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Neoliberal governance and ‘responsibilization’ of agents: reassessing the mechanisms of responsibility-shift in neoliberal discursive environments

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ABSTRACT

The ‘governmentality’ approach has been influential in analyzing how neoliberal governance transfers responsibility to individual agents through an ‘appeal of freedom’ mechanism. This productive conceptualization of power has generated a solid body of research on the workings of (neo)liberal governance and contemporary Western capitalism. However, such research has largely ignored a complementary mechanism characteristic of situations where ‘appeal of freedom’ lets actors down, that is, dynamics of ‘threat to personal control’. Studies focusing and elaborating on this aspect, and ‘control constructs’ more generally, have remained mostly within the disciplinary boundaries of (social) psychology. In this paper we aim to bring the social psychological research on control constructs into a dialogue with governmentality theorizing and to show how neoliberal ‘responsibilization’ can work through threats to personal control, insecurity and governance by fear. We propose one way of utilizing, and advancing, these approaches in tandem with empirical research, by focusing on the analysis of control attributions of the subjects of (neoliberal) governance. With a brief empirical illustration from the context of Australian neoliberal agricultural policies we then show how neoliberal ‘responsibilization’ can be viewed as relying on farmers’ striving to maintain personal control under uncertainty, in addition to the workings of the ‘appeal of freedom’ mechanism.

KEYWORDS

Neoliberal governance; responsibilization; governmentality; control constructs; attribution theory; social psychology; Australian agricultural restructuring

Introduction: linking discursive environments to responsibility taking?

Discussions of the cultural logic of contemporary Western capitalism in general and neoliberal governance in particular have been heavily influenced by what is referred to as the ‘governmentality’ approach. As originally developed by Michel Foucault and elaborated later on by others, it focuses on the rationalities, technologies and ethical problematizations, through which governance and rule (often by the state) can be exercised remotely, indirectly and via a specific mode of ‘subjectification’ (see Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991; Dean 1999; Lemke 2001; Barnett et al. 2008; Hamann 2009). An important

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assumption of this approach is that processes of governing, subjectification and responsibility-taking are closely interlinked. Correspondingly, it is argued that the remote and indirect action of the state is essentially enabled by something called ‘responsibilization’, the establishment of a form of subjectivity or self-hood – such as an ‘enterprising self’ (Rose 1992; Peters 2001; McNay 2009) – whereby an agent ‘would produce the ends of government by fulfilling themselves rather than being merely obedient’ (Rose, O’Malley, and Valverde 2006, 89). Authority and rule are exercised by individuals acting upon their selves, rather than giving way to some externally enforced agent (such as a democratic state). It is suggested that scholars direct attention to an ‘art of government’ where the state acts remotely through ‘chains of enrolment, “responsibilization” and “empowerment” by individuals who adopt a new and specific mode of governing the self’ (Barry, Osborne, and Rose 1996, 12).

Indeed, from the 1990s onwards – particularly in the UK (but also the antipodes) – the governmentality perspective has been utilized to detect, identify and analyze these themes and links in relation to neoliberal – or ‘advanced liberal’ – modes of governance (Lemke 2001; Rose, O’Malley, and Valverde 2006). From a governmentality perspective, then, ‘neo-liberalism is a political rationality that tries to render the social domain economic and to link a reduction in (welfare) state services and security systems to the increasing call for “personal responsibility” and “self-care”’ (Lemke 2001, 203). It is a form of governing – at least as an ideal type – which seeks to reshape the sensemaking, even subjectivity, of individuals in such a manner as to shift their explanations for problems or concerns from external agents or forces to the self. In other words, neoliberal governmentality emerges as a form of governance that relies on a generalized praxis of ‘responsibilization’. Consistent with leading scholars in the field, we understand the term ‘responsibilization’ as referring to a governance praxis that operates through ascribing freedom and autonomy to individuals and agents (e.g. as autonomous ‘consumers’) while simultaneously appealing to individual responsibility-taking, independent self-steering and ‘self-care’ (Barry, Osborne, and Rose 1996; Rose 1999; Barnett et al. 2008; Shamir 2008). As Rose has argued, ‘... neo-liberal programmes ... respond to the sufferer as if they were the author of their own misfortune ... the disadvantaged individual has come to be seen as potentially and ideally an active agent in the fabrication of their own existence’ (1996, 59). The process of welfare state retrenchment – and related ‘subordination of the social’ (Clarke 2007) – is thus allegedly rendered workable through the shift, or even transformation, of citizens into self-steering, economically independent, responsibility-taking agents.

Commentators have noted, however, that it is not always clear how the technologies, rationales and ethical problematizations ‘rolled out’ for the purposes of government/governing connect up with cultural and socio-psychological processes of responsibilization, self-formation and subjectivity (see Barnett et al. 2008; Pyyysiäinen and Vesala 2013). Indeed, one of the central puzzles in the literature revolves around how the process of neo-liberal responsibilization actually proceeds. How is it that individuals – and also collective agents – come to see that they ought – naturally – to see themselves as responsible for their own fate, to actively assume responsibility for outcomes in relevant areas of their lives? If we assume agents are active and capable of resistance in the face of perceived (personal and social) injustice or unfairness, then how is it that they are so easily influenced by the neo- (or ‘advanced’) liberal rule and so prone to succumb to responsibilization? The literature on neoliberal governmentality seems to suggest that the subjects of

neoliberal governance are persuaded by the appeal of increased personal freedom, possibilities of self-realization and maximization of quality of life. According to such an ‘appeal of freedom’ explanation for responsabilization, then, the subjects of neoliberal government can be seen as co-participating in the construction of the neoliberal rule. A crucial point, however, is the nature of the ‘social psychological’ mechanism or sensemaking process through which neoliberal subjects eventually assume personal responsibility. Is it, perhaps, a question of self-centric calculation, active sensemaking and internal deliberation, or perhaps more passive ‘subjugation’ to dominant macro-discourses, even to the extent of a kind of ‘conversion’ into responsibility-taking subjectivity?

