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'We are not afraid to die': gender dynamics of agrarian change in Ratanakiri province, Cambodia

Clara Mi Young Park and Margherita Maffii

Dramatic changes have subverted the socially, culturally and resource-rich systems of indigenous communities living in Ratanakiri province. These changes include the incursion of market-based economy and commodification of land, the alienation of land and natural resources by way of economic land concessions (ELCs) and the inflow of large number of migrants from other regions and countries. Their cumulative impact has affected indigenous communities' agrarian practices, their livelihoods and their system of beliefs and way of life, with important repercussions on social differentiation and gender relations. Based on fieldwork carried out in Ratanakiri province, this contribution analyses how emerging capitalist relations are shaping shifting gender relations and creating hierarchies of power that risk marginalising indigenous women and girls and eroding spaces of recognition, autonomy and agency they once had.

Keywords: Indigenous peoples; gender; generation; agrarian change; land; labour; Cambodia

1. Introduction

Numerous cases of dispossession, forced evictions, and escalating conflicts and protests have been documented in Cambodia in recent years, making the country known as one of the 'hot spots' for land grabbing in Southeast Asia. Land grabs have been largely associated with the expansion of illegal logging and economic land concessions (ELCs), an instrument under the 2001 Land Law that allows investors to acquire state land for economic development. This process is anchored to a significant redistribution of the rural population from the more densely inhabited central plains towards the uplands where most of the ELCs are concentrated (Diepart 2016). Ratanakiri is one of the provinces of Cambodia situated in the northeastern uplands, inhabited until a few decades ago mainly by indigenous people; the expansion of ELCs granted for logging, rubber plantations and mining activities has severely affected their access to land and natural resources (CCHR 2016). Capital penetration in indigenous communities in Ratanakiri is not a new or recent phenomenon, but has been ongoing for decades in a nonlinear progression of processes of commodification of land and market integration, accelerated by the expansion of commercial monocrop plantations and recent initiatives to promote individual ownership of land (Gironde and Peeters 2015).

As seen in this collection and other research, the impacts of land grabs are felt differently by social groups differentiated along lines of class, gender, generation, ethnicity and nationality (Hall et al. 2015). These intersecting social differences determine roles,

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opportunities and rights that different women and men have and hence the way in which the restructuring of rural economies and changes in social relations of production and reproduction affects them (Behrman et al. 2012; Daley and Park 2012; Julia and White 2012; Doss et al. 2014; Daley and Pallas 2014; White et al. 2015). Similarly, research conducted among indigenous peoples in Malaysia, India, Thailand, China and Indonesia (Kelkar and Nathan 2001; Li 2010) has shown that changes in land tenure systems and commodification of the commons impact deeply on women's status, role, workload and agency. However, to date, little research attention has focused on the gender dimensions of capitalist expansion and land grabs in indigenous communities in Cambodia.

This paper contributes to filling this gap with insights from fieldwork carried out among Tampouen, Kreung, Brao, Kavet, Jarai and Kachak groups in Ratanakiri province between 2006 and 2015. We argue that the penetration of capital in indigenous communities in Ratanakiri, coupled with state initiatives to simplify existing tenure systems (Scott 1998, 2012), not only disadvantage women and girls, but also erode spaces of recognition, autonomy and agency they once had. Women's status and roles in the indigenous communities we visited have specificities that can determine equally specific gendered outcomes and are thus worth investigating to get a more nuanced understanding of the ongoing agrarian transformations. In fact, while our findings are spatially confined and cannot be generalised, they do suggest that the gendered implications of the ongoing changes in indigenous societies need to be analysed in the context of broader resource politics (Li 2000) and 'regimes of dispossession' (Levien 2013), where capital needs the lands and resources but not the people on it (Li 2011).

We adopt a feminist agrarian political economy framework that investigates how gender, social relations and dynamics of production and reproduction, property and power in agrarian formations and their processes of change are mutually constituted, guided by the basic questions of agrarian political economy (Bernstein 2010, 22) applied from an intersectionality perspective. Intersectionality recognises that social identities are mutually constituted. As such, gender must be understood in the context of the power relations embedded in such social identities (Collins 2000). As amply shown by feminist political economy and ecology scholarship, gender relations affect and are affected by division of labour and resources (Agarwal 1995, 1997; Deere 1995; Rocheleau et al. 1996; Deere and Doss 2006; Rocheleau 2008; Razavi 2009) and shape livelihood and reproduction strategies and thus processes of diversification within and out of agrarian economies (Razavi 2009).

While access to and ownership of land is a central aspect of the theoretical debate surrounding gender inequalities in rural societies (Agarwal 1995, 1997; Razavi 2007) as well as of the literature on land grabs, in our case it has less pertinence, as will be explained later. Therefore, our analysis focuses strongly on division of labour, voice and participation as well as cultural norms and behaviours shaping gender relations.

Although we do not engage with the academic debate on indigeneity, we argue that in the context of ongoing agrarian transformations a discursive gendered reconfiguration of indigeneity may be taking place, with women being re-constructed as embodying all the negative connotations commonly associated with it. Our findings indicate that women are losing not only the material and symbolic places of recognition they had but also their identity as farmers and agriculturalists, while being re-framed essentially as care providers according to mainstream gender norms. The reconfiguration of roles is largely discursive but has tangible effects. Women continue to be active in the productive realm, but their work is reclassified as housework and devalued, and their public role is obstructed by the new gender constructions. This process is fully integrated within and shaped by the ongoing agrarian changes and is the primary focus of this contribution.

