and companies gain access through these certificates. Since the initial allocation of land in the 1990s gave priority to the male head of

households there is still a large gender difference between who is formally registered as “owners” of land. Existing statistics estimates that around one quarter of women between 31-45 years old have their names registered on the certificate. For women between 46-60 years old registrations is thought to be around 39 percent (VHLSS 2008).

In line with Fraser’s conceptualization of justice, formal ownership is an important part of equal distribution of resources which would mean that unequal registration is an important factor for individual’s relation to land. The interviews gave contradictory messages on this point, however, with gender experts in Hanoi and representatives of the Women’s Union emphasizing the importance of formal ownership while household representatives saying that this is not important. On the same note, different opinions existed regarding current procedures:

Most LURCs used to be issued in the name of the husband. Nowadays, most families register two names, however, when getting new LURCs. (Interview, Phu Yen’s WU, Hanoi May 2010)

Before the husband’s name was normally on the LURC but now it usually has both names. All new LURCs have two names [...] It is important for women to have their names on the LURC. Mainly because of the happiness of the family. (Interview, WU, Bac Ninh June 2010)

The importance of having two names on the LURC is that if there is a divorce the can at least have to consult with the woman [...] The ethnic minorities in practice take back the land after a divorce. If the woman has given birth to a son she can stay forever and if she goes to live with another man the boy will get the land. If the child is a girl she doesn’t get anything. (Gender expert, Hanoi May 2010)

This was contradicted by other statements, for instance by four persons from three different households outside Bac Ninh City. In their area around 40 percent of the agricultural land had been recovered during the last ten years. The land use certificates in the area were usually registered in the husband’s name. When asked if they wouldn’t feel more secure with formal ownership of their own the women laughed and said that they don’t mind since they trust their husbands (Bac Ninh June 2010). Interviews in Ho Chi Minh City displayed the same pattern with organizational representatives talking about the importance of registering two names while household representatives stated that most families still only register one name on the LURC. Interviewed households instead highlighted difficulties in relation to receiving the certificate, in part due to the arbitrary fees charged by land offices as described above. Who in the household that was registered was seen as secondary to receiving formal use right for the family.

The certificates thus represent an important dimension of ordinary family’s relation to land. Corruption during issuing processes is therefore a major obstacle in their everyday lives. Silences regarding who in the family is registered as the “owner” of the land points again to customs surrounding land with male privilege assumed as a natural feature of household relations. In many ways this embodies

the implicit legitimization of masculine power and Fraser's description of misrecognition.

It also illustrates a conflict between a feminist understanding of social relations in which formal ownership is a fundamental aspect of independence and local interpretations of their experiences and everyday lives. Although fieldwork by other researchers have revealed that some women do not leave abusive relationships because they have nowhere to go following a divorce (Belanger et al. 2010), the fact that the participants prioritized other parts of the current land regime as problematic needs to be taken seriously.

Women's weaker legal position regarding land (seldom name on LURC, living with their husband's family etc.) might for these reasons lead to not claiming their legal rights to land. Underpaid staff could also be expected to give less attention to cases with little or no chances of receiving bribes, whereby vulnerable groups might face increased difficulties in claiming their rights. To actively claim land rights in court can also be difficult if this is linked to a strong social stigma or done in a context where the extended family provide welfare and assistance to its members in times of crisis. Questions emerging from the interviews thus include the relation between women's self-interest and membership in the village collective (Belanger et. al. 2010). If women who demand to be registered on the LURC are stigmatized, they are obviously less likely to claim their legal rights. This also highlights the importance of understanding how constructions of masculinity and femininity are intertwined with intra-household and communal power relations as well as with corruption.

5.1.3 Women as guardians of land

Women have been found to act as "guardians of land" in studies by Belanger et al. (2010). In their fieldwork land was by many households seen as a security that would keep the families from poverty. Concretely this could mean refusing to sell the family land and prevent the land from being transferred even at times of crisis regardless of whether this is caused by higher costs due to corruption or other external threats.

