

# No money, no farm?

## Mobilizing resources for land purchase by migrants in post-emancipation Estonia

by Kersti Lust

### *Abstract*

This article evaluates the role of family ties and social networks in mobilizing financial resources for land purchase and conveying information about migration destinations in nineteenth-century Estonia. It complements the existing body of literature on the non-institutionalized forms of borrowing and providing information in environments where markets were inefficient by extending the geographical scope to the eastern part of Europe. The study helps us to understand how peasants who had only recently started to pay money rent instead of labour dues and marketed a small portion of farm products could manage to purchase a farm, which normally meant paying 25–30 times the annual rent as a purchase price. Besides growing flax and becoming tenants prior to the purchase, it was family and communal networks that proved crucial to their success. Family members and relatives provided larger credit than non-family members, but larger social networks facilitated access to information.

Land purchase typically requires substantial financial resources and migration also requires access to information. In most research, it is asserted that social networks enable better access to resources and improve outcomes for their members.<sup>1</sup> It is also believed that features of the network such as the strength of ties determine to a great extent what kind of resources a person within that network receives – that the strongest ties give access to finance and that weaker ties can still be important channels for information. Social networks, it is argued, ease information flows and create trust by fostering shared norms. Historians generally prefer an ‘arbitrary metaphorical use’ of the term ‘social networks’ and have been reluctant to adopt rigorous quantitative forms of network analysis.<sup>2</sup> On this basis, information that in the sources indicates the form and performance of a network is usually examined through narrative. Such an approach has resulted in deep qualitative analyses of individual relations or interconnections within manageable small groups, which serve as examples for larger contexts.

<sup>1</sup> For a definition of social network, see Andreas Gestrich and Martin Stark, ‘Introduction’, in Andreas Gestrich and Martin Stark (eds), *Debtors, creditors, and their networks: Social dimensions of monetary dependence from the seventeenth to the twentieth century* (2015) (2015), pp. 4–5.

<sup>2</sup> Matthias Bixler, ‘Historical network research: Taking stock’, in Gestrich and Stark (eds), *Debtors, creditors*, p. 54.

In pre-modern rural societies, most buying and selling was done on credit, which created local or widespread and intertwined networks of credit.<sup>3</sup> People were involved in webs of economic and social dependency based on mutual trust. Access to credit was provided by various forms of familial, neighbourly, or economic networks, and social relations facilitated mutual lending.<sup>4</sup> During the nineteenth century, it has been argued, personal trust was largely replaced by institutional trust, while the importance of traditional family and kinship ties for economic transactions diminished.<sup>5</sup>

Personal networks and migratory chains have become a key explanation of mobility since Torsten Hägerstrand's pioneering work. Hägerstrand, a Swedish geographer, emphasized personal contacts and the circulation of information: pioneering migrants ('primary migrants') remained in contact with relatives who had stayed behind, which led to increases in the migratory flow by creating new, privileged areas where information, people, and goods could circulate.<sup>6</sup> Migration information was shared by kin, friends, and acquaintances.

Current migration research emphasizes social networks in various stages of the migration process, including the decision to migrate and the direction and persistence of migration flows.<sup>7</sup> Recently, however, Georg Fertig has pointed out the ambivalent role of social networks in migration. Loose information networks created by recent migrants from the same village or region reduced insecurity in migrant destinations, but closely knit village communities

<sup>3</sup> Studies from different parts of Europe: Craig Muldrew, 'Interpreting the market: The ethics of credit and community relations in early modern England', *Social Hist.* 18 (1993), pp. 171–4; Craig Muldrew, *The economy of obligation. The culture of credit and social relations in early modern England* (1998); Gabriele B. Clemens (ed.), *Schuldenlast und Schuldenwert. Kreditnetzwerke in der europäischen Geschichte 1300–1900* (2008); Philipp R. Schofield and Thijs Lambrecht (eds), *Credit and the rural economy in North-Western Europe, c.1200–c.1850* (2009); Sheilagh Ogilvie, Markus Kùpker, Janine Maegraith, 'Household debt in early modern Germany: Evidence from personal inventories', *J. Economic Hist.* 72 (2012), pp. 134–67; Mats Olsson, Patrick Svensson, 'Production and credits: a micro level analysis of the agrarian economy in Västra Karaby parish, Sweden 1786–1846', in Ellen Hillbom and Patrick Svensson (eds), *Agricultural transformation in a global perspective* (2013), pp. 206–28; Tracy Dennison, 'Contract enforcement in Russian serf society, 1750–1860', *ECHR* 66 (2013), pp. 715–32; Gestrich and Stark, 'Introduction'.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Reupke, 'Credit markets in the nineteenth-century countryside: A comparative study in a rural border region', in Gestrich and Stark (eds), *Debtors, creditors*, p. 142.

<sup>5</sup> Anna-Carolina Vogel, 'Credit, trust, and social networks: Mortgage credit in the industrializing town of Esslingen (Württemberg, Germany)', in Gestrich and Stark (eds), *Debtors, creditors*, p. 79.

<sup>6</sup> Torsten Hägerstrand, 'Migration and area. Survey of a sample of Swedish migration fields and hypothetical considerations on their genesis', *Lund studies in geography, Series B, Human geography* 13 (1957), pp. 27–158.

<sup>7</sup> Relational aspects of migration have been either included in multivariate, quantitative models or described in more qualitative, micro-studies of families or places. See, for example, Claire Lemerrier, Paul-André Rosental, 'The structure and dynamics of migration patterns in 19th-century Northern France', 2009. ffhalshs-00450035v3ff (accessed 5 Aug. 2019); Paul-André Rosental, 'Between micro and macro: Theorizing agency in nineteenth-century French migrations', *French Historical Studies* 29 (2006), pp. 457–81; Martin Dribe, Christer Lundh, 'People on the move. Determinants of servant migration in nineteenth century Sweden', *Continuity and Change* 20.1 (2005), pp. 53–91; Noël Bonneuil, Arnaud Bringé, and Paul-André Rosental, 'Familial components of first migrations after marriage in nineteenth-century France', *Social Hist.* 33 (2008), pp. 36–59; Georg Fertig, 'Balancing, networking, and the causes of emigration: Early German transatlantic migration in a local perspective, 1700–1754', *Continuity and Change* 13.3 (1998), pp. 419–42; Yukari Takai, 'The family networks and geographic mobility of French-Canadian immigrants in early-twentieth-century Lowell, Massachusetts', *J. of Family Hist.* 26 (2001), pp. 373–94.



FIGURE 1. Estland and the Estonian part of Livland, nineteenth century

at home were often an important part of the hostile social environment that emigrants were seeking to escape.<sup>8</sup>

This article evaluates the role of family ties and social networks in mobilizing financial resources for land purchase and conveying information about migration destinations in nineteenth-century Estonia (Figure 1). A rich body of international literature already exists on the non-institutionalized forms of borrowing and lending and providing information in environments where markets are inefficient.<sup>9</sup> In a wider context, this article presents a case study demonstrating the importance of social networks in gaining better access to resources.<sup>10</sup> This micro-study of migrant farm purchasers complements that literature by extending the geographical and temporal scope to the eastern part of Europe in the era of agricultural transformation.

<sup>8</sup> Fertig, 'Balancing, networking', p. 438.

<sup>9</sup> In the contemporary context: Kaivan Munshi, 'Labor and credit networks in developing economies', *Handbook of social economics* (2011), vol. 1B, p. 1224. In the historical context, Juliette Levy, *The making of a market: Credit, henequen, and notaries in Yucatán, 1850–1900* (2012).

<sup>10</sup> The theoretical framework is provided, for example, by Pierre Bourdieu, 'The forms of capital', in Imre Szeman, Timothy Kaposy (eds), *Cultural theory: An anthology* (2011), pp. 81–93; Meltem Odabaş, Fikret Adaman, 'Engaging with social networks: The Bourdieu-Becker encounter revisited', *Forum for Social Economics*, 47 (2018), pp. 306–14.

In some European regions, nineteenth-century reforms leading to peasant emancipation and the redemption of peasant land or feudal dues considerably increased the need for credit, which in turn gave impetus to the establishment of rural credit institutions.<sup>11</sup> In the case under study, it took several decades for such institutions to emerge and as the government did not provide a helping hand to purchasers of land, the latter had to look for other options (i.e. informal credit). Because of the peculiar circumstances of the emancipation in the Baltic provinces, which were also unusual within eastern European history, a large amount of land became available to peasants at market prices. The outright purchase of farms was a process of buying peasant land from the noble landlords or from the state government after the emancipation of the serfs took place in the three Russian Baltic provinces in 1816–1819. Unlike in Russia proper (Great Russia), Poland, Lithuania, and Prussia, peasant farmers in the Russian Baltic provinces did not receive a title to land along with emancipation. It was only several decades after they achieved their personal freedom that Baltic peasants were able to purchase land and transform tenancies into freeholds. In most other territories with a manorial system, the reforms gave the current tenants direct ownership of land (e.g. in return for giving up parts of land) or the right to purchase the ownership of the land at regulated prices.<sup>12</sup> In territories without ‘demesne lordship’ (*Gutsherrschaft*), feudal duties could be redeemed, usually in terms of a multiple of annual rents (15–25 times annual rent).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the intensive migration of land purchasers triggered by the transformation of tenancies into freeholds can only be studied in the Baltic provinces.

Noble land ownership was also extensive in Sweden. As in Sweden, manorial lords in the Baltics were not forced to sell parts of their holdings, and if this happened, it took place through sales at market prices. In Scania in the south, and the three counties around the capital Stockholm, tenant farmers on noble land largely disappeared over the course of the nineteenth century, as landlords initiated evictions and increased their own direct control of farmland, although large shares of noble land were also taken over by peasants.<sup>14</sup> In the Baltic provinces of Russia, by contrast, mid-nineteenth century reforming legislation restricted peasant land for peasants’ use only. Therefore it was impossible for large manorial estates to continue expanding the share of their land under direct management. Instead, the landlords typically sold it to peasants. Analysis of peasant engagement in the credit market in the era of agricultural transformation in Sweden has shown that most of the loans were small and that borrowers used the informal credit market principally to solve short-term financial problems.<sup>15</sup> Swedish peasants also took out mortgage loans to invest in their production. In addition, specialized lenders – peasant bankers – participated in the credit market, but their role has been highlighted in connection with investments

<sup>11</sup> Johannes Bracht, *Geldlose Zeiten und überfüllte Kassen. Sparen, Leihen und Vererben in der ländlichen Gesellschaft Westfalens (1830–1866)* (2013), p. 144.