Following a brief description of research methods, the next section of the paper provides information on Ratanakiri indigenous groups, their agrarian system and practices and gender roles therein, and the legal and policy framework shaping their access to land and resources. It then focuses on the changes that have occurred in recent years, including those engendered by the recent land rush and followed by the expansion of ELCs, and accelerated by land reforms and programmes that have promoted the individualisation of tenure. The third part looks at the implications of these changes for gender roles and relations, giving voice to some of the women we met to illustrate the impact of and reaction to the changes from their perspective. The third and final part of the paper draws some preliminary conclusions and highlights areas where more research might be needed.

2. Research methods and limitations

This contribution is based on both available literature and documents and primary qualitative data collected through fieldwork. The fieldwork was conducted in Andong Meas, Oyadaw, O'Chum, Borkeo and Veunsay districts[1] in Ratanakiri between 2006 and 2016 in the context of different projects involving research, consultations and activities with indigenous women. All such activities were meant to collect information about changes in gender roles and relations, while research from 2014 onwards had a specific focus on the expansion of ELCs and the impact of land initiatives such as Order 01 (discussed further below).

The field methods included in-depth, non-structured dialogues and group discussions with women and men from the above communities as well as interviews with other key stakeholders, including local authorities and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Our analysis, therefore, is based on research carried out in different communities and ethnic groups, rather than a more thorough ethnographic study of a single community. While this means some sacrifice of depth and detail, the intention is to capture a transformation that has impacted the whole province and is not limited to a specific ethnic group or geographical location. The methods used have allowed the collection of experiences, stories, feelings and concerns on a wide range of issues in a number of communities over time.

3. Background to the land rush and agrarian change in Ratanakiri

3.1. *The indigenous groups in Ratakaniri*

Ratanakiri, Cambodia's most northeastern province, bordering Vietnam and Lao PDR, is home to the majority of the country's indigenous groups, together with the provinces of Mondulkiri, Kratie and Strung Treng, and is the most ethnically diverse among those provinces (Vize and Hornung 2013).[2] Far from being cut off and isolated from the lowland society, these groups have maintained exchanges and relations with the Khmer majority, even if often asymmetric ones, and have been heavily affected by the war and the Khmer Rouge regime, suffering extrajudicial killing, mass displacement, banning of religious beliefs and rites, forced labour and dismissal of traditional agricultural practices (Biernan 1996). After the fall of the Khmer Rouge, the lack of viable communication axes granted indigenous people a decade of relative isolation and peace from modern state-making projects (Scott 2009).

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[1] The principal sites include 15 villages in Banlung, Andong Meas, Oyadaw, O'chum, Borkeo and Veunsay districts. The names of the villages have been omitted to protect the identity of the women and men we interviewed and consulted.

[2] In the country there are 23 indigenous groups, comprising about 1.34 percent of the national population (Indigenous People NGO Network 2010).

3.2. *The indigenous agrarian system, gender roles and relations*

The people living in Ratanakiri have practiced swidden agriculture, also known as shifting cultivation, 'as far as their memory can go back in time' (Bourdier 2014, 9; AIPP 2015). Shifting cultivation is an adapted form of forest land use, which translates into optimal returns in terms of labour and yields (Dove 1983) and is embedded in a system of beliefs and cosmology from which dwellers derive their social and cultural norms and which leads their interactions with the environment (Bourdier 1995). It has been one of the most misunderstood forms of land use among policymakers and development practitioners, charged with negative prejudices which have contributed to labelling those practicing it as backward destroyers of natural resources and forests (Erni 2015, 8).[3]

The system practiced by Ratanakiri indigenous communities is labour constrained but not resource constrained.[4] It relies on cooperation and labour exchange and is characterised by a significant complementarity of women's and men's roles, and low hierarchical gender and social constructions (Matras-Troubetzkoy 1983; Ironside 1999; Baird 2000; Bourdier 2009).

Cultivable land, consisting in secondary forest which undergoes cycles of cultivation and fallow, is available to families or groups of families who are free to farm as much land as they are able to according to the availability of labour in their households (Backstrom et al. 2007; Ironside and Backstrom 2007). Farmers acquire a non-permanent use right over cleared land, generally for two or three to five years (Ironside and Backstrom 2007). If permanent trees are planted on the farm, possession rights are generally longer; otherwise, the land returns to communal land status as soon as it is left fallow. In all ethnic groups, nobody is allowed to sell land or give away communal land.

Shifting farms are planted with upland rainfed rice varieties and vegetables, and fields are left fallow after a number of years, which varies according to ecology and soil quality (Matras-Troubetzkoy 1983). Food and materials for everyday life and exchanges with the lowland are gathered from the forests. Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are particularly important during the dry season, which lasts six or seven months. Hunting and fishing provide access to the main sources of proteins (Matras-Troubetzkoy 1983; Baird 2000), while domestic animals – chickens, pigs and buffaloes – are kept for ritual ceremonies and as an important resource that can be sold if needed (Matras-Troubetzkoy 1983). Cooperation and labour exchanges, regulated by a complex system of customary norms, allow farmers to tackle the most demanding tasks such as clearing, burning and sowing new land plots. This ensures that even households with limited labour can complete their cultivation cycle (Matras-Troubetzkoy 1983). The system results in a low degree of social differentiation and a social entity – the community – which is self-governing and where every family has access to the key resources needed for their livelihood.