In this article we ponder the nature of such a neoliberal responsibility-shift and propose a reassessment of the mechanisms that underpin the susceptibility to responsibility-taking and conformance to neoliberal rule. We argue that in addition to the ‘appeal of freedom’ explanation research should better acknowledge another, complementary explanatory principle for responsibility-taking that may, on a closer look, be a quite influential mechanism in the operation of neoliberal responsabilization.¹ The ‘successful’ working of neoliberal responsabilization and governance may significantly depend on a complementary mechanism we call ‘responsibilization through threat to personal control’. Contrary to the ‘appeal of freedom’ mechanism which taps into the positive expectations and subjective hopes and desires of individuals, the ‘threat to personal control’ mechanism taps into the negative expectations, feelings of uncertainty, fear and threat of the loss of control over events. Indeed, governmentality scholars – and Foucault himself – have noted that striving for security and controllability, on the one hand, and culture of danger and stimulation of fear, on the other, are intrinsic, complementary aspects of liberal governmentality (Foucault 2008; Lemke, Larsen, and Hvidbak 2011). In the fields of psychological and social psychological research, these themes have been traditionally studied in relation to questions concerning psychological control and ‘control constructs’. There, an established finding suggests that when people’s perceived controllability over events is threatened, they may react in complementary ways, depending on their perception of the situation: on the one hand, people may become passive or indifferent and, for example, relinquish their attempts at controllability or, on the other hand, they may actively strive to restore their threatened personal control. According to the latter, the so-called ‘reactance’ alternative, experienced uncertainty may be accompanied with an accentuated emphasis on one’s personal efforts and responsibility.

Interestingly, to our knowledge, these ideas have not been explicitly linked to and thematized in the context of governmentality studies. However, once the connection is made, we learn that in addition to the ‘appeal of freedom’ route, advanced liberal rule and responsabilization may be seen as working also through alternative routes, by imposing ‘threats to personal control’ and tapping feelings of personal insecurity. Further, once the connection is made, it seems unnecessary to resort to assumptions about neoliberal governance as effecting profound ‘conversions’ at the level of subjectivities or ‘selfdoms’ of its subjects. Finally, the juxtaposition of these traditionally distinct approaches (i.e. governmentality approach on responsabilization and psychological approach on control constructs) may help contextualize and ‘historicize’ the psychological constructs of control, as cultural and psychological correlatives of liberalism and its genealogy.

In the following sections of the article, we first describe the basic idea of the neoliberal responsabilization through ‘appeal of freedom’, as it can be detected in the

governmentality-inspired literature on neo- and ‘advanced’ liberal governance. Subsequently, we show how research on psychological control constructs can be used to formulate an alternative explanation for the working of responsabilization under neoliberal rule. Then we move to illustrate one possible approach for empirically assessing these alternative explanations for responsabilization. We do not engage in ambitious statistical hypothesis testing, but rather illustrate how neoliberal discursive constructions can, in actuality, be plausibly linked to the shifts in responsibility attributions among agents exposed to such a discursive environment. We conduct our brief empirical ‘demonstration’ by documenting the discursive sensemaking patterns among Australian farmers, in relation to the future survival prospects of their farms, at two points in time.

Australian farming is a particularly useful context, as it manifests a fascinating puzzle. In contrast to other national farm sectors, neoliberal rule has become exceptionally well embedded during recent decades, and subject to little overt resistance from the farming community. How might we explain this state of affairs? If we find farmers increasingly prioritizing self-responsible attributions and shifting toward more responsibility-taking as exposure to the neoliberal discourse increases, then this would lend support for the alternative that neoliberal discourse is at least correlated with a responsibility-shift and, indeed, increased personal responsibility-taking. Conversely, if we see no increase in responsibility-taking, then we should consider the alternative that neoliberal rule ‘sticks’, or indeed exists, (also) via other processes. The case of Australian farming has the added advantage that it has been the subject of a healthy dose of analysis utilizing the governmentality framework (see the following sections). We have existing analysis on which to base our work and propel the debate forward.

Neoliberal governance and ‘responsibilization’ of agents: an appeal of freedom or threat to personal control?

Governmentality research on neoliberalism analyzes how neoliberal governance and responsabilization are extended through discourses and discursive assemblages that problematize prevailing societal practices and seek to render ‘appropriate’ modes of governing the self the prioritized response (Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991; Miller and Rose 2008; Shamir 2008; Hamann 2009). The discourses may be accompanied or intertwined with practices and technologies for individuals to work upon the self (such as programs, technologies of self or tools for ‘self-care’). These neoliberal discourses can be understood as providing ‘frames’ (or reframings), which incorporate a *diagnosis* or *representation* of a problem situation – including an attribution of blame or causality, and a *prognosis* or *intervention* that suggests a solution (Lemke 2001) – including a specification of strategies, tactics or targets (Benford 1993, 199). Hence, neoliberal discourses would diagnose as problematic such societal conditions that prevent individual agents from effectively assuming responsibility for outcomes to themselves. As to the prognosis, the solution offered, neoliberal discourses set out to re-frame and re-configure the conditions so that the fate of the agents – and the consequences of their undertakings – would depend predominantly on their own decisions, actions and abilities. Then, as put by Lemke (2001, 201), (...) the consequences of the action are borne by the subject alone, who is also solely responsible for them.

A paradigmatic example of such a reconfiguration through neoliberal discourse(s) would be the ‘economization’ of the state and societal institutions, whereby agents’ previous identities – citizen or civil servant, for example – would be reframed with equivalents from the economic sphere – such as ‘consumer’ or ‘entrepreneur’ (e.g. Shamir 2008; McNay 2009). A solid body of literature documents a range of instances where neo- or ‘advanced liberal’ responsabilization has been brought forth by discursive reframings along these lines, including public sector management (du Gay 1996a) and management of unemployment (Dean 1995), education (Peters 2001), health care (Cohen and Musson 2000; Doolin 2002), regional development (Raco 2003; Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins 2004), agriculture (Higgins and Lockie 2001; Pyysiäinen and Vesala 2013) and, naturally, consumer culture and ‘consumerism’ (du Gay 1996b; Barnett et al. 2008).

While discursive (re-)framing is thus sketched in as the mechanism for enrollment of agents in self-governance and responsibility-taking, the operation of neoliberal governance and responsabilization are postulated as being ultimately based on a positive, ‘productive’ form of power and government rationality, characteristic of societal rule under ‘advanced liberalism’. As originally formulated by Foucault (1979, 1980) as part of his historical analytics of power, the productive form of power – also referred to as ‘bio-power’ – can be considered as exerting a positive and productive influence on life and populations, and thus as sharply distinct from historically earlier, coercive and negative forms of power, analyzed by Foucault under the labels of ‘sovereign’ and ‘juridico-institutional’ power (see also Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 126–142; Rabinow and Rose 2006; Ojakangas 2005).