<sup>12</sup> Juhan Kahk, ‘Die baltischen Agrarreformen des 19. Jahrhunderts in neuer historischer Perspektive’, *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 45.4 (1996), pp. 544–55; Kathryn Gary and Mats Olsson, ‘Business as usual. Nobility and landed estates in Sweden’, *Essays in economic and business history* 35.1 (2017), pp. 149–71.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich-Wilhelm Henning, *Landwirtschaft und ländliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland, II, 1750 bis 1986*

(1988).

<sup>14</sup> Gary and Olsson, ‘Business as usual’, pp. 149–71; Patrick Svensson, ‘Land market, property rights, and agricultural transformation in southern Sweden, 1680–1870’, in Gerard Béaur and Philipp Schofield (eds), *Property rights, land market, and economic growth in Europe (13th–19th centuries)* (2013), p. 462.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Svensson, ‘Peasants and entrepreneurship in the nineteenth-century agricultural transformation of Sweden’, *Social Science Hist.* 30.3 (2006), pp. 413–9.

in enclosures, land reclamation, and drainage rather than in connection with turning noble or crown land into freeholds. In Sweden as well as in Finland, tenancies on crown land were turned into freeholds by legislation that gave tenants the right to purchase their leased farms. The price set for crown land was usually lower than the general price level and Swedish crown peasants could afford this using the surplus from their farms and, if needed, through loans from neighbours and relatives, or later during the nineteenth century, from a bank.<sup>16</sup> Finnish crown tenants, who occasionally lacked resources to buy their farms, sold their pre-emption rights. The migration of farm purchasers has not been observed or studied in these two Nordic countries. In the Baltic provinces, tenants on state lands also bought their farms outright on favourable terms, and the process did not trigger in-migration.<sup>17</sup>

Research on migration in nineteenth century Europe normally considers how poor areas produced migrants who gravitated towards wealthier areas. This article, by contrast, examines the migration of the members of farming families and former landholding peasants and, to a lesser extent, the migration of farmhands from the wealthiest regions to less developed areas.

The Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire were rural economies that experienced a capitalist transformation in the nineteenth century. The peasant economy was characterized by the transition to money rents, the transformation of tenancies into freeholds, the consolidation of the farmsteads into amalgamated lots, and the enclosure of common pastures. New crops, crop rotation and improved tools also appeared, increasing yields and agricultural output. In addition to providing for their own needs, farms also started to produce for the market. Tenants' incentives for long-term investments were diminished by the insecurity of their tenancies: leases were short-term, and the rent increased with each new contract; the estate owner could easily terminate the contract if the tenant did not comply with its terms, and tenants had no prerogative to renew the contract after the term of the contract. Secure tenure and control over farm succession were vital economic incentives for pre-industrial tenant farmers; noble politicians were concerned that if the farmers were afraid of losing their land, they would not make long-term investments in farm production and would neglect the farm. The capitalist transformation of the farm economy occurred in tandem with the transformation of tenancies into freeholds.

The major cash crop in Livonia was flax, which the manorial lords generally avoided, as it was an exhausting crop that depleted the soil. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the export of flaxseeds and fibres through Riga – one of the main ports in the eastern Baltic – rose steadily.<sup>18</sup> England was the main importer of flax. When the American Civil War broke out in 1861 and cotton supplies were cut off, the demand for flax increased in Europe, thus driving

<sup>16</sup> Svensson, 'Land market', pp. 461–2.

<sup>17</sup> Kersti Lust, 'How permanent were farms in the manorial system? Changes of farm occupancy in the nineteenth-century Russian Baltic Provinces of Estland and Livland', *Continuity and Change* 35 (2020), p. 224.

<sup>18</sup> Juhan Kahk, 'Mesto Rossii na mezhdunarodnom sel'skokhozjaistvennom rynke v pervoi polovine XIX v.', in *Feodal'naja Rossija vo vseмирno-istoticheskom processe. Sbornik statej* (1972), p. 99–100; e.g. out

of Riga's total exports in 1862 (valued in roubles), 57% consisted of flax and flaxseed; in 1872, 43.5%, respectively. In terms of quantity, the export of flax reached its apogee in 1870 (49% of the total value of exports in roubles): *Material zu einer allgemeinen Statistik Livland's and Oesel's* (1863); *Der Rigasche Börsen-Comite in den Jahren 1866–1872, nebst Sammlung der auf Handel und Schifffahrt bezüglichlichen Verordnungen, Instructionen und Taxen* (1873), pp. 319–21.

up prices. In Livland the price nearly tripled.<sup>19</sup> Flax production was commercialized, but in general, farmers' production for market was limited until the late nineteenth century, when dairy farming became an important agricultural activity. Until the late nineteenth century, it was not so much the growth of local towns that created greater demand for cash crops but rather the growth of the distilling industry (run by the landlords) using increasing quantities of grain and potatoes. Laws and decrees limiting relocation to other peasant communities and towns restricted migration until the 1860s.

By combining court records with microdata from parish registers, this article focuses on the mobilization of resources by the most successful group among the farm purchasers in Estonia – the Mulks, i.e., residents of the fertile southern parts of Estonia's Viljandi and Pärnu counties. In densely populated and economically advanced Mulgimaa (Figure 1), the purchase of farms gained full momentum earlier than elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> This region saw little purchase-triggered in-migration but, more importantly, produced numerous migrants heading to less-developed parts of the country from the 1850s to the 1880s (Figure 2). This massive outflow of prospective farm purchasers was unique in the Baltic context.<sup>21</sup> Migration within or between parishes for the purpose of purchasing farms took place in other parts of the country as well, but a large-scale migration that extended far beyond parish borders took place only from Mulgimaa.

The outright purchase of farms has been thoroughly studied in Estonian historiography but completely neglected outside it. Researchers have dealt with the creation of the laws governing farm sale and purchase, the speed of the process and regional variations in it, land prices, the attitudes of landlords and peasants towards farmstead sale and purchase, changes in who headed the farms, and the changes the sale brought about in rural society.<sup>22</sup> Curiously, the migration of Mulks was, until recently, the best-known but least-studied aspect of the multifaceted process of the sale of peasant land in Estonia. Published memoirs, fiction, oral tradition, and newspaper articles established knowledge of the Mulk 'threat' – the influx of rich and astute Mulks to various places throughout mainland Estonia. A recent article by this

<sup>19</sup> Juhan Kahk, *Talude päriseksostmise aegu [When the farms were bought in perpetuity]* (1993) p. 64.

<sup>20</sup> It is thoroughly described in Mati Laur *et al.*, *Talude päriseksostmine Liivimaal (Pärnumaa andmesitiku põhjal) [Purchasing farms in perpetuity in Livland (based on data from Pärnu County)]* (2013).

<sup>21</sup> In Kurland, four-fifths of tenants on noble manors bought their farms in perpetuity within a short period of time and thus the sale did not trigger a large-scale migration (Laur *et al.*, *Talude päriseksostmine Liivimaal*, pp. 113–14). By contrast, in Livland the process lasted over eighty years.

<sup>22</sup> Eduard Bodisco, *Der Bauerland-Verkauf in Estland und Materialien zur Agrar-Statistik Estlands* (1902); Kahk, *Talude*; Artur Vassar, 'Eesti talurahva vaated maavaldusele XIX sajandi teisel poolel [Estonian peasants' attitudes towards land]', in Ea Jansen, Juhan Kahk (eds), *Eesti talurahva sotsiaalseid vaateid XIX sajandil* (1977), pp. 124–82; Priit Pirsko, 'Talud päriseks: protsessi

algus müüjate ja ostjate pilgu läbi [The start of the process of farms sales from the perspective of the sellers and buyers]', in Ea Jansen, Jaanus Arukaevu (eds), *Seltsid ja ühiskonna muutumine: talupojajäähiskonnast rahvusriigiks [Societies and changing society. From a peasant society to a nation state]*, (1995), pp. 97–117; M. Laur *et al.*, *Talude päriseksostmine Liivimaal*; Kersti Lust, *Pärisorjast pärislohaomanikuks: talurahva emantsipatsioon eestikeelse Liivimaa kroonukülas 1819–1915 [Emancipation of state peasants in the Estonian part of Livland (1819–1915)]* (2005); Kersti Lust, 'Eestikeelse Liivimaa talupoegade suhtumine talude päriseksostmisse 1863–1882 [The attitudes of peasants towards the purchase of land in the Estonian-speaking part of Livland]', *Eesti Ajalooarhiivi Toimetised* 18(25) (2010), pp. 239–52; *ead.*, 'Kas Eestis osteti päriseks oma esivanemate talud? Taluperemeeste vahetumisest 1840–1889 [Did Estonians buy the farms of their forefathers for perpetuity? Changes in tenancy, 1840–1889]', *Tuna* 69 (2015), pp. 33–55.