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[3] This prejudice is still alive and constitutes the main justification for intergovernmental plans aimed at 'modernising' the areas inhabited by indigenous peoples in a triangle comprising South Laos, Northern Cambodia and Central Vietnam (Ironside 2015).

[4] In this section and the following one we use 'ethnographic present' to describe activities, practices and relationships that, at least in some communities, have now been replaced and/or dismantled.

Some indigenous groups also grow paddy rice, a practice introduced by Lao settlers in Veunsay district 300 years ago (Bourdier 2009) and enforced as a key instrument of incorporation by different regimes as well as more recently by some development programmes (Ironside and Baird 2003).

In the rest of this section we describe the gender dimensions of indigenous agriculture and the communities practicing it. While continuing to rely mainly on the available literature, we include a few observations from our own field research.

As seen in the literature and confirmed by our fieldwork, within the agrarian system described above the division of labour between women and men generally shows a high degree of complementarity. Women's tasks tend to be considered less intense and not dangerous, and are carried out during daytime while caring for or carrying infants and children (also see Van Den Berg 1998). The selection of new plots, cutting trees and fencing the farms are generally masculine tasks, as are hunting and gathering materials for house or tool construction in the deep forest. Women are responsible for organising the cultivation of different crops, tending them once the sowing is done, harvesting the vegetables and gathering forest products not far from farms or villages (Matras-Troubetzkoy 1983) – all work that women tend to perform in groups. Women are also forest product gatherers, but their range of action tends to be confined to secondary forest not too far from the village, while men's includes the dense forest for hunting or gathering heavy materials. Such divisions are not strict, however, and women and men cooperate in many tasks, with sowing or rice harvesting involving all the available household labour and activities such as fishing expeditions engaging large groups of women, men and children.

> We are very happy when we go into the deep forest: women with the kapha, men with the long knife, the dogs, the children … I also like to go collecting vegetables in the small forest because is a quiet place, is cold and beautiful, and cuts down stress. We go together with friends, we gather the products and when we have collected enough we relax and chat, then we go back to the village and cook, sometime also eat together. (Kreung woman testimony, O'chum, 2014)

Women have great autonomy as farm organisers and plant selectors. As an informant said, 'rice seeds are a job for women' and decisions about planting land with different rice varieties are based on knowledge that rests with women and is transmitted from one generation to the other: 'the old women tell the young what to do'.[5] Women are also in charge of water and firewood provisioning, food preparation and transformation of produce for consumption or storage, including rice wine which is an essential component of ceremonial life. Care of children, the elderly and the infirm are also predominantly women's tasks, although until recently it was not unusual to see indigenous men carrying babies while women were busy preparing the family meal (Maffii 2009).

Women may take part in petty trading out of the village, selling surplus vegetables in provincial or district town markets if not too far, and maintain control over the cash income, which is usually spent on food supplements or clothes and school materials for children. They retain ownership and control over household assets and goods, which are transmitted through the female line, with the youngest daughter generally inheriting the parents' house (Ironside and Backstrom 2007). Some ethnic groups (Jarai and Tampouan) are organised into matrilineal clans and are essentially matrilocal; others (Kreung) are bilateral and practice a system where the newlywed alternately stays with both families for a number of years before settling in their own house, usually located near the wife's family hamlet.

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[5] Elder Kreung woman, O'chum district, 2006.

The community social space is not segregated by sex, and men and women of all ages share the same spaces. Solidarity and equality among kinship groups within the village are at the core of social interactions and village structure, which is circular with all houses facing each other and the meeting house at the centre (Matras-Guin 1992). Differently from women in lowland Cambodia, where patriarchal values infuse moral codes that determine relations between sexes and women's behaviour and roles (Jacobsen 2008), indigenous women's and girls' behaviour and reproductive life are not subject to particular restrictions (Maffii 2009). Girls and boys are encouraged to socialise before marriage (Matras-Troubetzkoy 1983)[6] even if precautions must be taken to avoid pregnancies before marriage. Marriages are not arranged, and cannot occur without girls' consent. Divorces can be initiated by either spouse, and compensation is generally required by customary law and is equal for men and women (Ironside and Backstrom 2007). In matrilinear groups, women retain custody of children and ownership of the house. In contrast, spousal abandonment, taking a second wife or other forms of marital disengagement entail heavy sanctions, as do rape and sexual assault – which, however, are very uncommon.

With regards to women's participation in community governing bodies, our fieldwork indicates that each community organises these differently. Male elders tend to be more involved in issues concerning community governance, such as boundaries, new farms' location or disputes with neighbours, while female elders exert more of a religious role as shamans, mediums or traditional midwives (Maffii 2010a). However, women are not excluded from decision-making and are consulted on issues concerning the communities: 'How they [men] decide without consulting us? We are the one implementing their decision, if we don't agree nothing is done'.[7] As for other aspects, wide variability exists among communities in the ways women are included in or excluded from decision-making processes.

Overall, the role and status of women as well as gender relations seem to follow patterns and criteria that are different from those predominant in lowland Cambodian communities. Women's triple role as farmers, gatherers and care providers makes their workload heavy and days busy. At the same time, however, women are largely autonomous and retain decision-making power over these activities and their outcomes as well as control over important assets. In addition, they are not excluded from decision-making and maintain important cultural roles. A gender hierarchy or norms that sanction women's inferiority do not seem to emerge from the spiritual, symbolic and religious realm (White 1996). Social relations within households and communities are characterised more by equality and common interest than hierarchy and power (Bourdier 2009). This is in strong contrast with the patriarchal dominance and the vertical power structure of Cambodia's central state, where gender norms and values shape gender relations and define women and men's spaces, social interactions and roles (Öjendal and Sedara 2006).