Explaining neoliberal ‘responsibilization’ through an ‘appeal of freedom’

The distinction between negative and positive concepts of power is crucial for governmentality-inspired literature on neoliberalism as it commonly emphasizes that neoliberal (and ‘advanced liberal’) modes of governance operate through, and not despite or against, the ‘powers of freedom’ and autonomy of its subjects (Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991; Rose and Miller 1992; Burchell 1993; Dean 1999; Rose 1999; Rose, O’Malley, and Valverde 2006; Miller and Rose 2008). In other words, the operation of neoliberal governance and responsabilization is based on discourses that tap into and resonate with the subjects’ desires of personal freedom, quality of life and fulfillment of self-realization potential. The subjects of neoliberal governance are persuaded into active responsibility-taking by the appeal of increased personal freedom and possibilities of self-realization, as highlighted, for example, in the title of Rose’s (1999) seminal book *Powers of Freedom*. A critical condition for the success of this neoliberal discursive reframing would thus be that the subjects are making a sort of trade-off: that is, ‘sacrificing’ other types of rationalities of social organization and action for the sake of pursuing personal freedom, self-fulfillment and quality of life through the making of autonomous choices. In other words, neoliberal responsabilization would ultimately rely on an ‘appeal of freedom’ explanation.

A point where the ‘appeal of freedom’ explanations for neoliberal responsabilization seem to differ or diverge, however, is the nature of the social psychological ‘mechanism’ or (sensemaking process) through which the subjects of neoliberal governance assume personal responsibility. Governmentality-inspired studies seem to hesitate between two

basic alternatives. The first alternative assumes that responsabilization is based on something like a process of self-interested calculation and active psychological/discursive sensemaking. As such, responsabilization would be a matter of rational calculation and persuasive ego-centric deliberation and arguing, encouraged and fueled by 'neoliberal' discursive environments and 'technologies of the self'. This alternative seems intuitively appealing and comprehensible: plenty of evidence supports the view that Western market democracies have increasingly resorted to discourses and practices where citizens are addressed as autonomous individuals, 'consumers' and makers of free choices based on subjectively evaluated and calculated preferences. However, on the basis of mere persuasive psychological sensemaking and rational calculation it would be difficult to explain why individuals would continue to assume personal responsibility and conform to neoliberal rule even in the face of socio-economic predicament that no longer promises opportunities for personal freedom and self-realization. If responsabilization would be based on mere self-interested calculation and pursuit of self-realization, why does neoliberal rule 'stick' so steadfastly even when conditions run counter to the self-interest and self-realization opportunities of its subjects? Auxiliary assumptions would obviously be needed to make intelligible the persistence of neoliberal rule under conditions where the expectations concerning outcomes remained unfulfilled for large fractions of the population. As a case in point we think here of the general population under austerity programs in contemporary Europe: Is this population perhaps still persuaded by the 'appeals of freedom' – even if only somewhere in a distant future?

An alternative working of responsabilization can also be detected in the governmentality-inspired literature. This second alternative seems to posit a deeper transformation of subjectivity or even some kind of a 'conversion' of mentality, or selfhood, as underpinning responsabilization and the operation of neoliberal rule. If neoliberal subjects could be viewed as 'converted' into a neoliberal mentality and responsibility-taking, then it would be easier to explain the obvious persistence and success of neoliberal rule. On this note, however, we are reminded by several governmentality scholars that discourses – be they neoliberal or not – should not be treated as literally constitutive or as simplistically creating realities and identities. For instance, Cruikshank (1996, 248) has warned that 'Discourse is not literally constitutive', and government discourses do not solely (re)make 'citizen-subjects'. The claim is repeated in a reflective essay by Rose and colleagues (2006, 89):

Governmentality studies ... rejected the notion ... that discourses themselves create realities and identities. Language and other signifying systems were instead regarded as one element among many for rendering reality governable.

Taken together, governmentality-inspired accounts of neoliberal governance provide us with illustrative insights into the logic of neoliberal responsabilization through discourses and practices that appeal to freedom and autonomous agency. Nevertheless, these accounts leave us with some open questions concerning the more specific operational logic of the responsabilization through 'appeal of freedom'. In particular, one is left wondering, when or in what kinds of contexts/situations, and to what extent, is an assumption of self-interested calculation and pursuit of self-realization sufficient – or necessary – to explain the working of responsabilization under neoliberal rule? Or might there also be other types of responsabilization mechanisms at work?²

Explaining neoliberal ‘responsibilization’ through threat to personal control?

We suggest that the mechanisms and processes of responsibility-taking under neoliberal governance can be analytically further unpacked and elaborated with the help of social psychological theories concerning constructs of control and attribution processes. Using these theoretical ideas to unpack the assumptions upon which the ‘appeal of freedom’ explanations of responsibilization (as described above) can logically be based, we are able to uncover another possible type of explanation for the functioning of responsibilization under neoliberal governance. An alternative explanation for responsibilization elaborates a flip-side of ‘advanced liberal’ pursuits, that is, the possibility of disappointments and of a ‘struggling agentic’ trajectory under advanced liberal rule. The autonomously choosing and independently self-steering agent may end up in situations where choices are not rewarded but instead risks are realized or unforeseen external forces frustrate projects. In other words, the mechanisms of responsibilization are intertwined with situational dynamics where appeal of freedom may give way, or turn into, threat or fear of loss of control. We call this complementary explanatory principle here (by way of juxtaposition) ‘responsibilization through threat to personal control’. In more exact terms, it may take two alternative and complementary main forms, referred to in the following as ‘learned helplessness’ and ‘psychological reactance’. These alternatives help, first, to shed light on the open questions concerning the operation of responsibilization through ‘appeal of freedom’ described above. Second, we believe that they may be useful explanatory principles for the operation of neoliberal rule, responsibilization and their persistence. Let us elaborate.