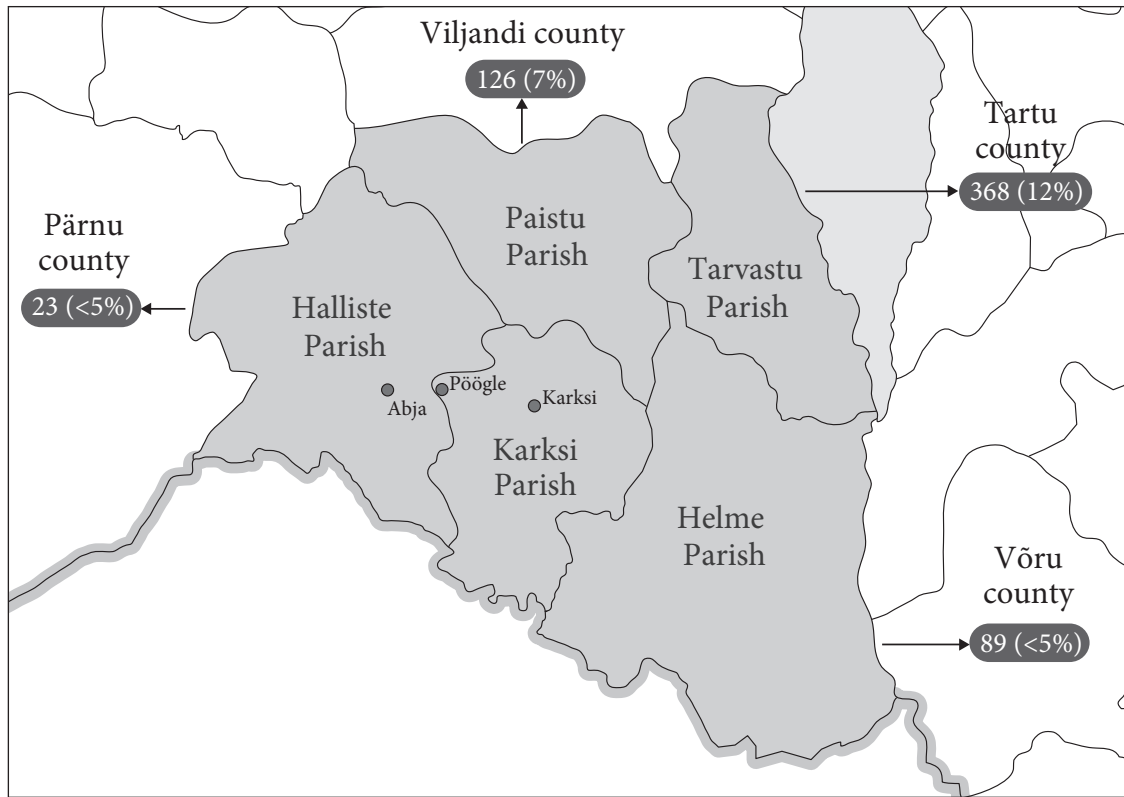


FIGURE 2. The number of farms sold to Mulks outside Mulgimaa in southern Estonia, 1850–1889.

Note: the percentages are of farms bought by Mulks in the respective county.

Source: The author's own calculations based on purchase contracts, church records, and civil registration of migrants.

author has explored when they migrated, from where and to where they migrated, and the push- and pull factors involved in their migration.<sup>23</sup>

The rest of the article is structured as follows, An introduction to the sources and methods is followed by a description of the institutional setting of land purchase. Thereafter, migrants' individual characteristics, such as marital and socio-economic status, will be considered. The main sections discuss various strategies, either used separately or in combination, to mobilize resources for farm purchase outside Mulgimaa. The article seeks to determine whether the migrants were connected as kin, acquaintances, or fellow villagers and how information related to migration was shared among them. The last section sheds light on credit relations. Baltic scholarship has paid very little attention to the question of how land purchase was financed and how credit networks evolved. The study helps us to understand how peasants who had only recently started to pay money rent instead of labour dues and marketed a small portion of farm products could manage to purchase a farm, which normally meant paying 25–30 times

<sup>23</sup> Kersti Lust, 'Mulgi hädaoht ehk kuidas mulgid võõrsil talusid päriseks ostsid (kuni 1889) [The Mulk threat, or how Mulks bought farms outright outside Mulgimaa]', *Tuna*, 64 (2014), pp. 44–63.

the annual rent as a purchase price.<sup>24</sup> Under the previous system of *corvée*, opportunities to accumulate savings were limited. In the period under study, peasants had almost no access to credit from the formal sector – savings and small credit banks. The manorial lord could transfer part of the manor's mortgage loan to the farmstead, but on average, it covered only about one-third of the purchase price. Private credit relations were often built around personal networks.

## I

As a first step in this research, a dataset was created covering all farm purchases in southern Estonia until 1889.<sup>25</sup> The study ends with the year 1889 because in that year, the system of registering land properties changed, and the records kept thereafter make it far more complicated for researchers to follow sales of farmland by landlords. However, by the late 1880s the process of turning farmland into freehold land in southern Estonia was mostly over, as was the heyday of Mulk migrants buying farms outright.

In the second step, the geographical origin of buyers was identified on the basis of church records (mainly registers of parishioners), poll tax lists ('soul revision' lists), and listings of migrants. Lutheran registers of parishioners present data on births, migratory moves, marriages, and deaths of all family members in the same place. The registers were in use for 10-, 20- or 30-year periods and allow us to follow families over time. The actual number of Mulk land purchasers might be somewhat higher than indicated in Figure 2, as in several cases the place of origin could not be identified. The problem of identification pertains mostly to purchasers who did not, in fact, settle into the community and leased out the farm(s), as well as to members of the Russian Orthodox Church, as this church did not keep registers of parishioners.

By tradition, Mulks are the residents of five parishes – Halliste, Karksi, Tarvastu, Paistu, and Helme, home to c.43,000 people in 1850 (Figure 1).<sup>26</sup> In the following, a 'Mulk' is defined as a person who was born in one of these five parishes. This method does not allow us to distinguish clearly between those who migrated to seek ownership and those who migrated with the general hope of becoming a farmer (head of the farm). These two migrations, however, were closely interrelated, and in order to understand the evolution of the out-migration over time, both should be considered.

In the third step, registers of parishioners, birth and death registers, and poll-tax lists were used to identify buyers' socio-economic and marital status. A person's socio-economic status often changed over the course of his or her life. On noble estates, farms frequently changed hands; those born into a tenant's family could become farmhands by the time they got married and vice versa.<sup>27</sup> Where possible, I established buyers' socio-economic status in the years

<sup>24</sup> Laur *et al.*, *Talude päriksostmine*, p. 65.

<sup>25</sup> Farm purchase contracts preserved in the land registry archives in Rahvusarhiivi Ajalooarhiiv [National Archives of Estonia, hereafter, RA, EAA]: f. 2381, f. 3416, and f. 3760.

<sup>26</sup> Calculated on the basis of 1850 poll tax lists. It includes those living on manor as well as on peasant

land before the allocation of 'quota land' to the noble lords. The 'Parish' was the church parish. Parish courts operated in a number of parishes (in court districts). Parish court was headed by a nobleman, assisted by two peasant assessors.

<sup>27</sup> Lust, 'Kas Eestis osteti', pp. 46–9.



just before their migration from Mulgimaa, rather than at the time of their birth.<sup>28</sup> Since determining the socio-economic origin of purchasers from the vital events data of the whole family is painstaking work, this study limits itself to 18 examples from about 46 communities in Mulgimaa (Table 1). By tradition, parish registers from Mulgimaa mention farm names, but in most other places they record only the community's (and the village's) name. As a result, studying marriages does not help us to establish whether, when a purchaser was marrying a local woman, it was the farmer's daughter from the farm he eventually bought outright, or some other woman.

The inconsistency, heterogeneity, and fragmentary nature of the available sources make quantitative analysis of networks impossible. For the study of credit relations, I was able to make use of land registry documents, including data on bond and mortgage loans and court files concerning failed credit relations. Thus we have data on cases in which either the borrower left loans unpaid and the creditor sued the debtor, or the farm went into bankruptcy, or the buyer (the farm owner) took bond loans (normally only large loans). Most oral and written loan agreements went unrecorded in official documents and thus remain out of reach to us. The court records concerning failed credit relations allow us to identify the lenders and show how lenders and borrowers were related to each other. This kind of information on interpersonal links would usually be impossible to reconstruct from other types of sources. The community and parish court records give us enough evidence to assert that informal credit played an important role in the success of Mulks and, more generally, in the process of buying farmsteads outright. I will look more closely at the community of Kavastu, located east of Tartu (Figure 1), where more farms were bought outright by Mulks (35 in all) than anywhere else in Estonia, and where Fritz Karro acted as an agent in the in-migration to the community. Karro represented a new type of peasant, active and mobile both socially and geographically, self-confident and full of initiative.

## II

### *The institutional setting: Peasant land and farming*

In accordance with the laws emancipating serfs in the three Baltic provinces (in 1816 in Estland, in 1817 in Kurland, and in 1819 in Livland), legal ownership of all farmland belonged either to owners of manor, who were mostly Baltic German noblemen, or to the crown.<sup>29</sup> Until the mid-nineteenth century, estates in state ownership, as well as noble estates, were large-scale agricultural enterprises based on *corvée*. Each estate was divided into two areas: the estate land (*Hofsland*), which was partly farmed directly with *corvée* or hired labour, and partly leased to peasants in small or large lots, and the peasant land (*Bauerland*), which was held by farmers and was not available to the manorial lord. Noble estates had a third type of land: by the peasant law of 1849 (in Livland), the lord was allowed to take one-fifth of the peasant land

<sup>28</sup> Birth registers include father's occupation. Usually, I identified family's status from the vital records of the children, born closest in time to the departure from Mulgimaa.

<sup>29</sup> For an overview, see Andrejs Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States* (2011), pp. 184–98, 217–21. Kurland is a historical region in western Latvia.

(known as ‘quota land’ or *Quotenland* in German) under his or her own management. On noble estates, the peasants had only weak rights of tenure and inheritance.