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[6] This is a common trait of indigenous ethnic groups in Cambodia and in the whole region (Andaya 2006).

[7] Workshop with Jarai and Tampouan women, Leu Khon village, Borkeo district, 2010.

Summarising, we may conclude that indigenous communities are not idyllic places but perhaps loci of lesser or less-structured oppression and discrimination compared to lowland societies. For the same reason, they also represent a fragile context where material and symbolic changes that affect traditional practices and beliefs and accelerate social differentiation can have a significant impact on women's status, and hence have the potential to reshape gender relations substantially. This we explore in the next part of the paper, after briefly considering questions of legal recognition of indigenous groups and the broad contours of the land rush affecting them.

3.3. *The legal recognition of Cambodian indigenous groups*

With the Land Law of 2001 and the Forestry Law of 2002, Cambodia was the first country in mainland Southeast Asia to 'provide those defined as "Indigenous" with extraordinary land rights' (Baird 2013, 269). The Land Law recognises communities' right to manage and use the land according to their customs (Article 23) and ratifies their right to collective ownership (Article 26). The communal land title encompasses 'not only lands actually cultivated but also includes [land] reserved necessary for the shifting of cultivation which is required by the agricultural methods they currently practice and which are recognized by the administrative authorities' (Article 25, Land Law). However, communities cannot dispose of the land held communally to any person or group (Article 26, Land Law). The law further states that no authority outside the community may acquire rights to immovable properties belonging to indigenous communities (Article 29, Land Law). De facto, the law forbids sales or appropriation of indigenous communities' land, although these have continued unabated (NGO Forum of Cambodia 2007).

The long delay in the promulgation of the bylaws which operationalised the provisions of the Land Law, and the complex bureaucratic procedures established by those bylaws (Milne 2013; CCHR 2016), also contributed to delaying access to communal land titling for indigenous communities, making them vulnerable to land dispossession and enclosures. As a result, at the end of 2015, only 11 communities had been able to obtain the communal title, out of 166 that had applied (CCHR 2016). Additionally, interim protective measures for applicant communities were approved in 2011 but not enforced (Vize and Hornung 2013).

3.4. *Land rush, land reform and agrarian transformations in Ratanakiri*

As noted in the introduction, capitalist expansion in Ratanakiri is not only associated with the more recent mushrooming of ELCs but goes back to the mid-1990s when the transition to an open market economy and the improvement in infrastructure opened the land frontier in the province, making it more accessible to agricultural investments, rubber in particular (Vize and Hornung 2013). Land markets and speculation flourished, bringing in companies, land investors, middlemen and cash crop planters (Maffii 2009), as well as labourers from other provinces (NIS 2008).[8]

Forced by increasing land scarcity and destruction of natural resources, many communities started shifting partially or entirely from swidden agriculture to permanent commercial crops (Maffii 2009). A process of transformation of traditional systems of farming and labour exchange among families was put in motion, accelerating the monetarisation of the village economy as well as its social stratification. These changes have also impacted people's interactions with the environment, and the social, cultural and ritual aspects of their lives (Bourdier 2014; AIPP 2015). Uncertainty about land tenure security, the constant threat of land grabbing and the pressure exerted by land brokers have also pushed many families into selling their land – a phenomenon that has been more significant and visible in the areas near the provincial towns and along the main roads (Fox et al. 2009).

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[8] The population went from fewer than 100,000 people in 1998 to 150,466 in 2008, though the overall population density is still relatively low at 14 people per km^2 (NIS 2008).

The province has also become one of the preferred sites for ELCs for rubber. As of 2012, the number of ELCs in the province had grown to 22, with rubber as the main or sole investment crop in 18 of these (Human Rights Council 2012). The concessions have been awarded in areas where people had legitimate tenure rights or where the process for acquiring the communal land title had started or was nearly completed (Dwyer 2015), putting strains on swidden agriculture by reducing the land available for rotation and access to forests. The landscape has also changed radically, with commercial crops and monoculture plantations run by large agribusinesses replacing vast tracts of forests. This has affected communities in different ways and increased women's workload as gatherers, as we will see later.

In response to rising criticism from civil society and the international community, in May 2012 the government declared a moratorium on ELCs and a review of existing concessions, and in July 2012 issued Order 01 on the Measures Reinforcing and Increasing the Efficiency of the Management of Economic Land Concessions (Milne 2013; Rabe 2014; LICADHO 2014). The Order, defined as 'Cambodia's most recent and most ambitious land titling project' (Work and Beban 2016, 38), aimed at recognising and titling state land occupied by families in insecure forest and ELC areas (Work and Beban 2016, 53), while ensuring respect of land belonging to 'indigenous minorities and citizens' way of life' (Directive 01BB in Rabe 2014). Under the order a fast-tracked titling campaign was launched which, though in line with previous efforts of land registration, was sharply different in speed and scope, and mandated titles to be issued free of charge (Work and Beban, 53).