In the fields of psychology and social psychology, a robust body of research has addressed questions related to psychological control and control-constructs (see, e.g. Rodin 1990; Burger 1992; Skinner 1996). Within this broad strand of research, different traditions and paradigms can be detected, ranging for instance from learning and motivation theoretical formulations to more socio-cognitively oriented approaches, variably focusing on themes of personal control, responsibility-taking, autonomy, self-determination, motivation and their interrelations (Rodin 1990; Burger 1992; Skinner 1996). Crudely summarized, a converging assumption within this broad line of research claims that *individuals aim at maintaining a sense of control over ongoing events and outcomes of their undertakings* (White 1959; Brehm 1966; De Charms 1968; Thompson and Spacapan 1991; Burger 1992; Skinner 1996). As such, this assumption is in line with the ‘appeal of freedom’ principle central to governmentality studies: achievement and demonstration of personal control over outcomes and events indeed holds a powerful appeal. The influential ‘attribution theory’ tradition (Heider 1958; Jones and Davis 1965; Kelley 1967; Wortman 1976; Weiner 1986; Hewstone 1989), for example, holds that people will attribute cause to events in a way that renders their world and fate controllable, thereby facilitating and maintaining healthy psychological functioning. There is a tendency, for instance, to assume personal control of positive outcomes, by making an ‘internal’ attribution and thus claiming responsibility for the cause of positive events and outcomes, whereas negative outcomes implicating self can be given an external attribution and explained away, as falling outside or beyond the boundaries of responsibility of the ego.

As a general premise, theories of control assume that people’s reactions to opportunities or potential losses of control depend on their appraisals of the situation (i.e. is the situation

potentially controllable?) and their capability and resources to exercise control over the situation: 'appraisals of high control should lead to information seeking, planning, strategizing, preventative efforts, and direct action' (Skinner 1996, 556). This approximates roughly the logic of the 'appeal of freedom' alternative; people (are led to) believe that outcomes and events are amenable to control via autonomous choices and actions and engage thus in pursuit of personal freedom, self-fulfillment and quality of life. Negative control appraisals, in turn, ought to be accompanied with reverse behavioral consequences. A famous example of this has been documented by the theory of 'Learned helplessness' (Seligman 1975; Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale 1978), according to which people are prone to learn a passive or 'helpless' action orientation under circumstances of prolonged perceived noncontingency between effort and outcome. If the agent learns that she has no control over the outcomes of her undertakings, the agent is expected to cease to take initiative, personal effort and responsibility. 'Learned helplessness' would thus approximate an antithesis of the neoliberal agenda. However, a mechanism similar to 'learned helplessness' might nevertheless play a role in the neoliberal responsibility-shift via, say, 'silent conforming' or taming of resistance instead of a responsabilization proper. If discouraged, struggling subjects may learn a premise that they cannot influence the rule that works upon them and thus relinquish efforts to change the course of things (even if the expected outcomes and 'trickling down' would remain immaterialized).

Interestingly, research has also documented a more active, 'innate' compensatory tendency to perceived threats to personal control, according to which people often attempt to restore threatened controllability under uncertainty and disappointing outcomes. Wortman (1976) provides an early example of the unemployed, who can at times blame themselves for their lack of employment. This seems counter-intuitive to healthy functioning; however, if the person attributes the cause of their unemployment to a changeable internal quality, they are able to maintain sense of control and belief that they can prospectively alter their unemployed status. Indeed, a solid body of work documents how individuals can show persistence in pursuit of control and responsibility-taking even when perceived personal control over events is threatened; instead of pessimism or passivity, they may rather strive to restore their threatened freedoms and personal control. This tendency has been called 'psychological reactance' and is the cornerstone of the 'Theory of psychological reactance' (Brehm 1966; Wicklund 1974; Wortman, Brehm, and Berkowitz 1975; Brehm and Brehm 1981; Brehm 1989).

Wortman, Brehm, and Berkowitz (1975, 308) further specify that the stronger the person's expectation of control is, the 'more controlling behaviour or persistence he will show'. If, instead, the required behaviors and means of control are perceived to be beyond person's control, motivation for control is expected to cease and other reactions, such as 'helplessness' or discounting of the attractiveness of the outcome, will follow (see also Greenberger and Strasser 1986; Skinner 1996).

In summary, the tendency to react to threats or losses of control along the lines described by 'learned helplessness' and 'psychological reactance' mechanisms represents an alternative route for the potential working of neoliberal responsabilization. First, in the case of 'learned helplessness' the subjects of neoliberal governance would react to a loss of controllability over events by passivity, withdrawal or potentially 'delegating' the blame to an external agent, and finally concluding that the issue is beyond personal control and responsibility. Thus neoliberal rule might 'stick' – not because of active

responsibilization it poses upon its subjects but because of passifying or discouraging effects. Second, in the case of ‘psychological reactance’, subjects would react to threats to controllability by striving to persistently regain their threatened control. In this case, neoliberal rule would operate, somewhat unexpectedly, through a kind of mediated and indirect responsibilization. By shaking conventional sources of stability or by stimulating fear of dangers, neoliberal arrangements would expose its subjects to possibility of reduced or lost personal control (cf. Foucault 2008; Lemke, Larsen, and Hvidbak 2011). This experience of threat to controllability would then trigger the subjects to assume responsibility and engage in emphatic, persistent strivings to restore their threatened personal control.

The cases of ‘learned helplessness’ and ‘psychological reactance’ represent alternatives where neoliberal rule might operate via more indirect mechanisms that have not to our knowledge been distinguished as alternative response trajectories in the governmentality-inspired literature. In the following, we examine and assess the plausibility of these three explanatory mechanisms (‘appeal of freedom’, ‘learned helplessness’ and ‘psychological reactance’) in the light of an empirical case that is an illustrative example of the intensification and establishment of a neoliberal policy environment, namely the context of agriculture and farming in Australia. We analyze longitudinal survey responses from Australian farmers at two points in time, 1996 and 2003, regarded as the period when neoliberal policies were established as the hegemonic policy discourse in Australian agriculture. Thus we are able to detect and analyze how this culmination was reflected and interpreted in the explanations and sensemaking of its subjects. Before moving to the empirical analysis, we briefly review how the neoliberal discursive environment in the context of Australian farming and agriculture was constituted.

A neoliberal discursive environment: the Australian farm context

Successive Australian governments, commencing in the 1970s, have repudiated policies that applied generous state assistance to agricultural producers. This policy shift included the removal of import tariffs and statutory marketing arrangements (Wonder 1995; Cockfield 1997). This policy change has been associated with a rapid decline in farm numbers, and in turn has had impacts on the well-being and composition of rural society and the quality of rural environments (Higgins and Lockie 2001).