The peasant laws of 1849 (in Livland), 1856 (in Estland), 1863 (in Kurland) and 1865 (in Ösel, today Saaremaa), favoured money rent over labour rent by limiting the maximum amount of labour dues but leaving the level of money rent unregulated.<sup>30</sup> The peasant laws also governed land sales to peasants who could buy the farmsteads through long-term mortgages. Peasant land was brought onto the market through its transformation into freehold land. Although the purchase and sale of peasant land continued to take place under free-market conditions, tenants in Livland (in 1865) as well as in Kurland (in 1863) were given the pre-emptive right to land purchase with a four-week period granted for decision-making.<sup>31</sup> On noble estates, the farm purchasers were involved in purchase agreements of several years and in loans from owners of manors and noble credit associations,<sup>32</sup> usually at an annual interest rate of five or six per cent. The purchase contract specified the sums and dates of redemption payments: the down payment; payments liable at the signing of the contract, start of the farming, and registering the property; and at later dates. From the purchaser’s point of view, timely payment of the sums specified in the contract was more important before the registration of the purchase contract in the court than afterwards.<sup>33</sup> Normally, two to three years elapsed between the signing of the contract and its registration. If the purchaser remained in arrears before the registration, he often lost the farm, which was resold by the manorial lord.<sup>34</sup> The lists of debts, as well as court and land registry records, indicate that after the purchase contract was registered in the court, the sellers (manorial lords) were often flexible regarding timely redemption, and on some occasions they did not put forward payment claims until decades after the deadlines had expired. For example, in Kavastu, one-third of the farm purchasers of Mulk origin still owed redemption payments to the manorial lord in 1891, although in most cases, these were due to be paid by the end of the 1870s.<sup>35</sup> In exceptional cases, arrears to the lord could amount to four-fifths of the redemption payments due after the contract’s registration.<sup>36</sup>

As mentioned above, long-term mortgages covered only about one-third of the price, and there were no financial institutions offering small loans to peasants.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, farm purchasers’ only options were to borrow from kin,<sup>38</sup> acquaintances,<sup>39</sup> friends, or fellow

<sup>30</sup> Lust, ‘How permanent were farms’, p. 223.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> A credit institute for the provincial nobility. Membership was voluntary. The credit association issued mortgage bonds to manor owners that were secured not only by the debtor’s manor on which they were engrossed, but by all the manors that joined the institute.

<sup>33</sup> Land registries started to operate from 1889. Before that, county courts were in charge of registering immovable properties.

<sup>34</sup> Community court minutes and parish court files: RA, EAA, f. 3556, n. 1, s. 5, fos. 41v, 47, 48, 72–72v (9 Feb. 1868, 21 Mar. 1868, 8 Apr. 1868 and 25 Jul. 1869);

EAA, f. 3987, n. 1, s. 8, fos 47v–48, 28 Mar. 1867; EAA, f. 924, n. 1, s. 981, EAA, f. 926, n. 1, s. 1219.

<sup>35</sup> RA, EAA, f. 1427, n. 1, s. 28, fos. 99–102: lord of Kavastu manor to the Land Council of Livonian nobility, 1 Aug. 1891.

<sup>36</sup> RA, EAA, f. 2381, n. 2, s. 7015; EAA, f. 1427, n. 1, s. 28, fo. 101.

<sup>37</sup> In the early 1880s, a savings bank in Põltsamaa started to offer bond loans to farmers. Few farm buyers in the vicinity of Põltsamaa used this new opportunity.

<sup>38</sup> RA, EAA, f. 928, n. 1, s. 92; EAA, f. 931, n. 1, s. 703, fo. 1.

<sup>39</sup> RA, EAA, f. 931, n. 1, s. 692.

villagers. There were three ways in which informal credit was provided. Individuals provided open-ended bond loans, normally at an annual interest rate of five to six per cent. Either side could claim the repayment of the principal of the loan with six months' notice. The second type of loans was promissory notes. The third and by far the most common type was a verbal or written agreement, sometimes concluded in the presence of witnesses. It allowed for deferment of payment, but the risks were high, as it relied largely on the debtor's credit, and the community and parish courts in charge of contract enforcement proved to be rather inefficient at debt collection. On the one hand, the wide use of insecure forms of loans reflects practical concerns, as they offered substantial room for negotiation of repayment terms and interest arrangements, and peasants did not have to follow a formalized procedure of registration at the local court. On the other hand, it shows that social networks truly created trust.

The laws fixed the minimum size of peasant farm holdings on noble manors; a new farm could be set up either on the manorial lord's initiative or with his approval.<sup>40</sup> Peasant laws also discouraged the dividing up of a farm and allowed only one heir to inherit it. Generally, the eldest son inherited the parents' holding, and other successors received compensation for their portions in livestock, goods, or cash. If no male siblings survived, the farm succession continued down the female line, but the husband took control of farm management.

*No money, no farm: tenants' difficulties with buying farms*

On noble manors, the shift from labour to money rents and from tenancy to freehold took decades and was subject to the approval of a landlord. Most farms transitioned to money rent only in the early 1860s.<sup>41</sup> Transformation of peasant land into freehold land started in Livland very slowly between 1830 and 1860. At that time, the vast majority of Estonian peasants still did not have the money to buy land on the terms set by the manorial lords. Among the purchasers were many town burghers. Purchasers of peasant origin were often wealthy people whose gainful activities lay outside farming. The year 1864 became a turning point in the process of buying the farms; from that year onwards, the Livonian noble credit association allowed the transfer of part of the manor's mortgage loan to farmsteads, which caused sales to mushroom. In the early 1880s, the proportion of farmland sold was higher in Mulgimaa than in most other parishes.<sup>42</sup>

Earlier historiography has established that on noble manors, many tenants were unable to buy their farms outright.<sup>43</sup> For example, in three parishes in southern Estonia (Helme, Saarde and Viljandi), at least one-quarter of the tenants on most manors lost their farms.<sup>44</sup> The vast amount of court records, complaints, and supplications from all over Estonia testifies to the

<sup>40</sup> Lust, 'How permanent were farms', p. 224.

<sup>41</sup> At the beginning of the 1860s, only one-fifth of farms on peasant lands paid money rent: Fr. v. Jung-Stilling, *Statistisches Material zur Beleuchtung Livländischer Bauer-Verhältnisse* (1868), p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> By the early 1880s, 98 per cent of peasant land was bought in perpetuity in Halliste and Tarvastu, in Helme 90, in Karksi 84, and in Paistu 80 per cent:

Friedrich von Jung-Stilling, *Materialien zur Kenntniss der livländischen Bauer-Verhältnisse* (1883), pp. 129–34.

<sup>43</sup> Kahk, *Talude*, p. 87; Vassar, 'Eesti talurahva vaated', p. 142; Kersti Lust, 'Talude päriksostmine Saaremaa eramõisais aastatel 1905–1915 [Purchase of farms on the noble estates of Saaremaa, 1905–1915]', *Eesti Ajalooarhiivi Toimetised* 7(14) (2001), pp. 124–5.

<sup>44</sup> Lust, 'How permanent were farms', pp. 232–5.

lack of money to buy farmsteads outright.<sup>45</sup> Whether former tenants could buy their farms in perpetuity depended primarily on local circumstances. The time of sale, the landlord's attitude and the price he wanted for the farm, competition from neighbours and migrants during the sale, and the percentage of previously in-migrated farmers, purchases of farms, and expansion of demesnes in the surrounding areas all played a role. Evictions of tenants in one community could trigger similar events in other communities, as some of those evicted moved and bought farms outright in other communities. This kind of domino effect, however, occurred only in Mulgimaa and, to a lesser extent in the parish of Viljandi bordering on Mulgimaa. In other regions of southern Estonia, dispossessed tenants were less successful at becoming farm owners outside of their home communities. In many places, tenants asked the landlord to delay the sale so that the farms could be improved or so that the tenants could at least take a loan. There were some manorial lords who agreed to wait for a decade or more, and others who refused to wait even a year.<sup>46</sup>

### III

*'When money jingles in a Mulk's purse ...'*

In keeping with general migration patterns, economic differentials between the point of origin and point of arrival led to the migration of Mulks. Peasant farmers in Mulgimaa were among the first to reform farming practices and to increase their incomes. The economic advantage of Mulgimaa, which featured large and scattered farmsteads, manifested itself in the greater mobility of money, people, and information, and the more widespread practices of paying money for farm rental and purchasing farmsteads.<sup>47</sup> Landowning farmers had much more success with growing flax than tenant farmers, whose attempts to increase the cultivation of flax were severely limited. The manorial lords eagerly sued tenants who grew more flax than the rent contract allowed.<sup>48</sup> For example, the tenant farmers in Pöögle had to pay the landlord a fine of 25 roubles per bushel of land (0.37 ha), and depending on how excessive the growing of flax was, their fines ranged from 13 to 300 roubles in the mid-1860s.<sup>49</sup> The importance of flax is further supported by the fact that outside Mulgimaa, farm purchasers of Mulk origin first enhanced its cultivation.<sup>50</sup>

In the five Mulgimaa parishes, there were about 1750 farms. Until 1889, landlords sold about 8100 farms on peasant land in southern Estonia (outside Mulgimaa); over 600 of them were bought by Mulks. On average, each Mulgimaa farm produced 0.35 purchasers of a farm outside Mulgimaa in southern Estonia. As the Mulks also bought farms outright in the province of Estland (today northern Estonia) as well as in the southern part of Livland (today northern

<sup>45</sup> Hans Kruus, 'Eesti talupoegade palvekirjade-aktsioonid 1860-ndail aastail [Petition campaigns of Estonian peasants in the 1860s]', in *Eesti ajaloost XIX sajandi teisel poolel. 60-80-ndad aastad* (Tallinn, 1957), pp. 9–87; Lust, 'Eestikeelse Liivimaa', pp. 239–52.

<sup>46</sup> Lust, 'How permanent were farms', p. 232.

<sup>47</sup> As a rule, large farms are those over 20 *thaler*. The *thaler* was a fiscal measure of the farm's capacity to

give production (in grain), not a square measure. Jung-Stilling estimates, however, that one *thaler* in the area of investigation was about 2.2–3.3 ha of agricultural land.

<sup>48</sup> RA, EAA, f. 924, n. 1, s. 284.

<sup>49</sup> RA, EAA, f. 3556. n. 1, s. 5, fos 19–20, 22, 25–25v, 40v–41: community court minutes, 1 Mar., 22 Mar. and 1 May 1867, 9 Feb. 1868.

<sup>50</sup> Laur *et al.*, *Talude päriseksoostmine*, p. 57.