In practice, however, in the indigenous areas the programme avoided places where conflicts were ongoing and where ELCs had been granted on previously occupied land. Therefore, people whose land was in ELC cultivated areas could not regain access to their lands through the campaign (Work and Beban 2016). Through Instruction 020, all of the ongoing communal land titling processes were suspended, and the titling of communities' forest areas used for NTFP collection or sacred sites was denied, contravening pre-existing laws (Rabe 2014). Furthermore, by making individual and communal titles mutually exclusive, not only did the Order deprive communities of their legal right to communal titling, accelerating de facto commodification of land, it also legally re-produced as 'unoccupied' all state land which was in use at the time of the titling (Milne 2013, 327). People were pushed into accepting individual titles without proper information and without much time for consultation or consideration.

In the next section, we analyse changes in gender roles and divisions of labour over time, and particularly at two critical junctures: the opening up of the land frontier and initial introduction of cash crops, which created extra work for women while lightening men's traditional tasks of forest-clearing and hunting; and the expansion of ELCs, commodification of land and establishment of commercial farming, which triggered men's increased involvement in farming.

4. Gender implications of agrarian transformations

4.1. *Changes in gender roles, division of labour and women's status*

> All work is done by women, and men go around. We have much more work than before, and no help from men! What men do? They drink! Modernity has changed men's work, they do not have to produce tools, or repair the house like before, they have less work to do, they do not go into the forest very much; they do not hunt, cut wood or bamboo like before. (Jarai women's group, Gong Thom village, Oyadaw District, 2008)

> Before we had solidarity, while now everything is based on money, people care only about close relatives. Before people came back from the forest and used to eat the prey all together, now they just cut a little piece and run to sell the rest in town. (Tampouan women's group, Chan village, O'chum district, 2006)

The quotations above encapsulate women's understandings of the changes in gender divisions of work, and the social impacts of commodification, which puts women's work, especially unpaid (non-commodified) work, at the basis of processes of capital accumulation (Razavi 2009, 2011).

While sales of some produce such as vegetables occurred even before, the cultivation of cash crops such as cashew nuts, cassava, soy beans and peanuts on permanent land parcels and exclusively for sale, has been a more recent development. The transition to cash crops started with the introduction of cashew nuts, which combine the benefit of cash income with protection from land grabs, as trees indicate that land left fallow between cycles of shifting cultivation is not *terra nullius* but belongs to a community or a household. However, cashew nut trees have created additional work for women:

> It is very hard work with two farms because we have to take care of both. We come back so late that sometime it is already dark. Farms are farther now, because there is no land available near the village. In cashew nut farms it is possible to plant other vegetables when trees are young, but we must control weeds and grass, and is very hard. When the trees grow and we start to collect the nuts, we need to clean the grass before the harvest, get rid of leaves and branches in the dry season to avoid fires, and of course harvest the nuts. Before some work was men's work, but now women do everything. (Jarai women's group, Ten Thom village, Oyadaw District, 2006)

The nature of work has also changed. Many activities must be performed under strict time constrictions and are devoid of social value due to lack of interactions. For instance, women complained about the dismissal of traditional activities such as weaving, which is made impossible by lack of time.

> Before it was more fun. We had time to rest during the dry season, and time to spin cotton and weave. And sometime women went to the forest with the men for many days, to choose the new fields. We like the old [home-woven] clothes more, but we cannot afford them anymore, we do not have time for this work. (Kreung women's group, Cha Oun village, O'Chum district, 2008)

In a similar but reversed way, men's traditional tasks have decreased significantly. Men's expertise in forestry is less needed in a system that relies more on permanent crops and where there is little land available for shifting cultivation. Hunting is limited by conservation policies or impaired by forest destruction, and the tools traditionally crafted by men have been replaced by ready-made industrial ones. Bamboo houses have been supplanted by more durable wood ones, reducing work and time required for maintenance.

This material and symbolic estrangement from traditional life has been aggravated by increased contacts with migrant settlers and by the structuring of a new economic, social, political and cultural environment embedded with strong patriarchal values (CARE 2013). For some indigenous men, though not the majority, this has created opportunities for integration in mainstream society through employment in the armed forces and police, and positions with civil-society organisations and local governance structures. Their attendance at sex-segregated leisure spaces such as beer parlours and brothels underwrites this process of integration. Meanwhile, women find themselves confined in their villages, limited in the exchanges as well as opportunities to learn the Khmer language by their time scarcity. Furthermore, when women attend urban markets, they face marginalisation and abuse of power by non-indigenous vendors. Cases of sexual assault have been frequent, especially in communities near plantations employing prevalently male workers, limiting women's mobility.

From 2012 onwards, with increasing numbers of ELCs, the arrival of non-indigenous plantation workers (Diepart 2016) and Khmer settlers seeking access to land for the production of cash crops (Maffii 2015), another wave of changes has affected indigenous communities and agrarian systems of production and reproduction. New permanent cash crops, such as cassava, which are labour intensive and require investments, have replaced in part upland farming (see also Ironside 2015). Commercial crops provide a renewable source of cash and are seen as an important way to catch up with societal and economic changes, as reflected in the changing attitude towards money and material assets.

> Before it was easy to cheat us, we didn't know the value of land; but now we have learned, we have more knowledge and more understanding, and we know better how to handle money. We are a little bit richer now, we can grow cash crops, we have machines to hull rice and prepare the fields, we still grow rice, but we plant also cassava, cashew, and soya beans. Before it was only rice. We use money to repair or build houses, to buy machines for farming or motorbikes. (Jarai women's group, Padal village, Oyadaw district, 2014)

Contrary to what happened when cashew nut trees were introduced, men have begun to participate more in agricultural work. This may be the result of a lack of other jobs, except for wage work on plantations, which is generally despised, and the income generated through cash crops which makes agricultural work more attractive than other temporary jobs. Furthermore, the new cash crops require machines, which facilitate work and provide prestige through their ownership. Men's mobility and fluency in Khmer also gives them a comparative advantage over women in marketing.