The neoliberal ‘turn’ sought to sever reliance and recourse to government ‘intervention’ in underwriting farm survival. As Lemke (2001) described in general terms above, the aim is to transfer responsibility for outcomes – in this case farm survival – from the state to individuals. This approach has had a reasonably long history in Australian agricultural policy. Early schemes had the aim of removing inefficient farmers and affecting consolidation. They worked, as Lawrence (1987, 201) has argued, on the precept that, the ‘... solution to agriculture requires *individual* action – a farmer must become more efficient/productive or leave the industry’ (my emphasis). Amidst reductions of protectionist state assistance, these schemes focused on the capacity for farmers to adjust to the emerging competitive environment rather than seeking government intervention. It is a highly individualist brand of discourse.

This position was further consolidated into the 1990s. Governments have sought to position themselves as being responsible for creating an unfettered market environment

within which farmers can compete (see, e.g. Wonder 1995, 2). Consequently, the ‘right and proper’ conduct of farmers has been constructed through narratives of ‘self-reliance’ and ‘entrepreneurship’. Farmers have been encouraged, sometimes quite forcefully, to conceptualize the farm as a business.

Consistent with this ‘farm as a business image’, farmers have been encouraged to adopt certain business practices and develop certain abilities: in particular to develop business acumen, to deploy individual risk management strategies and to closely follow market trends (Higgins and Lockie 2001). As Lawrence (1987) identified, this also encouraged farmers to look for solutions to viability within them ‘selves’ rather than resort to solutions through government largess. Efforts have been made to support discourses with tutelage in relevant skills. Government has itself sponsored training to enhance these capacities where they are ‘deficient’. This latter point is crucial. The attempts to generate basic business skills of farmers (such as computer skills, market risk management tools, etc.) *have been accompanied by explicit attempts to fashion farmers as self-steering, economically independent, responsibility-taking agents*. Against the backdrop of declining state welfare and support for farming, the state sought to create – at least the governmentality literature suggests – farmers as self-responsible agents.

As such, farmers are encouraged to interpret their ability (and not remote structural factors per se) as the most significant determinant of farm viability. Hence, these discourses are said to encourage farmers to embrace blame for any farm failure as their personal failure as a farm business manager. This formulation leads us toward the conceptual core of our research problematic, the influence of neoliberal discourses upon the responsibility-taking and governing of the individual ‘selves’.

There is little need to document these governmental discourses further, as their intent and potential impact is well established in the literature (see, e.g. Gray and Lawrence 2001; Higgins and Lockie 2001; Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins 2004). A less studied question, however, is first whether and then how agents’ interpretations resemble those provided by the neoliberal discursive environment, that is, the Australian neoliberal agricultural discourse? And what kind of impact do the neoliberal discursive frames have on the self-understandings and psychological sensemaking of farmers? Are the farmers indeed persuaded to assume responsibility for outcomes by the ‘appeal of freedom’ that neoliberal discourses promise, or does responsabilization perhaps work via the threat to personal control that these policies pose on their subjects?

To shed light on these questions, we need to examine the actual sensemaking and attribution processes of individuals subject to neoliberal governance. Examination of these processes in the context of Australian neoliberal agricultural policies can serve as an illustrative example of the role of alternative mechanisms of responsabilization in rendering neoliberal rule workable and persistent more generally.

Empirical excursion: neoliberal responsabilization and attributions of responsibility in Australian farming

We illustrate how attribution theory can be applied to analyze responsibility-taking in qualitative survey data collected from Australian farmers at two time points. We focus on the responsibility- and control-attributions (Shaver 1985; Weiner 1986, 1995; Hewstone 1989) as expressed by the farmers and detect whether prolonged exposure to

Table 1. Attribution of the locus of cause in different mechanisms of responsibility-shift.

Mechanism of responsibility-shift	Attribution of the locus of cause for events and outcomes (diagnosis/prognosis)	
	Diagnosis of the locus of cause of events	Prognosis for locus of cause of effective responses to the events
Appeal of freedom	Internal (cause of events attributed to self)	Internal (cause of effective responses attributed to self)
Learned helplessness	Internal (cause of events attributed to self)	External (cause of effective responses attributed to forces beyond self)
Reactance	External (cause of events attributed to forces beyond self)	Internal (cause of effective responses attributed to self)
'Welfarist' orientation	External (cause of events attributed to forces beyond self)	External (cause of effective responses attributed to forces beyond self)

neoliberal discursive environment is indeed evident in their causal explanations for events. Attribution theoretical approach, especially as developed by Weiner (1974, 1983, 1986, 1995), can be used to 'operationalize' the three neoliberal responsabilization alternatives sketched previously, that is, 'appeal of freedom', 'learned helplessness' and 'psychological reactance' patterns, in terms of responsibility- and control-related attributions.

Weiner's work (1974, 1983, 1986, 1995) has elaborated the classic internal–external locus distinction of causal attributions (Heider 1958) into a more comprehensive dimensionality of causal attributions. However, for the purposes of our analysis, the main analytical interest lies precisely on the attribution of the *locus* of cause for events, that is, the perception of events and outcomes as controlled by internal vs. external causes. The hypothesized three mechanisms of responsabilization can be broken down into attributions concerning their 'diagnostic' (locus of the causes of events) and 'prognostic' (locus of cause of effective responses to the events) constituents as shown in Table 1. As a fourth logical responsibility-shift alternative we consider also an 'anti-neoliberal' attribution pattern, labeled here suggestively as a 'welfarist orientation', where external concerns would be met with externalized responses. Examples of such an attribution pattern would include concerns and responses that emphasize structural and societal forces (see Table 1).³

Research design and data

Empirical study of responsabilization is no doubt possible utilizing a range of methods. In this case, we collected data via a postal questionnaire survey distributed in 1996 and then 2003 to all 'rural rated' landholders in a rural shire of New South Wales, Australia (anonymity of the shire is maintained here as a requirement of ethics clearance).

Our case shire supports a range of broad acre agricultural enterprises, including cropping, cattle, sheep and pig production. It also supports a range of manufacturing enterprises, agricultural and non-agricultural. It is a medium-sized inland town, with a range of government and non-government services. While it is nonsensical to talk of the average town, there is no reason why the responses we elicited here should be in some way exceptional.