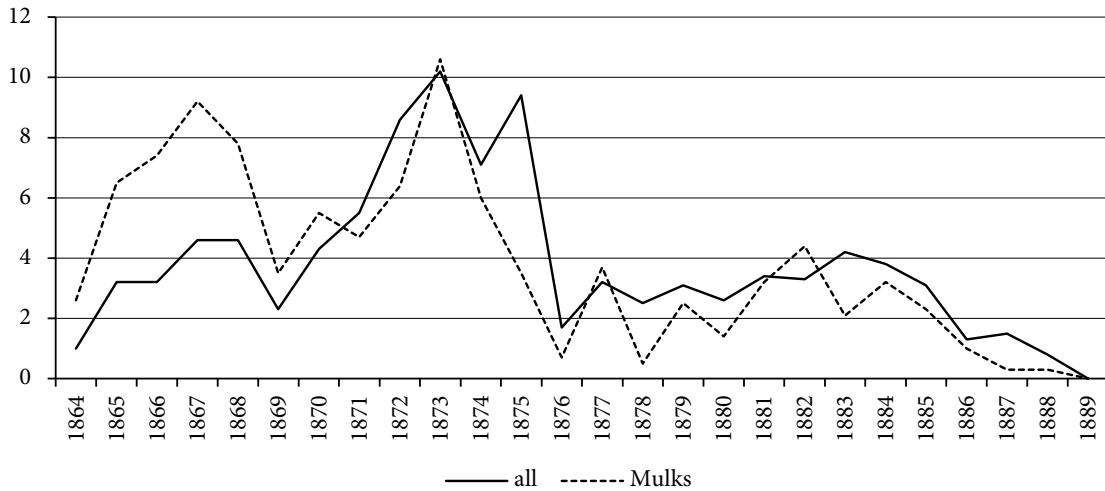


FIGURE 3. Farms bought outright in southern Estonia (excluding Mulgimaa) from 1864 to 1889, percentages by year: all purchasers and the Mulks\*

Number of purchased farms from 1864 to 1889 = 100%

Latvia), the average rate of purchasers produced per Mulgimaa farm was even higher.<sup>51</sup> The sale of peasant land on noble manors led to considerable mobility in Estland and Livland (though there were large regional differences), but typically the outsiders were from nearby communities (manors) in the same parish.<sup>52</sup> As stated above, such a large-scale out-migration of purchasers that extended far beyond parish borders took place only from Mulgimaa and a few manors in the Viljandi area. In this respect, Mulks clearly stood out among migrant purchasers.

The overall number of farms sold to Mulks outside Mulgimaa in southern Estonia is presented in Figure 2. Until 1889, they bought outright about seven per cent of the peasant farms in Viljandi County and 12 per cent in Tartu County, while in two other counties of southern Estonia, their share was negligible. Purchasers of Mulk origin bought farmsteads outright on 115 noble manors outside Mulgimaa, and on 16 manors, they bought outright at least ten farmsteads.<sup>53</sup> In all counties, they gravitated towards the areas close to Mulgimaa, which suggests that geographical proximity was an important factor in deciding where to move. From Figures 3 and 4, it appears that in the mid-1860s, Mulks were especially active in buying farms outright in southern Estonia in general, and in Tartu County in particular. Their success irritated the local people, who started calling the migrants ‘Mulks’, a nickname that was initially pejorative but later had positive connotations. The ethnonym ‘Mulk’ arose through the well-known pattern of contrasting one’s own people with outsiders.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Livland was divided by a linguistic boundary: the Northern spoke Estonian, while the Southern spoke Latvian.

<sup>52</sup> The question has not been addressed in Estonia

but the claim is based on my own research.

<sup>53</sup> Lust, ‘Mulgi hädaoh’, pp. 50–51.

<sup>54</sup> Farm purchasers, however, accounted for a small proportion of the Mulks who migrated to many areas.

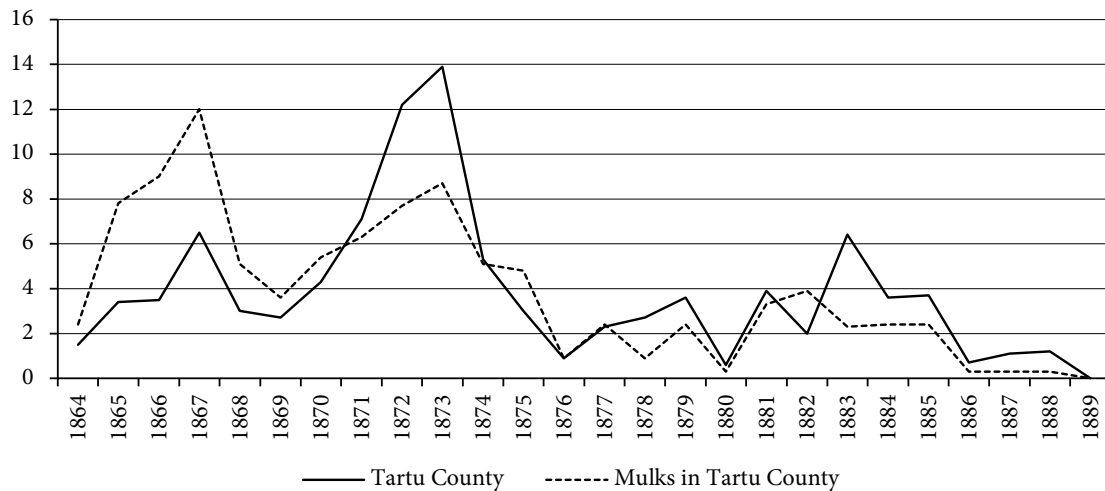


FIGURE 4. Farms bought outright in Tartu County from 1864 to 1889, percentages by year: all purchasers and the Mulks\*

Number of purchased farms from 1864 to 1889 = 100%

Mulks were often wealthier than peasants outside Mulgimaa. A proverb from that time stated: ‘When money jingles in a Mulk’s purse, the Tartu farmer trembles in his farmhouse’.<sup>55</sup> If the tenants in Tartu County refused to buy their farms outright on the terms set by the manorial lords, then, to use a popular contemporary metaphor, ‘a thousand Mulks were standing at their door’.<sup>56</sup> The average down payment placed by farm purchasers of Mulk origin, however, was roughly comparable to that placed by farm purchasers who were not Mulks (on half of the manors, they paid larger down payments, and on the other half, they paid smaller ones).<sup>57</sup> Moreover, on average, the price they paid for the land was the same that other purchasers paid on the same manor. In some places, they snapped up the largest farms, but this was not the prevalent pattern.

The most well-off group among Mulk migrants was that of former (evicted) tenants. Evictions happened not only because tenants lacked the means to buy their farmsteads but also due to conflicts with the manorial lords and the allocation of one-fifth of farmland for the use of the manorial lords.<sup>58</sup> Many dispossessed tenants whose farms were attached to estate land sought a new farm outside Mulgimaa.<sup>59</sup>

Three examples of early migrants illustrate how increasing revenues fed the tenants’ self-esteem and increased their self-confidence, which led to conflicts and out-migration. Juhan Kolberg (b. 1809 in Pöögle) was one of the first three Mulks to buy farmsteads outside Mulgimaa. In Karksi he leased two farms but was evicted in 1857 for ‘damaging’ them. He had

<sup>55</sup> Anne Hussar, Arvo Krikmann, Ingrid Sarv, Harri Kõiva (eds), *Vanasõnaraamat* (1984), no. 556.

<sup>56</sup> The metaphor derives from a comedy by Juhan Kunder, *Mulgi mõistus ja tartlase tarkus. Nali ühes järgus* [*Mulk’s wit and wisdom of a Tartu man. Comedy*

*in one act*] (1881), p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> Lust, ‘Mulgi hädaoht’, p. 55.

<sup>58</sup> Livländische Agrar- und Bauern-Verordnung (1850), §§ 8–12.

<sup>59</sup> RA, EAA, f. 931, n. 1, s. 675, 689, 711, 735.

sown five times more flax than allowed (on 40 bushels of land instead of eight), cleared land and shrunk pastures, and raised 65 cattle, even though the rent contract did not allow more than twenty.<sup>60</sup> In 1855, the manorial lords turned him in to the police for selling cheap vodka from home.<sup>61</sup> Innkeeping was a privilege of the manorial lords, and Kolberg's activities considerably reduced the lords' incomes from their inns. The Kolberg case vividly demonstrates how constrained the enterprising peasants were, if they were tenants, in their attempts to change traditional farming and take up new activities. In June 1859, Kolberg bought two neighbouring farms in Väike-Konguta in Tartu County.<sup>62</sup> The price was 6240 roubles, including an immediate down payment of 4000 roubles. As a farm owner, he bought flax from peasants and sold it to merchants in Tallinn, Tartu, and Pärnu; locals bought Baltic herring and other goods from him.<sup>63</sup> Kolberg's three younger daughters married sons of Peter Ottas, an arriviste who had bought outright five farms in the Tartu area and several houses in the town of Tartu.<sup>64</sup>

Jaan Tamberg was the first Mulk to purchase a farm outright in Kavastu. When his tenant farm was put on sale in Abja, he asked that the down payment be reduced and did not pay it on time. As a result, the landlord sold his farm to someone else. Jaan Tamberg actually had a great deal of money, and according to the bailiff of Abja manor, Sarri, 'everyone in the community knew this'.<sup>65</sup> In March 1862, Jaan's sons Jaan and Henrik Tamberg immediately paid 3359 roubles of the 6709-rouble price for the two Viru farms (114 ha) in Kavastu.<sup>66</sup> It was an extraordinarily large down payment, over six times more than was normal in terms of absolute value from the 1860s to the 1880s.

In 1864, the lord of Veelikse manor, Paul von Stryk, evicted Peeter Sitska. Lord von Stryk considered him quarrelsome, disobedient, and thieving.<sup>67</sup> Court records reveal that Sitska, like many other farm heads, had harvested timber without the landlord's permission and that, unlike the other farm heads, he had not diligently carried out the landlord's orders.<sup>68</sup> In 1865, Peeter Sitska bought a farm outright in Tali, Saarde parish (Pärnu County), becoming the first farm buyer of Mulk origin there. Sitska paid 7900 roubles, including an immediate down payment of 1975 roubles. In Tali, he was soon elected the head of the community court, and his farm became the centre of social life. Sitska, however, was also tried for lying and for black-market trading of alcohol and cigarettes.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>60</sup> RA, EAA, f. 931, n. 1, s. 669.