This was also illustrated during my interviews, for instance in the words of a representative of the Women's Union in Bac Ninh:

Women complain a lot to the government about losing land as they have to take care of the family if they lose their land [...] Women have the main responsibility for taking care of the family which makes her worry more about what will happen if the family's land is recovered and if the compensation is not enough. How will they then be able to take care of the family? Women complain more than men, usually by sending letters to the government. (Women's Union, Bac Ninh June 2010)

Both in Ho Chi Minh City and in Bac Ninh participants stated that women complain more when their land is recovered by the state. Explanations differed but included that women worry more about the family.

It is usually women who go to protest outside the government offices because there might be fighting with the police if the men go. There were many complaints previously when people went to the commune PC with signs, to protest against land recovery. (HCMC June 2010)

The most important worker in the family is the man so he does not have time to complain. It is also better if the woman complain as the men more easily get angry. (Woman around 40-years old, HCMC June 2010)

This corresponds with the findings by Rydström (2003) concerning the association of men with a “hot” and women with a “cool” nature. Implying complementary character traits, this construction of masculinity and femininity serves to reproduce and legitimize the gender hierarchy and status order situating men as superior.

Many of the interviewed households in both Bac Ninh and HCMC had tried to file complaints against land recovery, low compensation levels or against not being offered new jobs after losing their agricultural land. The most common method of protest seemed to be writing letters or, at times, direct visits to the competent offices. Women seemed to play an important role in these processes at times shouldering the responsibility of representing the family. While I was in Ho Chi Minh City, around 50 women (and a few men) were standing outside the provincial People’s Committee with banners protesting against the confiscation of their land. This can be related to women’s special relation to land in line with the kinship structure described above. As land signals “belonging” to the community, and land traditionally is passed on from father to son, women gain status and legitimacy through the male lineage that they marry into. By taking responsibility for some land-related issues women have been found to not only gain autonomy from the male lineage they have joined, but also protecting their land rights in case of divorce, widowhood and in their old age (Belanger et al. 2010). Some women’s guardianship in relation to land can also be related to Fraser’s discussion of recognition. While many women are obstructed from participatory parity in the day-to-day decisions concerning land, the complicated complaints procedures seem to open a space where they can interact with others as peers.

5.1.4 Impact of corruption

Although it is difficult to prove that corruption leads to lower compensation levels when land is recovered/confiscated this is an assumption that has been proposed also by other researchers (for instance CECODES, Sørensen 2010, Kerkvliet 2001). There are indications that unclear legal provisions for price setting in combination with poor oversight mechanisms create a particularly attractive point for corruption in the interactions between companies and state officials. The

conditions following land recovery is also a central point of concern for many households (which is likely to increase as Vietnam's rapid industrialisation continues), and a situation whereby individual households can be indirectly affected by corruption in land administration and allocation processes. Representing one of the major challenges for rural families many stated that they had been paid well below the market price and that they now faced destitution since the compensation was not sufficient for buying another piece of land. Other studies have similarly found that authorities offer only a fraction of the market price (Kerkvliet 2006).

The consequences for farmers subjected to land recovery became very clear in a village I visited in Bac Ninh. Consisting of five hundred persons, the village had been built by the state when their original village and farm land was recovered to make room for an industrial zone. People were then forced to move to the new village. When I sat down at a small coffee shop and asked a few questions the villagers became very agitated and started talking about maltreatment and how the corrupt officials had embezzled their compensation. Only a few of the younger people were given jobs in the new factories in the area but since the salary is so low many quit after a while and instead open small service businesses or shops. Other family members stayed at home waiting for the salary of the factory workers. The villagers had written many letters to the local and provincial authorities but said that they don't care about their complaints and do not listen to what they have to say. Some of the participants meant that life was better before, although it was worse for the families without a family member who had a job in the factory. There seemed to be an age-divide concerning sentiments of recent developments. Older persons seemed to regret having lost their land and longed for the "old times". Several of the younger participants, on the other hand, meant that working in factories was easier than working as farmers. One of the participants described a nearby village where the villagers have now spent their compensation and are very poor as they have lost their farming land and cannot find new jobs.