In the questionnaire, we explicitly asked the respondents to reflect on their own, personal situation. Two open-ended questions were designed to establish how the farmers framed their current situation regarding their farm enterprise, and the logical form of

action they thought flowed from it. The first question probed the aspect of diagnosis, or attribution of concern, in the following form:

What would you consider the biggest concern regarding the future of the farm?

And the follow-up question, probing the aspect of prognosis – attribution of effective responses to the concern – was presented in the form:

What action can you take to meet and deal with this challenge?

Both questions were vital as the analysis aimed to chart the variation and possible shifts in the locus of causes in the concern–response patterns. The analysis thus focused on the ways with which farmers located their self within, and attributed causes to events and outcomes associated with, the ‘competitive farm squeeze’.

To give an example, an ‘ideal typical’ neoliberal attribution pattern would include elements of, first, an internally attributed concern (diagnosis) along the lines: ‘My farm lacks efficiency in competitive markets’ and, second, an internally oriented explanatory response (prognosis) along the lines: ‘I need to learn to manage my farm more along the lines of a traditional business and improve my entrepreneurial skills’. This pattern reflects the ‘responsibilization through appeal of freedom’ mechanism, where the person is persuaded to focus on an internal concern (in the form of his/her ‘self’, own actions, decisions, abilities, thoughts and emotions as causes for outcomes) and cope with it with internally oriented responses (in the form of autonomously taken choices, initiatives, decisions and actions). The logical opposite, what we call a ‘welfarist’ ideal type would include an external concern, such as: ‘It is not possible to continue farming given present conditions’, and an external response along the lines: ‘The government needs to recognize the value of farming and help solve the structural problems that cause farm decline’ (see [Table 1](#)).

However, since the open-ended survey responses reported by farmers do not provide unambiguously classifiable attribution patterns, we applied qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff 2004; Hsieh and Shannon 2005) to code the responses (each including a pattern with main concern and prioritized response to the concern) on the basis of their attributional loci (see [Table 1](#)). We compared patterns discernible in 1996 and 2003.

Results of the comparative analysis between 1996 and 2003

The 1996 survey had a response rate of 32.5% (219/674) and the 2003 survey a lower response rate of 12.3% (89/726). In all, the 1996 survey yielded 193 and the 2003 survey 89 useable ‘diagnostic’ and ‘prognostic’ explanations for the purposes of attribution analysis.⁴ In our design the 1996 findings serve as the benchmark against which to compare the 2003 data.

We hypothesized that we would see a shift toward increasingly internally oriented causal explanations in 2003 sample, both in terms of concern (diagnosis) and response (prognosis), as exposure to neoliberal discourses intensified. This hypothesis reflects the responsibilization through ‘appeal of freedom’ mechanism, as the dominant interpretation of the operation of neoliberal rule in governmentality-informed literature. In our 1996 benchmark sample, we saw, first, that farmers favored an explanatory pattern characteristic of ‘psychological reactance’ that combined an externally oriented concern (diagnosis)

with an internally oriented response (prognosis). A clear majority of the respondents, 63.7% of farmers, used this attribution pattern (see Table 2).

Interestingly, the respondents in the 1996 sample readily attributed their *concerns* to *external* factors. The second biggest attribution pattern category (20.2%) consisted of a combination of an externally oriented concern and an externally oriented response – an approximation of what we refer to above as a ‘welfarist’ orientation (see Table 2). Only a small minority, 15% of the respondents, favored the ‘ideal typical’ neoliberal explanatory pattern (‘appeal of freedom’ orientation), consisting of a combination of internal concern and internally oriented response. Finally, the ‘learned helplessness’ orientation was barely discernible in the 1996 sample, with only two respondents expressing this pattern.

Taken together, in our 1996 sample, the respondents were *not* particularly inclined to express the ‘prototypical’ neoliberal responsabilization pattern (‘appeal of freedom’). That being said, the most popular ‘reactance’ attribution pattern – expressed by 63.7% of the respondents – is compatible with the logic of neoliberal responsabilization: by coupling an essentially external concern with *internal response*, it expresses respondents’ proneness to assume personal responsibility in order to cope with the perceived external concerns or threats. But still, despite this ‘neoliberal-friendly’ tendency, 20% of respondents resisted the neoliberal discourse with an attribution pattern that combined external concerns with external responses (i.e. ‘welfarist’ pattern). The findings demonstrated that variety existed in the farmers’ sensemaking patterns concerning the determinants of farming success and survival. Even if the patterns do not so much directly support (as ‘appeal of freedom’ orientation would) or challenge (as ‘welfarist’ orientation would) the neoliberal discourse and rationality, they can nevertheless be interpreted, in broad terms, as being consonant with the neoliberal rule, via the ‘reactance’ mechanism.

When we move to compare the 1996 sample with the sample from 2003, we find – somewhat surprisingly and contrary to our initial expectations – a striking consistency in the results. This similarity is demonstrated in Table 2, where the ‘reactance’ attribution pattern (combination of an external concern with an internal response) dominates the population in both time frames. The initial share of respondents in the ‘reactance’ category, 63.7% in 1996, remains almost identical in the 2003 sample, with 65.2% of the respondents continuing to favor the ‘reactance’ pattern. Likewise, the proportions of farmers who maintained an ‘appeal of freedom’ pattern (20% in 1996 and 19% in 2003), or a ‘welfarist’ pattern (exactly the same 15% in 1996 and in 2003), remained virtually constant over the two sampling times. Somewhat surprisingly, then, and against our

Table 2. Codified findings from the surveys: concerns and responses in 1996 and 2003.

Mechanism of responsibility-shift (in terms of the locus of attribution in concerns and responses)	Year	
	1996	2003
‘Reactance’	<i>N</i> = 123	<i>N</i> = 58
Locus: External–internal	63.7%	65.2%
‘Welfarist orientation’	<i>N</i> = 39	<i>N</i> = 17
Locus: External–external	20.2%	19.1%
‘Appeal of freedom’	<i>N</i> = 29	<i>N</i> = 13
Locus: Internal–internal	15.0%	14.6%
‘Learned helplessness’	<i>N</i> = 2	<i>N</i> = 1
Locus: Internal–external	1.0%	1.1%
Total	<i>N</i> = 193	<i>N</i> = 89
	100.0%	100.0%

initial expectations, there was no increase in the ‘appeal of freedom’ category from the 1996 sample. Finally, very few (only 1%) in both samples expressed the ‘learned helplessness’ pattern where internal concern is met with an externalized response.