<sup>61</sup> RA, EAA, f. 952, n. 1, s. 2535. Kolberg was fined with 100 roubles.

<sup>62</sup> Formally, Kolberg did not buy the farms outright, as it had been done by Könn two years earlier. Könn, however, was actually a shadow buyer, which is confirmed by the fact that he did not move there. All other buyers in Väike-Konguta were migrant moneybags, which further supports the assumption that Könn was a shadow buyer: RA, EAA, f. 2381, n. 1, s. 1236; EAA, f. 1264, n. 1, s. 251, f. 290.

<sup>63</sup> RA, EAA, f. 924, n. 1, s. 3088; EAA, f. 996, n. 3, s. 717; EAA f. 1001, n. 1, s. 1712; EAA, f. 923, n. 1, s. 3217. Court disputes with merchants Koch, Kurrikoff and Adler reveal that his flax transactions amounted to

thousands of roubles:

<sup>64</sup> RA, EAA, f. 2381, n. 1, s. 1232; EAA, f. 2381, n. 1, s. 1239; EAA, f. 925, n. 1, s. 3609. Peter Ottas was from Tartu County (i.e., not a Mulk).

<sup>65</sup> RA, EAA, f. 931, n. 1, s. 686, fos. 3–4: Sarri to the parish court of the 3rd district in Pärnu County, 13 Mar. 1863.

<sup>66</sup> The father bought the farms but the property was registered in the names of the sons, who both were under 20 in 1862. Contract was signed on 16 May 1864.

<sup>67</sup> RA, EAA, f. 931, n. 1, s. 695: Stryk to the parish court of the 3rd district of Pärnu County, 8 Dec. 1864.

<sup>68</sup> RA, EAA, f. 3990, n. 1, s. 10.

<sup>69</sup> RA, EAA, f. 951, n. 2, s. 1014: police investigation file.

TABLE 1. Socio-economic status of the migrant farm purchasers from Mulgimaa

	<i>No. of communities (manors)</i>	<i>No. of farms on peasant land<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>No. of purchasers</i>	<i>Members of farm head's family (%)</i>	<i>Farmhands (%)</i>	<i>Other<sup>b</sup> or unknown (%)</i>
Noble manors	14	481	161	60.9	28.6	10.5
State estates	4	255	67	43.3	49.2	7.5

Notes:

<sup>a</sup> In the early 1850s, before the allocation of 'quota land' to the noble lords.

<sup>b</sup> The category 'other' includes teachers, bailiffs, innkeepers, blacksmiths, and others.

Source: The author's own calculations based on the purchase contracts, church records, and civil registration of migrants. The sample includes 18 manors out of 46 in Mulgimaa. From six manors, no farm purchasers outside Mulgimaa are known. Data on the manors of Helme, Holdre, Jõgeveste, Patküla, Riidaja, Hummulu, Leebiku, Lõve, Taagepera, Holstre, Morna, Pahuvere, Saaremõis, Vooru, Pöögle, Kaubi, Pornuse and Vana-Kariste.

### *Socio-economic and marital status*

Farm purchasers of Mulk origin formed a socially diverse group. Their social origins ranged from manor bailiffs to farmhands, from innkeepers to conscripts' sons. However, the vast majority were farmers and their family members. Many more buyers were born into servant (i.e. farmhand) families, but since then they had improved their social status over that of their parents, and buying land did not raise their social status further. The large share of former farm heads, evicted from their farmsteads, as well as farm heads' sons and brothers (Table 1) reflects the importance of the resources they amassed or were provided by other family members. Sons of farmers benefitted from a large inheritance and could expect financial support from their family members. Landholding peasants also followed property-related marriage strategies so that the partner was able to bring assets into the marriage.

Marriage was a strategic decision for prospective farm purchasers. It involved the question of whom to marry to get access to economic resources, expand kin networks, and move upwards socially. Most migrant farm purchasers were married, and most of them also travelled with their families (i.e. their wives were usually Mulks) (Table 2). Marrying the farm's heir – a farm head's widow or daughter – in the area of destination was not a common way of becoming a farm proprietor. In one such case, a conscript's son (whose status put him at the bottom of the village hierarchy) from Taagepera managed to marry a young widow in Krüüdneri and thus become a proprietor. We may assume that the information network functioned well and that earlier migrants from Taagepera gave him suggestions. Another opportunity that landless men had for upward mobility was to marry a young woman from a well-to-do farming family, either from Mulgimaa or from the destination area. This strategy was followed by about half of the men of landless origin who bought a farm outright outside Mulgimaa.<sup>70</sup> The relatively small proportion (Table 2) might be explained by the fact that many prospective purchasers

<sup>70</sup> Based on the data from Holstre, Taagepera, Vooru, Leebiku, Riidaja, Patküla, Jõgeveste, Lõve, Morna, Pahuvere, and Kaubi.



TABLE 2. Marital status of the farm purchasers from Mulgimaa at the time of signing the purchase contract and the geographical origin of their wives

No of communities (manors)	Marital status			Geographical origin of wives		
	married	purchase year = marriage year (+/-1)	single <sup>a</sup>	Mulk	local	other
10	66	16	10	49	21	12

Note: <sup>a</sup> excluding minors

Source: The author’s own calculations based on the purchase contracts, church records, and civil registration of migrants. Data on the manors of Helme, Holdre, Holstre, Jõgeveste, Leebiku, Lõve, Patküla, Riidaja, Pornuse and Vooru.

had left Mulgimaa years before they bought a farm, and becoming a tenant farmer did not require a great deal of resources.

*The role of networks in choosing a migration destination*

The migrant’s destination was often influenced by information obtained from social networks (including previous migrants). Kavastu, Kaagjärve, and Krüüdneri attracted the most farm purchasers of Mulk origin (Figure 1). Fritz Karro (1830–1895) was the primary migrant who passed on information that created a migration stream between Pöögle and its neighbouring communities in Mulgimaa and Kavastu (about 130 km from Pöögle) in Tartu County. By the time Karro arrived in Kavastu in 1865, the lord of the manor, Arthur von Richter, had managed to sell 22 farms out of 128 (mostly to locals). Karro came up with the idea of becoming a negotiator between the landlord and peasant farm buyers and earn a commission. In 1872, A. von Richter denied any such agreement but acknowledged that Karro had, for his own benefit, convinced his acquaintances in Viljandi County to come and buy farms in Kavastu, and he had promised to pay a commission on each successful deal.<sup>71</sup> From the mid-1860s to the early 1870s, Karro arranged purchase deals with at least 25 Mulk migrants in Kavastu. Eleven of them came from his home community, Pöögle, and one was a brother of a farmer (Karel Tilk) from Pöögle. Karel’s brother, Henrik, born in Kaubi, bought outright a farm in nearby Alatskivi. As a result, all farm purchasers of Mulk origin came to Alatskivi from Tilk’s native community, Kaubi. Several farm buyers of Mulk origin in Luunja (west of Kavastu along the Emajõgi River) were probably also related to this network of migrants.<sup>72</sup> The land purchasers of Mulk origin in Kavastu included Karro’s relatives by blood and marriage (e.g., his brother-in-law and two of his relatives, the brother of the other brother-in-law), fellow villagers, friends, and business acquaintances.<sup>73</sup> Karro’s role as a negotiator in farm purchase deals was unusual in Estonia,

<sup>71</sup> RA, EAA, f. 918, n. 1, s. 380, fos. 12, 16–17v: Richter to Tartu County Court, 27 Feb. and 12 Dec. 1872.

<sup>72</sup> For example, there were family members among them.

<sup>73</sup> Kersti Lust and Tõnis Tärna, ‘Pärisperemees

ja pärisjärra moderniseeruvus Eestis: Kargova Fritz Karro ja Saverna Jaak Kissa [Fritz Karro of Kargova and Jaak Kissa of Saverna: the farmer and the landlord in modernizing Estonia], *Ajalooline Ajakiri* 3/4 (2011), p. 327.

although not unique. For example, the lord of Kuremaa manor, Eduard von Oettingen, also employed an agent of peasant origin in spring 1863 to look for and negotiate with buyers, and paid him 1.5 per cent of the purchase price for each successful deal.<sup>74</sup> Kuremaa (55 km north of Tartu) also attracted Mulk migrants.

The arrival of a number of purchasers from one community to another, located dozens of kilometres away from their original homes, within a short period of time or in successive waves, reveals networks and the sharing of information. For example, 11 out of 19 land purchasers originating from Taagepera bought farms in Krüüdneri (75 km from Taagepera) between 1879 and 1882. The first family from Taagepera arrived there in the early 1850s, and the next ones came in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>75</sup> Kaagjärve presents a similar pattern: the future purchasers from Helme parish first came in the late 1850s and were followed by others in the next couple of decades. Those migrants who did not buy land in the first community to which they moved, to but moved several times before buying land, often became acquainted with each other in the places where they stopped. For example, in Lota, five farm purchasers out of six came from Pöögle.<sup>76</sup> Two of them were born in nearby Abja, six or seven kilometers from Pöögle, and had moved to Pöögle as farm tenants in the 1850s. Most migrants from Pöögle, both natives and those who came later, bought farms outright in two communities: Lota (about 60 km from Pöögle) and Kavastu.

Not only migrant peasants but also lords owning two or more manors in different parishes spread information about available farms. Jõgeveste and Uniküla manors belonged to the same owner and all Mulk farm purchasers in Uniküla were from Jõgeveste. Seven out of ten Mulk farm purchasers in Vana- and Uue-Pärsti originated from Riidaja, all three manors owned by Friedrich von Stryk.

As shown above, in the 1860s and 1870s, Mulks arrived in several communities in a single wave of migration and were associated with one another either by kin ties or as fellow villagers. On the other hand, there were a number of communities where migrant purchasers of farms seem to have been, for the most part, unconnected. In two such communities, however, their final destination was the result of a series of random moves, and the sources do not reveal whether they had got to know each other on their way.