The expansion of ELCs has also put the indigenous agrarian system under stress in many different ways, much beyond the loss of farmland. For instance, community members in one village in Andong Meas lamented the lack of land for food 'exploration' – wild vegetables and fruits, hunting and fishing – declining access to water supplies, and the loss of spiritual forests for sacred rituals and graveyards. This is why the community rejected attempts made by the nearby company to negotiate a monetary compensation. In addition, they felt it would be impossible to capture the long-term benefits of farming for their generation and the next ones.[9] Women in particular were adamant in opposing any sort of dialogue with the company and complained about the lack of support from the state: 'It is not fair. The provincial governor said that cutting down trees is illegal, but the government even allows the companies to legally clear the whole forest, while it is illegal for us to cut down a few trees and access the forest for food for our daily lives … The companies also created a border between our farms and the plantation. Because we are illiterate, we feel inferior to the companies'.[10]

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[9] Mixed group discussion, Andong Meas village, 17 March 2014.

With increasing land scarcity, farms are often farther away from the villages, forcing women to walk hours before reaching their fields. Shifting cultivation cycles have also changed. Fallow intervals are reduced and farms tend to become permanent, with important consequences in terms of women's labour and time spent in weeding. Firewood and wild vegetables are more difficult to find and fish availability has decreased significantly, reducing access to a key source of proteins.

> No more forest is left near the village. … We cannot find the vegetables that we used to collect before in the months when the fields are not productive … We do not have wood for building and repairing the houses. We do not have wood to make fire. We have to walk kilometers before collecting enough wood for cooking; it is very tiresome. We do not find medicinal plants … We do not have wild animals to hunt anymore, and there are fewer fishes in the river. So life is becoming more difficult. And the company just cut the trees down and went away. (Kreung women's group, Ka Cheun village, Veunsay district, 2008, first cited in full in Maffii 2010a)

As a result of these changes, many families have turned from food self-sufficiency to purchasing, exacerbating the need for cash income. Thus, many women have started working as casual agricultural labourers for other indigenous people or new Khmer settlers. The resulting 'distress character of women's labour market engagement' (Razavi 2011, 56) translates into low wages and poor labour conditions which, coupled with the burden of reproductive work, do not have any net positive welfare effects on women (Elson 1999).

4.2. *Commodification and social differentiation*

> With cash crops solidarity is different; we still care about funerals, or other ceremonies, but in case of farming there is less solidarity. For example, if somebody comes to work with a machine we can pay, or exchange labour, but in that case two persons must work back for him. The poor are poor because they are following the old crop system or they have little land for new crops. (Tampouan women's group, Laeun Kren village, O'chum district, 2014)

> Here some people have most of the land, they are not outsiders, they are rich, have big houses, they become rich with cashew nuts, and can recruit people to work for them. And now they grow cassava and beans, and also rent their land to Khmer people. What makes me angry is that people talk about solidarity and equality in the community, but the rich do not share. I can only cultivate a small piece, not good quality, a lot of grass and a lot of work, and it is not enough, not even to buy food. Poor families sell labour, there is nothing else to do. The life of richer women is better now, they have machines, motorbikes, and lend money, but for us it is still difficult. We said to rich people that they should share because we cannot go as fast as them. (Kreung women's group, O'chum district, 2014)

The quotes above reflect different women's lived experiences of social differentiation at opposite ends of the spectrum. Some women (and their households) have benefitted from integration in the cash economy, while others have fallen deeper into poverty and have to work as casual labourers.

Social differentiation can be better understood in the context of the indigenous traditional agrarian system described earlier, where land use was mainly restricted by the availability of manpower. The monetarisation of the village economy and the introduction of cash crops have facilitated access to the labour market allowing some people to increase farm size beyond the labour available in the household, thus accelerating land accumulation. The system of labour exchange, where still in place, now tends to focus only on restricted family groups and no longer ensures equitable and widespread access to resources, social cohesion and solidarity among all community members. Those families that were in a prior condition of weakness, especially the ones headed by widows, are more likely to fall into poverty without access to such solidarity mechanisms.

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[10] Women's group discussion, Andong Meas district, 18 March 2014.

Another crucial mechanism for social and economic differentiation is access to and integration within networks of power and influence such as the local state administration, civil service or NGOs. This particular mechanism operates on differentiation more clearly at the individual rather than the household level, and produces effects that are the result of compounded social differences of gender and ethnicity. Men have better access than women to wage employment and decision-making positions, including in land markets. In contrast, women are disadvantaged by widespread discrimination, limited knowledge of Khmer, and the recruitment criteria adopted by NGOs which tend to favour the few educated women or those who have enough free time to participate in meetings and trainings.