As qualitative patterns, the findings cannot be taken to represent statistically generalizable trends in the farming population, but rather to indicate similarities and regularities as well as deviations and anomalies in the ways in which the farmers explained and made sense of their situations. As such, the results struck us as very curious. While they did not support our expectations of a shift toward *increasing* neoliberal responsabilization, in the form of increasingly internally oriented causal explanations in terms of both concern (diagnosis) *and* response (prognosis), they revealed a remarkable rigidity in the farmer population’s attribution patterns in the face of the intensification of the neoliberal discourse. The ‘appeal of freedom’ pattern did not penetrate the respondents’ sensemaking of events and did not increase at all over time; instead, the respondents diagnosed the causes of their farm’s survival (i.e. concerns) mostly as external. The ‘reactance’ mechanism, however, where external concern is met with an internal response, proved to be persistent and consistently favored by the respondents as the most common explanatory pattern. Indeed, even under increasing external uncertainty and competitive threats peaking in 2003, the respondents persistently favored the ‘reactance’ pattern and a striving to restore their threatened controllability over farming via personal efforts.

Taken together, the consistent domination of the ‘reactance’ pattern can be considered as consonant with the neoliberal rationality and rule by channeling, or transforming, the externally oriented concerns – such as general feelings of economic, social or personal insecurity and fear – into internally oriented, individualized reactions. The mechanism is not as direct as in the ‘appeal of freedom’ alternative, but it may be effective and persistent. As such, the ‘reactance’ alternative deserves more analytical attention as a mediating sensemaking mechanism that may well have a role to play in the operation of neoliberal ‘responsibility-shift’ and the persistent ‘sticking’ of the neoliberal rule more generally.

Discussion and conclusions

In this article we set out to explore the claims made within prominent sections of the governmentality literature that neoliberal discursive environments constitute an urging to individual agents toward assuming responsibility. According to the governmentality view, a process of responsabilization constitutes an essential building block of neoliberal, and more generally advanced liberal, rule. They operate allegedly by seeking to ‘translate’ objectives and problems of government into questions of autonomous self-governance of (quasi-) autonomous agents (see Rose 1992; 1996, 1999; Lemke 2001; 201–203; Miller and Rose 2008, 199–218). A ‘neo/advanced liberal mentality’ of government would thus operate through, and rely on, the ‘powers of freedom’, that is, the plethora of temptations and desires that autonomous self-steering and maximization of one’s potentials promise for the subjects of government. Consequently, the neoliberal responsibility-shift – and the process of responsabilization – would work so that individuals and actors assume responsibility in producing the ends of government ‘by fulfilling themselves’ (Rose, O’Malley, and Valverde 2006, 89).

However, when we zoomed in to examine the responsabilization of agents through the ‘appeal of freedom’ mechanism in more detail, we noticed that it leaves us with some

open questions. In particular, the open questions concern (a) the nature of the social psychological sensemaking process that ought to lead/persuade agents to assume responsibility and (b) not-so-appealing experiences where pursued freedoms remain unrealized and give way to uncertainty, fear or loss of controllability. In order to provide a satisfactory answer to both of these questions, the ‘appeal of freedom’ mechanism, as the sole explanation for the working of neoliberal responsabilization, would have to be supplemented with auxiliary assumptions, such as an assumption about an enigmatic ‘conversion’ of the subjects of neoliberal rule into more or less blindly responsibility-taking and/or utility maximizing agents (cf. Barnett et al. 2008). However, as governmentality scholars have warned, such an assumption would seem to be a step too far, assuming a totalizing discursive construction and determination of realities and identities. Hence, we set out to look for alternative answers to these questions with the help of social psychological theories about responsabilization by means of attributions of responsibility and control.

With the help of these insights derived from social psychological theories on control constructs and attributions, we elaborated on the discussions about neoliberal responsabilization as interpreted in the governmentality literature and sketched three alternative mechanisms for the working of neoliberal responsabilization: ‘appeal of freedom’, ‘psychological reactance’ and ‘learned helplessness’. In addition, we considered also a fourth, ‘anti-neoliberal’ attribution pattern (labeled suggestively as ‘welfarist orientation’), where responsibility would be attributed to external or structural factors. The first two mechanisms (‘appeal of freedom’ and ‘reactance’) were considered as mechanisms of responsabilization in the full sense of the term; ‘learned helplessness’, in turn, would typically imply rather a rupture or break with responsibility-taking – but might still indirectly contribute to support the neoliberal responsibility-shift, via excluding populations or rendering them passive or silent, for example.⁵ The ‘welfarist orientation’, instead, would imply a break with neoliberal mentality of government altogether.

We then demonstrated an empirical approach with which to study, and assess the plausibility of, these alternative mechanisms of responsibility-shift, utilizing open-ended survey questions concerning farming success and survival in Australia in 1996 and 2003 as our data. That farmers were increasingly exposed to responsabilizing discourses and also seemingly aligned themselves with them provides a useful context for our analysis. A governmentality perspective would surmise that this silent acceptance evidences the transformation of Australian farmers into responsibility-taking agents. Indeed, this is the dominant interpretation in the Australian rural sociological literature. We argued that if we do not see traces of such a shift in the responsibility attributions, then we ought to rethink – at least in the case of Australian farming – the mechanisms that underpin responsabilization and neoliberal rule.

What did we find? Contrary to our expectations, then, we found that the farmers did not really favor the ‘ideal-typical’ neoliberal pattern, that is, ‘appeal of freedom’ orientation, where apportioning of blame and credit are directed inwards (with regard to both concerns and responses for outcomes). Only less than one-fifth of respondents chose this pattern in 1996 and similarly again in 2003. Moreover, there was virtually no shift in the locus of responsibility between the years 1996 and 2003; in other words, the increased exposure to neoliberal discursive environment had virtually no impact on farmers’ attribution patterns. These findings highlighted the need to look for explanations

for the operation and ‘sticking’ of the neoliberal rule beyond the ideal-typical neoliberal responsabilization pattern, ‘appeal of freedom’.