The role of information and social networks in migration is further evinced by the fact that the parishes of Halliste and Karksi provided more migrants than the other three.<sup>77</sup> Likewise, there were many migrant farm purchasers from almost all the manors in these two parishes, including privately owned and state-owned manors, manors where farmsteads were sold very early and those where the sales happened a decade or two later, and manors where farms were mostly sold to locals and those where locals often lost their farms to newcomers. Thus the importance of personal connections in increasing the momentum of migration, where the

<sup>74</sup> RA, EAA, f. 1388, n. 1, s. 403, fo. 17: contract with Jaan Märtsin, 7 May 1863. Märtsin earned 1518.36 roubles.

<sup>75</sup> This and the following examples are all based on the farm purchase contracts in the land registry archives (RA, EAA, f. 2381, f. 3416, and f. 3760). The

geographical origin of buyers was identified on the basis of church records, poll tax lists ('soul revision' lists), and listings of migrants.

<sup>76</sup> On this small manor, all farms well sold to Mulks.

<sup>77</sup> The number of migrant purchasers divided by the number of farms in the community of origin.

contacts created by migration between the areas cause additional migration, partly explains the advantage of Halliste and Karksi parishes over the other three.

*Mobilizing resources outside Mulgimaa*

In about 25 per cent of the cases, migrant farm purchasers left Mulgimaa at least a decade before purchasing the farm. However, agreements could have been concluded many years before the purchase contracts were signed.<sup>78</sup>

In Livland, written rent contracts became obligatory in 1853, and many contracts expired in 1859, as farms were normally rented to peasants on a six-year contract. This enabled many industrious Mulk migrants to set up themselves as tenants in several different communities. If they managed farms skilfully, it paved the way for them to become a landowner.

Becoming a tenant several years prior to the purchase gave migrants a chance to amass savings for farm purchase. It also required considerably smaller initial investments (deposits were much smaller than down payments) and enabled able-bodied workers to rise into the group of tenants. The latter was partly facilitated by the fact that the 'iron inventory' of the farm (the fixed amount of grain, livestock, and tools of each farmstead, which were the property of the estate owner) meant there were basic means to keep the household going. Over half of the prospective farm purchasers of landless origin had migrated out at least six years before the purchase and had set themselves up as tenants either in the target community or elsewhere. The end of *corvée* – unpaid labour the tenants owed to the manorial lord – made many farmhands superfluous on the large farms, which had previously brought together many inhabitants and encouraged out-migration. For example, 80 per cent of the landless migrants from the Holstre state estate had lived at least six (and often more than ten) years in the community where they bought farms outright.<sup>79</sup> State peasants who started to pay money rent earlier, in the late 1840s or early 1850s, seem to have been in an advantaged position, as former *corvée* workers could move out somewhat earlier and set up themselves as tenants elsewhere.

Becoming a tenant several years before the manorial lord put the farms up for sale, however, also entailed a serious risk: the lord could evict the tenants for contrariness, non-compliance with the provisions of the rental contract, or other reasons. In 1867, four Mulk migrants in Restu (Sangaste parish in Tartu County) protested the increase in rent and defeated the owner of the manor in court. Three of them managed to stay there until they bought the farms outright in 1883.<sup>80</sup> By contrast, at the same time, several Mulk tenants in Laatre (Sangaste parish) failed in their attempt to protest unfavourable contracts and were evicted for excessive growing of flax, expanding fields at the expense of pastures, and other such activities.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Lust, 'Mulgi hädaohht', pp. 45–52.

<sup>79</sup> See note 75.

<sup>80</sup> RA, EAA, f. 924, n. 1, s. 621.

<sup>81</sup> RA, EAA, f. 924, n. 1, s. 284: minutes of the

parish court of the 3rd district of Tartu County, 17 Feb. and 21 Mar. 1866; EAA, f. 924, n. 1, s. 292, fos. 1–2, 6–6v; Engelhardt to the parish court, 12 May 1867, and minutes of community court, 14 Jun. 1867.

*No money? Borrow it*

Although revenues from selling the major cash crop – flax – were often considerable,<sup>82</sup> the preserved court records suggest that farm purchasers often borrowed money from various people.<sup>83</sup> Those with limited funds readily took risks. A newspaper commentator wrote: ‘The Mulk came with tens of or a few hundred roubles in his pocket and plans in his head for making money from flax production. He boldly bought the farmstead’.<sup>84</sup> Such men even bought large and expensive farms. Some cases suggest opportunism, as a farm purchaser could burden his property with huge loans amounting to thousands of roubles and exceeding the market value of the farm.<sup>85</sup> In 1865, Count Georg Mellin, the lord of Pöögle manor, managed, after several attempts, to evict Fritz Karro from Metsaleeli farm. Mellin accused him of fraud, ‘major immorality’, and having an ‘extremely negative impact’ on the others.<sup>86</sup> He was in debt to the manorial lord, communal granary, and fellow villagers and was frequently sued.<sup>87</sup> In the words of a member of Abja community court, Karro was – ‘as is generally known’ – ‘in debt and constantly financially strapped’ and without ‘any assets’.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, he bought one of the biggest farms (c.104 ha) in Kavastu in Tartu County for 5364,5 roubles in 1864. In order to make the payments that were due before the registration of the farm purchase contract, he borrowed small amounts of money. In his will, dated 4 April 1895, he bequeathed to his daughter Reet Gross, along with Kargova farm, all his debts.<sup>89</sup> During his career as a farm owner of Kargova, Karro took loans he later renounced and left unpaid; he was in debt to the manorial lord and private creditors and submitted unfounded claims for damages; he swindled and stole, drank alcohol excessively, and had served time in jail.<sup>90</sup> A bond loan of 1000 roubles from Gustav Nitov saved him from bankruptcy in 1874. Karro’s monetary loans from 1864 to 1876 are presented in Table 3. Aside from loans in money, he also took loans in kind (e.g., in flax seed).<sup>91</sup>

Fritz Karro was not just an indebted man; he also had ties to well-established families and developed a large social network. Family and kin provided a certain reputation or status, which expanded his financial opportunities. In 1848, Fritz married Made Piir, a farmer’s daughter from Abja. His brother Ott and father Juhan were tenant farmers in Pöögle (later, Fritz’s brother Juhan took over their parents’ farm). However, both of Fritz’s brothers, Ott and Juhan, were later evicted. Fritz could count on support and loans from the families of his sisters, two

<sup>82</sup> In the 1860s, for example, Juhan Loorberg in Helme sold flax and flax seed for about 800 roubles a year, whereas for other farm products (oxen and grain) he got altogether ten times less: RA, EAA, f. 934, n. 1, s. 1151; Loorberg to the parish court of the 6th district of Pärnu County, 1866.

<sup>83</sup> RA, EAA, f. 931, n. 1, s. 697, 702; f. 928, n. 1, s. 92; Lust and Tärna, ‘Pärisperemees ja pärishärä’, pp. 312–5; Lust, ‘Eestikeelse Liivimaa talupoegade’, pp. 242–9.

<sup>84</sup> *Eesti Postimees*, 30 May 1873.

<sup>85</sup> Lust and Tärna, ‘Pärisperemees ja pärishärä’, pp. 312–34, Tiit Rosenberg, ‘Talude päriksostmisest Sangaste kihelkonnas [Buying of farms in perpetuity in the parish of Sangaste]’, in *Künnivaod* (2013), p. 212.

<sup>86</sup> RA, EAA, f. 919, n. 1, s. 1633; Count G. Mellin to the parish court of the 3rd district of Pärnu county, 22 Oct. 1860.

<sup>87</sup> Lust and Tärna, ‘Pärisperemees ja pärishärä’, p. 311.

<sup>88</sup> RA, EAA, f. 931, n. 1, s. 2241; f. 919, n. 1, s. 4278, fo. 1: minutes of the parish court of the 3rd district of Pärnu County and Pärnu County Court, 24 Nov. 1864.

<sup>89</sup> RA, EAA, f. 2381, n. 2, s. 5869.

<sup>90</sup> Lust and Tärna, ‘Pärisperemees ja pärishärä’, pp. 310–43.

<sup>91</sup> RA, EAA, f. 3566, n. 1, s. 5, fo. 5v: Pöögle community court minutes, 8 Jun. 1866.

TABLE 3. Fritz Karro's loans (in roubles), 1864–1876<sup>a</sup>

Family	sum	Mulks	Sum	Kavastu	Sum	Other/unknown	Sum
Jaak Gross	2500	Tõnis Kaasik	500	Karl Elken	100	Gustav Nitov	1000
		Henn Järv	89.65 <sup>b</sup>	Märt Reili	100		
		Juhan Järv	30				
		Juhan Kalling	60				

*Notes:*

<sup>a</sup> It includes bond loans and only those verbal loan agreements recorded in the court records.

<sup>b</sup> Debt unpaid from a bigger loan as of 12 Oct. 1874.

Source: RA, EAA, f. 2381, n. 2, s. 5869; EAA, f. 931, n. 1, s. 2568.

of whom were married to farm purchasers in Tartu County. One of his brothers-in-law, Jaak Koger, was a speculator who bought a farm in Lota in 1868 and sold it for almost twice the price in 1874. Meanwhile, Koger acquired a by-manor (*Beigut*) of Kaagjärve (Sēļi) and even tried to acquire a noble manor (Burgas), promising the manorial lord a deposit of 1000 roubles in cash and 14,000 roubles in bonds. That deal failed, as he could not raise that sum.<sup>92</sup> At least two of Fritz's three daughters married well-to-do men – one a farm owner in Kavastu and the second a farm owner in Pöögle (the third married a blacksmith).<sup>93</sup> Fritz's son-in-law, Jaak Gross, lent him 2500 roubles in 1876. In Pöögle, besides farming, Fritz Karro had engaged in small-scale trade, buying flax from other villagers and selling them salt, sugar, coffee, honey, hats, boots, and other goods. This enabled him to develop a large network of various people (including Juhan Kolberg).<sup>94</sup> In Kavastu, as mentioned above, Karro became a negotiator between the manorial lord and peasant farm buyers. In 1867, Richter forgave 418.5 roubles of Karro's purchase debt for arranging purchase deals.<sup>95</sup> By inviting men from Pöögle and other communities to Kavastu, he helped many (including dispossessed tenants) to become heads of farms. Karro combined a wide variety of resources. His creditors included, for example, Tõnis Kaasik from Karksi, who, as an assessor of the parish court, occupied one of the highest positions in the peasant hierarchy. In other historical contexts, it has been shown that loans were granted on the basis not only of means, but also of the borrower's reputation.<sup>96</sup> Reputation meant reliability in repaying debts. The Karro case demonstrates another social aspect of credit relations in rural face-to-face societies: position in the village hierarchy and connections with various people was at least as important as a good reputation.