This was echoed in many other interviews and besides corruption related to LURCs, compensation levels was the topic that attracted most feelings and opinions:

As long as we have our farming land we at least don't have to worry about putting food on the table. If we get a job in one of the new factories our land makes it possible to quit if we are not treated well and go back to farming. (Man around 45 years old, Bac Ninh, June 2010)

Government changed all land in this area to residential land 10 years ago. All was agriculture land before. The government recovered the land, cut it into smaller lots and sold it back to the people. Nowadays, men mainly work in construction and women mostly work in small businesses. Lucky people with good land left can open a shop or run a small manufacturing. People that had bad land far away from the road usually sold it and bought a smaller piece of land close to the road or with a good location. People who get resettled in apartments cannot find jobs and often sell their apartments to office workers to buy a small piece of land

somewhere where they can make a small business. (Man around 40 years old, HCMC June 2010)

Several officials, on the other hand, meant that people in the countryside did not know the laws and that it is difficult to make them understand the legal framework. The officials even went so far as to say that people in Bac Ninh are less educated than in other provinces resulting in more complaints. The interviews indicate that job opportunities after agricultural land recovery seem to follow gendered patterns with women primarily opening small businesses (selling food, tea, other products) out of the house, whereas men tend to work in construction or manufacturing and sometimes go to other parts of the province or other provinces in search for work. This is likely to differ in different parts of the country but was reported both in Ho Chi Minh City and in Bac Ninh and have been identified in other studies as well. In Ho Chi Minh City one of the participants meant that women had a particularly hard time finding jobs after being resettled in apartment buildings as they could not run small businesses, such as food shops, outside their apartments. Another said that most people that had been given alternative housing options had sold them and moved elsewhere in order to open small shops or manufacturing businesses.

Following land recovery/confiscation, the situation for many families is desperate and opportunities for employment in the country side are limited. Corruption causing low compensation levels is, as mentioned, an assumption that is almost difficult to prove. That many of the participants were convinced that the land officials and the politicians were embezzling their compensation is, however, probably true to some extent. Never the less, when land is confiscated the households have limited options that also mirror a gendered division of labour and the different roles assigned to men and women in the household:

After the recovery the husband and the wife can sometimes get work in construction but it is very hard work and not all the time. Many young people from this area go to other provinces to work. The factories usually don't want to employ people over 30 years old and you have to have finished at least high school. Many people want to sell their house and move to another area. (42-year old woman, Bac Ninh 2010)

In Phu Yen district, the government wants to build a road but the compensation is very low and people don't want to move. The government did not arrange a meeting with the people to inform them about the decision and the process and people were moved to a high-rise. How can they make a living there and run small business outside their home? (Veteran's Union, HCMC June 2010)

Usually women work with handicraft/manufacturing or in small businesses when they have lost their farming land. Before resettlement, many women worked in agriculture so it is a change to work with service or a small business. The government have opened vocational training centres where women can learn new skills such as cooking, making flowers etc. but men tend to go somewhere else to find jobs. In the big cities, the Women's Union have training centres where women can go if they pay a small fee. Men have to find training on

their own or go to other areas to find work and learn new skills. (42-year old woman, HCMC June 2010)

The provincial government is planning to give women new jobs after recovery in manufacturing, handicraft and small businesses. (Representative of provincial People's Committee, HCMC June 2010)

We do not get any help from the social organizations and there is nothing they can do. The people's committee only comes to tell them they have to move and what the plan is but do not listen to what we have to say. Normally people have to find new jobs themselves, women usually start a small business and men usually go elsewhere to do construction or work on boats. It is difficult for everyone to find jobs – the same for men and women. (38-year old man, HCMC June 2010)