The strongest candidate for a compensatory explanatory mechanism for the success of neoliberal rule and responsabilization in the farm context was the ‘reactance’ pattern, where causes of farming success were attributed to forces beyond self, but potentially effective responses to these concerns were nevertheless attributed to one’s self and own actions. In trying to make sense of the meaning and function of this reactance pattern for Australian farmers, we might reason, from the perspective of control theories, that assuming personal responsibility amidst a ‘neoliberal competitive squeeze’ may indeed serve the maintenance of a sense of personal control. Even if autonomy and controllability in one’s action situation would appear very limited in the face of the competitive squeeze, one could still persistently continue to use one’s actions as means to ‘fight back’ and to prevent losing even the last remains of one’s personal control over the situation. However, in the longer run such a situation becomes naturally more and more difficult to sustain and tolerate.⁶ Finally, and also somewhat surprisingly, still one-fifth of the respondents steadily displayed a ‘welfarist’, externally oriented apportioning of blame, despite the lack of public resistance to neoliberal discourses among the farming community broadly, lending thus further support to the interpretation that the stickiness of neoliberal rule may be best explained by a combination of more than just one mechanism of responsabilization.

As a whole, our results showed that even if farmers display responsibility-taking, they may still disagree with the premises of the neoliberal discourse. Indeed, such an ambiguous orientation toward the discourse is displayed in the ‘reactance’ pattern: on one hand, the farmers viewed their farming trajectories as largely controlled by external and structural forces, but were nevertheless willing to emphasize personal action as the adequate response to the situation, on the other.

Our findings have broader implications for theorizing around governmentality. Once we acknowledge that responsabilization may work both through ‘appeal of freedom’ and through imposing ‘threats to personal control’, it seems even more unnecessary to resort to assumptions about neoliberal governance as effecting profound transformations or ‘conversions’ at the level of mentalities or ‘selfdoms’ of its subjects. The appeal of freedom orientation may well be at work, but it is likely to be only one side of the ‘neoliberal responsabilization’ coin. Another side would tap the psychological locus of control and responsibility under uncertainty: it may sometimes be enough to evoke experiences related to uncertainty, threat or fear – and harness them for the purposes of governance. And this being so, because somewhat unexpectedly, we find that the raw material for neoliberal rule – susceptibility to responsibility taking – may be already more or less ‘there’, as a part of the general tendency of modern Occidental culture and its actors to both value personal controllability and stimulate insecurity and fear (see Foucault 2008; Boulting 2011; Lemke, Larsen, and Hvidbak 2011).

We might push this basic hunch a step further by supposing that this background predisposition to pursue control may manifest itself through alternative mechanisms, depending on the characteristics of particular ‘advanced liberal’ discursive environments and the cultural orientations characteristic of their target populations. Urban and rural communities might manifest somewhat different dynamics, for example, as might communities with more individualistically and collectivistically oriented cultures. In the case

of our sample, the neoliberal farming context in Australia, it is no wonder that a ‘reactance’ orientation is emphasized, given the plethora of studies citing farming ideology and culture as relatively individualistic and as favoring self-reliant, autonomous and achievement orientations (see Beus and Dunlap 1994; Halpin and Martin 1996; Dudley 2003). Such speculation could form an important area of empirical investigation fruitfully connected to and deepening the insights of governmentality studies.

The work presented here suggests the governmentality literature might benefit from studying how agents actively ‘work with’ the discourses and the personal, social and discursive resources available to them, in order to arrive at interpretations that allow them to validly make sense of their environment and at the same time preserve a sense of personal control over their situation (cf. Barnett et al. 2008; Pyysiäinen and Vesala 2013). In so doing, we acknowledge that there is some ambiguity as to whether such an approach is in keeping with the premise of the theoretical framework itself. In their review article, Rose, O’Malley, and Valverde (2006) suggest that governmentality is not a theory; ‘Rather, it asks particular questions of the phenomena that it seeks to understand, questions amenable to precise answers through empirical inquiry’ (2006, 85). Elsewhere the authors say that there is ‘limited truth’ to the idea that the approach is about

the sociological study of how programs are actually implemented, or the proportions and numbers of subjects who adopt or refuse governmental problematics and agendas (...) Governmental analysis does not aspire to be such a sociology. But there is no reason why it could not be articulated with such work. (2006, 100)

Even though there is a seeming ambiguity about whether it is, or is not, reasonable to ask how this form of neoliberal governmentality works and resonates with the sensemaking of its subjects, we take these comments to provide luke-warm endorsement sufficient for our empirically oriented approach – and hope to propel the debate forward.

Notes

1. In this regard our approach has some similarities with other work in the field that emphasizes how liberal mentalities of government also variably rely on authoritarian/coercive practices and experiences of ‘unfreedom’ (e.g. Hindess 2001; Dean 2002).
2. As noted, we are not alone in pondering how (neo)liberal governmentality also presupposes and makes use of the flip sides of freedom, control and security (see, e.g. Hindess 2001; Dean 2002; Lemke, Larsen, and Hvidbak 2011).
3. The operationalized versions of the ‘responsibility-shift mechanisms’ (Table 1) serve here as analytical tools with which to categorize the open-ended survey responses reported by farmers, according to the principles of qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff 2004; Hsieh and Shannon 2005). The operationalizations are thus not designed as exhaustive conceptual definitions of the phenomena of ‘appeal of freedom’, ‘learned helplessness’, ‘reactance’ or ‘welfarist orientation’, but as their empirically applicable approximations. The phenomenon of ‘welfarist orientation’, for example, should be taken here rather as a roughly suggestive attribution alternative that represents an antithesis to the neoliberal responsibilization logic. None of the four orientation alternatives can be simply reduced to distinctions made along the attributional locus dimension (internal vs. external) only.
4. The relatively low number of respondents in both samples may be related to a number of issues that characterize the respondent population and their cultural context, including the preference of productive efforts over ‘paper work’ and increased stress and work load at the time of the surveys. Furthermore, the decreased response rate in the second round is

also to be expected given that the researchers had a lower profile in the area at the second time period.

5. All three mechanisms nevertheless elaborate on the dynamics and workings of advanced liberal rule upon its subjects and, as such, can be considered as elaborating on, and falling under the analytics of, the operation of 'biopower' (cf. Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 126–142; Rabinow and Rose 2006).
6. Even if the situation of (many of) the farmers might be described as a forced choice amidst the competitive squeeze, the way the farmers attribute reasons for their continuation or, say, quitting of farming, can make a real difference, both for the individual and for the system; for instance, depending on the making of causal attributions, *both* continuing *and* quitting farming could be variably associated with crediting or discrediting the system and/or the 'self' (see, e.g. Laitalainen, Silvasti, and Vesala 2008).

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