Differentiation also follows other lines, namely access to land understood as the ‘ability to benefit’ from land (Ribot and Peluso 2003). The communities that have managed to secure their land and resources, engaging sooner in the communal land titling process, are now in a better position, having land available for cashew nuts, upland rice and other cash crops, and even surplus land to lease out. While socio-economic differences are also evident within these communities, the number of families considered poor, or lacking land and relying only on paid labour for their livelihood, is minimal. For example, in L’eun Chon, the community representative indicated only three or four of over 60 households are poor or landless.[11] Conversely, in villages where land sales and the implementation of Order 01 have impaired communal land titling, the compounded effects of individualisation of tenure and expansion of mono-crop plantations are much more evident. In Andong Meas and Lumphat districts, where the villages are surrounded by ELCs, people’s farmland has shrunk and so has their access to forests and pasture. Some families have sold their lands after having received individual titles under Order 01 (see also Milne 2013; Park 2015). In Andong Meas, the community leader referred to a few cases of distress sales after the titling campaign and company encroachment. Additionally, while spouses received joint titles, this did not translate into women having a say in decision-making as women reported not having been consulted in the case of land sales. A young woman interviewed in Andong Meas expressed her immediate and future concerns: ‘If our lands are continuously lost, then there is no hope for the future generations’.[12] Such concerns were echoed repeatedly by different women. ‘There is no more land for the new generations, no more fish, no wild animals, no fruits and vegetables from the forest, we cannot collect food and wood’ (Tampouan women’s group, Malik village, Andong Meas district, 2014).

Entire communities have become net food purchasers and turned to microcredit to finance agricultural investments, with resulting high levels of indebtedness (Lumphat district, villages visited in 2015). In such communities the number of families whose livelihood has been disrupted is significantly higher, and the gap between the few rich families and the poor ones wider, with the richest individuals usually active in the land market as land brokers or as moneylenders.

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[11] Interview with community representative, 2016.

[12] Kachak woman, 17 years old, Andong Meas district 2014 (first cited in Park 2015).

It is also important to highlight that where communities have acted collectively to obtain communal land titles, internal cohesion has been strengthened, contributing not only to partially smooth out internal class differentiation, but also to the community's capacity to attract and manage external aid. Projects such as water provision or community schools and kindergartens, which have a direct impact on women's life, are more common in such communities. Meanwhile, communities that have been disintegrated by land sales, or heavily impacted by land grabbing, are often unable to attract external aid and are seen by NGOs as difficult to deal with. The repercussions for women's life are evident. For instance, Krola, in O'chum district, has 27 wells, and a pipe system that conveys water from a reservoir. In Plum village, Oyadao district, women have to collect water from a nearby lake, and in the dry season walk hours to find water.[13]

Overall, however, the improvements remain fragile even for the better-off villages and households. Access to resources, primarily land, remains insecure, posing challenges especially for the youth who are increasingly detached from their identity as foresters and agriculturalists but have no alternatives, with the exception of a few, mainly males, who have access to education and employment outside the village. As seen, the integration in the market economy, access to cash and increased 'khmerisation' of the province have accelerated a shift away from indigenous values and norms. This is more visible among young men and is a source of worries and complaints among elders.

> New generations do not know what a forest is; they have lost knowledge of it, do not know how to produce tools, how to build a house, how to make a farm. They do not follow our traditions, do not respect the elders anymore, and want to live the modern life like Khmer. (Tampouan and Jarai women's workshop, Ke Chong village, Borkeo district, 2010)

Anti-social behaviours, engagement in illegal logging for traffickers or even drug smuggling are also more common (Elders' meeting in a Jarai village in Sesan district, 2016). Furthermore, the normalisation of alcohol consumption, once linked to communitarian rituals involving men and women but now made popular by the availability of commercially produced beverages, has contributed to widespread alcoholism and antisocial behaviour and violence especially among young males or against women. For young women, instead, the impact of a new cultural hegemony has played out mostly through the adoption of gender norms and behaviours typical of Khmer society but without real opportunities for integration.

> Before it was different; boys used to come and visit us in the village. But now we have changed; we are afraid about reputation. If boys come to visit, bad reputation and gossip will follow. It is good to value reputation so no one can say bad things about us. We are happy with this. (Kreung women's group, Kren village, O'chum district, 2014)

The findings suggest that a gender fissure might emerge as a result of the estrangement of youth from farming activities and the loss of capabilities, skills and status. As farming is increasingly threatened by land grabs, processes of social differentiation and integration into capitalist relations may compound gender and generational dimensions. While both young men and girls are impacted by the changes in terms of loss of traditional roles and gender divisions, young men are more likely to speak Khmer and to be better connected with the outside world through access to mobile phones and motorbikes, and stand a better chance to integrate in mainstream economy and society than girls. Young women face the cumulative obstacles of time scarcity, workload and responsibilities as farmers and carers, and the barriers created by patriarchal norms and discrimination. This dimension deserves further research: generational dynamics, coupled with the observed ongoing process of social stratification, help us to understand the engendering of the social reproduction of inequalities (Ansell 2014).

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[13] Interviews with women's groups, 2016.

Though we have argued that access to land is not the main driver of shifting gender relations in Ratanakiri, it has nonetheless been a strong determinant of political reactions from below, with a distinct gender dimension. This we explore in the final section.

4.3. *Opposition, mobilisation and resistance*

With land speculation in Cambodia reaching its peak in 2007–2008 (Baird 2014), the price of land skyrocketed all over the country as well as in Ratanakiri. The dormant provincial town of Banlung turned into a typical frontier centre, attracting all kinds of adventurers and predatory businessmen trying to lure indigenous people into selling their land. An army of brokers ran through the villages, targeting men based on assumptions about who had decision-making power. Land transactions occurred in a very masculine environment, with deals made at night in beer and karaoke parlours.