Consequences of low compensation levels are thus different for men and women. While men have traditionally migrated to a larger degree than women, new patterns have evolved in which women migrate to the same extent as men (World Bank 2011). In an area of Bac Ninh where most of the agricultural land had been recovered, a participant said that women mostly work in small businesses out of their home, paper manufacturing or selling things in the market. Due to the difficulties in finding new jobs, many men were sitting at home and watching TV or spending their time gambling. Support networks for women, including the Women's Union, seemed to provide better services than what was available for men. Reflecting the male breadwinner role and expectation on men to solve problems on their own:

In the big cities, the Women's Union have training centres where women can go if they pay a small fee. Men have to find training on their own or go to other areas to find work and learn new skills. (Women's Union, HCMC June 2010)

Household relations are thus being re-negotiated based on structural reforms of land allocation. That land-prices as a consequence are rising has been found to lead to more women demanding equal sharing of parental land (Belanger et al. 2010). The expectation that men cope with land recovery on their own while women receive some support is another feature of this development challenging gendered power balances in new household organizations (Rydström, Horton 2011). This implies challenges to local versions of hegemonic masculinity and that constructions of femininity are likely to change as a consequence of this shifting conditions and life patterns.

6 Concluding discussion

There is no simple solution to reduce land-related corruption in Vietnam and there are reports of corruption at least as far back as the 1960s when some of the agricultural collectives were affected by illicit enrichment. Methods at that time included taking cement that actually belonged to the collective and used for the common good. Corruption today, involves much more money as a consequence of the privatizations and development of markets (Kerkvliet 2001). The everyday forms of corruption involving small amounts, but never the less detrimental for poor households, can for example be to pay an extra “service fee” for land transactions that should otherwise be free or paying an official to get formal “ownership” through the land use right certificate. In the end, this leads to reduced resources for the household to spend on other items such as healthcare and education.

Throughout this thesis I have highlighted various aspects that illustrate the ways land-related corruption are intertwined with constructions of masculinity, femininity and how this is firmly situated in strict status hierarchies. The initially formulated question concerning how constructions of masculinity and femininity are intertwined with land-related corruption have been approached through the employment of masculinity theory combined with Nancy Fraser’s theory for analyzing institutionalized inequality. This framework has enabled a discussion of the interviews and although no definitive conclusions can be developed, several trends deserve continued attention.

The way kinship systems structure individual’s access to land is in many ways illustrative of how masculine privileges are translated into a superior position when it comes to land. As with many of the other areas of interest, the participants had different experiences of how land-related corruption affects their lives and identities. Handling these contradictions has thus been a major challenge while writing this thesis. Traditional inheritance patterns, that was identified as a bearing part of the reproduction of masculine privilege, was for instance described as a contemporary practice. This is in line with other researchers who have argued that de-collectivization and accompanying privatization of land has led to the resurgence of the head of household (Belanger et al. 2010, Scott 2000). Other participants, however, meant that the patrilineal inheritance tradition is currently being challenged and that parents now tend to divide their land among their children. The effect of corruption on these practices may include the increasing importance of informal ways of settling land transactions outside the formal institutions. The theoretical discussion also developed an argument for how hierarchical societies might amplify corruption since it legitimizes inequality.

The effect of the Doi Moi reforms on relations between households and markets, households and the state and intra-household relations has been profound, not least

shifting the main agricultural unit from the cooperative to the household. In the Vietnamese context, opportunities for corruption during land recovery and land allocation processes seem to have increased which might very well lead to the reproduction of traditional ways of gaining access to land through kinship structures privileging men. Emerging inequality can in this way be analyzed as a consequence of the introduction of a neo-liberal governance model with its emphasis on consumers and producers meeting on free markets (Nguyen-Vo 2010). This has resulted in a reinforcement of women's reproductive role and the emphasis on women's identity as primarily related to being a mother and preserving good relations in the household (Phinney 2008). The extent of the impact is outside the scope of this thesis, but is described by Helle Rydstrøm:

Despite recent transformations of Vietnamese society, the pervading tradition of Confucianism continues to influence especially rural women's lives. Hence, patrilineal ancestor worship that celebrates male progeny is widespread and means that women and girls literally are rendered intelligible as 'outside lineage' (ho ngoai) and men and boys as 'inside lineage' (ho noi). (Rydstrøm 2006a, p. 284)

It seems clear that a majority of the currently existing land use right certificates are registered in the name of a male head of household. The impact of corruption on the re-issuing of certificates may include that reluctance that some of the participants expressed concerning contacts with the authorities, since these are associated with arbitrary costs and unpredictable outcomes. As a result, many households seem to prefer settling land matters outside the formal institutions. Corruption may in this way inhibit reform attempts and the ambition to re-issue land use right certificates in the name of both husband and wives. An important feminist reflection in relation to analyzing household relations is in addition not to reduce it to a single unit where resources are shared since this tends to obscure conflicting interests within the household (Belanger et. al. 2010). Corruption may in relation to this serve to reduce the already arbitrary implementation of Vietnamese laws and open up for arbitrary benefits given to those with personal connections and/or resources to pay for illicit advantages based on personal connections (Kerkvliet 2001). With Nancy Fraser's approach, it can be assumed that women's material exclusion from formal ownership of land also results in reduced opportunities for participatory parity and interacting with others as peers.

The structures of power within which corruption takes place are manifold and includes communities, social organizations, kinship groups, households and the state. Both men and women's access to land is embedded in these structures although men occupy a privileged position as the natural heir to the family's land and the legitimate "pillar of the house" (Rydstrøm 2006b, Scott 2003). During my interviews it was, for instance, common that women accepted a supporting role also in regards to land issues and tended to worry more about the future of the household, despite the fact that it was seen as the man's responsibility. In this, way, and through going to protest rallies that might be harmful for their husbands they protect and assist the male in shouldering their responsibility as breadwinners. Corruption can in different ways penetrate most of these levels

leading to institutionalized forms of injustice and the reproduction of masculine superiority. In the end the combination of corruption, power and poverty prevents women from demanding rights and entitlements and taking action to improve their everyday lives (Nissen 2004).

Vietnam's relatively good track record when it comes to gender equality, however, also seems to disqualify some of the ideas researchers have posed for other countries with different amounts asked from men and women for the same service, sexual favours in return for a service or difference in awareness levels between men and women. That women in Vietnam are well represented on the labour market also result in a different situation compared to countries where a majority of women only do household work.

During the group session in Bac Ninh, several of the officials meant that the overall problem when it comes to corruption is that there is no impartial monitoring mechanism. This point to the foundations of the Vietnamese political system with the very high degree of overlap between party and state, and party and supporting organisations (Thayer 2010). In this system, the same persons are often representing several key functions at the same time leading to non-transparent systems and arbitrary decisions. Executive and monitoring parts of the state are often the same.

The international pressure from development aid agencies and other companies, as well as internal challenges to the CPV will likely result in maintaining corruption high on the Vietnamese agenda. Considering the international and domestic pressure for reform is therefore another component that needs to be addressed. One of the participants referred to corruption as a "social evil" relating to the social evils campaign that was initiated in 1995 with the principal purpose to control immoral behaviour of various kind (to a large degree directed towards improper sexual relations) (Rydstrøm 2006a). The campaign emphasized western influence on Vietnam as a result of the increased global integration of the Vietnamese economy and the social deterioration this may result in. In this way, identified problems are associated with foreign "immoral" influence, and not something that is inherent with being Vietnamese or that exists in the Vietnamese society.

There are a number of topics that deserves further attention. In a context where corruption is a prioritized issue for many governments and development aid organizations, a better understanding of how structured inequalities affect both the experience and the ability to protest against corruption, would hopefully lead to better efforts to reduce it. In line with Nancy Fraser's conceptualization of parity of participation, different types of injustices require different countermeasures.

7 References

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