<sup>92</sup> A *Beigut* or By-manor was a smaller economic unit within a larger manor complex. Owners of by-manors, however, also had the voting right at the provincial Diet (if they were members of the noble corporation). EAA, f. 2381, n. 2, s. 6358; EAA, f. 2381, n. 1, s. 1253; EAA, f. 918, n. 1, s. 4932. In 1858, he was an inn-keeper in Pöögle. Very probably he bought outright also two farms in Kaagjärve.

<sup>93</sup> RA, EAA, f. 1256, n. 1, s. 624, fo. 333v.

<sup>94</sup> Lust and Tärna, 'Pärisperemees ja pärishärä',

pp. 310–43. A court file concerning Gross' dispute with Karro contains a flax trader's (Karro's or plaintiff's) account book which includes dozens of names of sellers from seven communities (RA, EAA, f. 931, n. 1, s. 2237). It shows how extensive were flax trader's business contacts.

<sup>95</sup> Lust and Tärna, 'Pärisperemees ja pärishärä', p. 326.

<sup>96</sup> Gestrich and Stark (eds), *Debtors, creditors*, 'Introduction', pp. 3–4.

Besides Fritz Karro, two other purchasers of Mulk origin in Kavastu, who were severely in arrears, retained their farms and bequeathed them to their descendants.<sup>97</sup> Their creditors included Mulks from various communities (and in one case, also family members like a brother and a brother-in-law). Out of 35 farms sold to Mulks in Kavastu, only one went into bankruptcy before 1889.<sup>98</sup>

Farm purchasers of Mulk origin could easily find creditors among other Mulks, either residents of Mulgimaa or migrants. In nineteenth-century Kavastu, for example, in two-thirds of the cases when farm purchasers of Mulk origin took bond loans, the creditors were Mulks.<sup>99</sup> Several well-off Mulks became moneylenders, normally charging interest of five to seven per cent. Court records give evidence of many such men who provided credit to farm buyers both in Mulgimaa and beyond.<sup>100</sup> For example, Henn Riit from Abja-Vanamõisa gave credit to at least four other farm buyers on three different manors.<sup>101</sup> Buyers often borrowed from several people.<sup>102</sup> It was not only successful farmers who provided credit; so too did leaseholders of manors.<sup>103</sup> The contract register of the community of Abja, a place that produced – in absolute terms – the most farm purchasers of Mulk origin outside Mulgimaa, reveals that the amount of purchase-related loans ranged from hundreds to thousands of roubles, and lenders were often family members.<sup>104</sup> For example, in 1868, Juhan Puusemp in Abja borrowed for farm purchase 3000 roubles from his father and 250 roubles from a local farm owner.<sup>105</sup> The biggest recorded loan amounted to 5000 roubles. Loan arrangements were also common between fellow community members and men who had built contacts in the course of the flax trade. Normally, family members provided big loans, but others also entrusted large sums in the form of bonds (this practice became more common starting in the 1880s). Creditors were often flexible regarding timely repayment and were willing to wait for years to get the loans back.<sup>106</sup> Not only did migrants seek credit from their native community, but the opposite also occurred – locals borrowed from migrants in order to buy a farm in their original home.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>97</sup> RA, EAA, f. 2381, n. 2, s. 6342; EAA, f. 2381, n. 2, s. 6334.

<sup>98</sup> RA, EAA, f. 2381, n. 2, s. 6339.

<sup>99</sup> RA, EAA, f. 2381, n. 2, files no-s 5863, 5869, 6334, 6349, 6329, 6323, 6342, 6476, 6434.

<sup>100</sup> Community court minutes from Abja, Abja-Vanamõisa, Pöögle, Pornuse, Kaubi, and Laatre: RA, EAA, f. 3987, n. 1, s. 6, fos. 40v, 49, 56, 16 Feb. and 28 Sept. 1867, 20 Jun. 1868; EAA, f. 3987, n. 1, s. 8, fos. 83v–84, 14 Jun. 1867; EAA, f. 3556, n. 1, s. 5, fos. 112v, fo. 128v, 26 May 1872, 5 Feb. 1873; EAA, f. 3556, n. 1, s. 6, f. 27, 8 Feb. 1874; EAA, f. 4709, n. 1, s. 10, fos. 16, 17–18v, 28 Feb. 1864 and 24 Apr. 1867; EAA, f. 4712, n. 1, s. 6, p. 29, 10 May 1865; EAA, f. 4710, n. 1, s. 2, fos. 50–50v, 16 Dec. 1866; EAA, f. 3990, n. 1, s. 10, fo. 52v, 1 Aug. 1862; EAA, f. 931, n. 1, s. 2568 (parish court dispute between Juhan Järv and Juhan Kalling, 1873). RA, EAA, f. 925, n. 1, s. 4468; EAA, f. 2381, n. 2, s.7288; EAA, f. 2381, n. 2, s. 7398.

<sup>101</sup> RA, EAA, f. 4709, n. 1, s. 10, fos. 28v–29,

27 Nov. 1868; EAA, f. 1275, n. 1, s. 557, p. 130; [www.ra.ee/apps/talumaad/](http://www.ra.ee/apps/talumaad/) (last access 2 Aug. 2019)

<sup>102</sup> Our fragmentary sources allow to identify up to five private creditors (besides the seller).

<sup>103</sup> RA, EAA, f. 2381, n. 2, s. 6360; EAA, f. 1275, n. 1, s. 551, f. 91; EAA, f. 1275, n. 1, s. 473, f. 16.

<sup>104</sup> RA, EAA, f. 3987, n. 1, s. 6, f. 36: entries from 27 and 31 May 1866. Very few contract registers annotating oral agreements between community members have been preserved from this period. Richness of data in the register of Abja is exceptional. For more, see also loan related court disputes between family members: RA, EAA, f. 3987, n. 1, s. 8, fos. 65v–66, 131v–132, 11 May and 23 Nov. 1867. For Laatre, see for example, EAA, f. 3990, n. 1, s. 25, fo. 28v, entry from 20 Feb. 1876.

<sup>105</sup> RA, EAA, f. 3987, n. 1, s. 6, f. 56v–57, 59 v, Jun. 1868.

<sup>106</sup> E.g., 8 or 14 years: RA, EAA, f. 4709, n. 1, s. 10, fos. 16, 34, 43v.

<sup>107</sup> RA, EAA, f. 3987, n. 1, s. 6, fo. 61, 5 Dec. 1868.

Aside from credit relations, the flax trade connected the family members who stayed put with those who migrated.<sup>108</sup>

## V

Was it true, then, that no money meant no farm? The short answer is yes, in general – but as shown in this study, a shortage of money could be overcome. Tenants who did not have sufficient funds to buy their farms outright normally lost them to those who had money. Land prices, farm sizes, and the timing of the sales process varied considerably across Estonia, and this triggered large-scale migration. Until 1889, the most successful migrants were Mulks, who bought outright about seven per cent of peasant farms in the non-Mulk communities of Viljandi County and 12 per cent in Tartu County.

Mulks used various strategies to mobilize financial resources. Their major source of support was the family. Members of farming families – farmers' brothers and sons, and former tenants – decisively dominated the group of migrant purchasers from Mulgimaa. Members of farming families not only had more savings of their own and received a larger inheritance but also had better chances to mobilize a family network in order to raise money for the purchase. The finding that, especially in the early phase of the process, family members tended to provide much more credit than acquaintances or fellow villagers confirms the view that family connections retained a powerful effect on financial behaviour in times of modernization.<sup>109</sup> Expanding networks by marrying a member of the local elite in a new place was occasionally part of the reason for success, but two-thirds of the migrant purchasers arrived with a wife from Mulgimaa. Marrying a farmer's daughter who would bring a substantial dowry into the marriage and help to expand networks would have been an option for farmhands to raise money. Half of the farm purchasers of landless origin followed this course of action. First becoming a tenant in the area of destination, amassing financial resources for years, and only thereafter buying a farm outright was a strategy that also kept the initial investment threshold low for farmhands. However, this approach was not without risks. Tenants could make good money by selling flax, but many manorial lords limited its cultivation on peasant farms and punished those who disobeyed. Farmers and innkeepers were able to earn money in their home communities, although this sometimes led to conflicts with the local manorial lords.

In most cases, family was the main source of credit, but in several others, wider networks and interpersonal relations helped to overcome the money problem. Mulgimaa's economic advantage manifested itself, among other things, in the accumulation of capital in the hands of some of the more prosperous farm heads, who provided credit opportunities for men who did not manage to save up as much themselves. Even if they were seriously indebted in their home community and faced constant lawsuits, Mulks who purchased farmsteads could stay afloat if they mobilized their social networks. This capacity depended on the person's position in the village and the extent of networks. Networks favoured trust and therefore ensured loan

<sup>108</sup> RA, EAA, f. 3987, n. 1, s. 7, fos. 4v–5, 21 Jul. 1866.

<sup>109</sup> Vogel, 'Credit, trust', pp. 95–96.

contract enforcement. Credit relationships among the Mulks supplemented poorly functioning markets that left peasants without almost any access to formal institutions of credit. The increased access to credit also encouraged risk-taking among purchasers who, in some cases, burdened their properties with huge loans. It appears that for a farm owner, continuous borrowing could be a sustainable lifestyle, due to the rapid rise in land prices.

Besides credit, social networks provided highly valuable information on available farms and, through it, influenced the choice of migration destination. For well-off and less well-off migrant land purchasers alike, information about possible migration destinations, where farms were on sale or vacant, where locals did not buy them and manorial lords looked for migrants as well as rent and price information, was of key importance. It was significant because the manorial lords' sale policies differed: some put farms on sale years or decades earlier than the others; some favoured current tenants or at least locals, whereas others eagerly welcomed migrants.