> We have a lot of conflicts now; some men feel that their wife is old and want to find young prostitutes, and spend all money with them. When they finish all money they come back, angrier then before and they want to sell land to get more money. How we can sell our land? How we will live without land? Now we have lots of divorces. Some wives decided to get away but some still live with their husbands who destroy all properties and become violent. (Tampouan women's group, Banlung district, 2006)

Women largely stood up against land sales, even when this triggered harsh conflicts within families and communities, as seen above. The inflow of non-indigenous settlers, which has created conflicts around management of common resources and disregard for customary laws, as well as growth of cases of sexual harassment and violence, also contributed to fostering women's opposition to land sales, as emerged from group discussions and interviews with women and local authorities. Traditional authorities, the elders' councils, have also been active in discouraging land giveaways in exchange for money or ephemeral goods – the impact being directly associated with the destruction of communities' identity and unity. These elders find themselves weakened by land grabbing and, more generally, commoditisation of land, which risk making traditional practices, knowledge and rituals obsolete.

Women have also participated in open confrontations and protests to stop companies or individual tycoons from expropriation and encroachment (Asian Indigenous Women's Network 2010), actively engaging in political activities that include planning and strategising beyond the single initative, as illustrated by the following quote:

> First we fought with the company, we burned the company compound, then the authorities denounced three of our people, but ADHOC [a human rights NGO] helped us to solve the issue. At the border with Malik village two guards came threatening us with guns. After that we had other confrontations with the company, we took out the keys of their trucks to stop them. The company promised to distribute some rice to us but finally they gave it only

> once, then never again. We sent a complaint letter, we spoke with Radio Free Asia. We think that at this point the Prime Minister is informed too. Now we have networked with other villages to cooperate with each other, 17 villages now join for advocacy. We know that the World Bank has funded the investment made by the rubber companies and we will advocate to them to try to stop this plan. We are united; we share money to fund the committee, for people's travels to join meetings, etc. Women and men, also young boys and girls, we feel really angry and afraid for our future. (Woman at a Kachak community meeting, Andong Meas district, 2014)

Among communities there is a strong belief that if women are involved, advocacy and negotiations may have better chances to achieve their aims and keep levels of confrontation under control in overt conflicts. In fact, communities and women themselves consider women's participation in mobilisation a natural fact when their own survival is at stake. This has been documented in numerous cases of urban and rural dispossession and protests across Cambodia (Brickell 2014; McGinn 2015; Lamb et al. 2017).

Women's participation in opposition and resistance to land grabbing has been remarkable, particularly in situations where communities have had little external support. It is frequent to hear women, more than men, declaring they are ready to face even the most extreme consequences while protecting land. Conversely, illegal deals and episodes of corruption and co-optation that occurred in some communities have occurred with the involvement of male members of the community colluding with local authorities and business representatives.

> We will not move from here. We will not accept compensation or else, we are ready to die here; our only objective is to make them leave. (Tampouan women's group, Lumphat district, where the community is affected by a mining concession, 2016)

> Land grabbing is so painful that we are not afraid to die. Our lands are our lives. We are not afraid to risk our lives to get the land back. (Kachat women's group, Adong Meas district, affected by rubber plantations, 2014)

In spite of the key role they have played, women's participation has thus far failed to put indigenous women's rights and concerns squarely on the agenda of social movements. This confirms research findings that indicate women's lead role in protests does not automatically translate into opportunities for women's empowerment (Lamb et al. 2017), and that external support might be needed for this to happen (see for instance Deere and León 2001; Deere 2003; Stephen 2006; Rubin and Rubin-Sokoloff 2013; Agarwal 2014).

5. Conclusions

The analysis of gender relations in indigenous societies undergoing agrarian, social and cultural changes is a complex task, which has to take into account specificities of indigenous culture and way of life, including gender roles and relations. This contribution has attempted to highlight some of these aspects from a feminist agrarian political economy perspective, looking at how capitalist relations and new tenure and labour arrangements are shaping gender relations and creating new factual and discursive hierarchies of power.

The evidence suggests that the commodification of the economy in the form of cash crops and expansion of ELCs has gendered impacts on the indigenous agrarian system of production and reproduction, shaping different outcomes for different women and men. In this respect, social institutions of gender, ethnicity and age operate as critical social regulators of processes of integration, exclusion and opposition to capitalist expansion (Razavi 2011). We also found the reality to be more nuanced than anticipated as to the type of changes that different waves of commodification have brought about.

A relatively long-term perspective has allowed us to detect that changes in gender roles and relations – shaped by the introduction of new agricultural practices and crops, erosion of traditional access to land, differential access to opportunities and exposure to the 'external' world – have had different outcomes at different points in time for different women and men. When cash crops were first introduced, women took on the extra burden of production (for cashew nuts). Later, however, with farming becoming increasingly capital intensive with crops such as cassava, women have been marginalised from their traditional roles as agriculturalists. Differential access to cash crops, labour and communal titling has also ignited processes of social differentiation between individuals, households and communities. The impacts have been clearly gendered and 'generationed' as women's identity, status and autonomy as agriculturalists are eroded and women and girls are pushed into marginal spaces and roles that offer fewer opportunities for integration into mainstream society.

Newly introduced capitalist relations coupled with increasing scarcity of land have reshaped gender roles and relations towards less egalitarian models, where the traditional complementarity has been replaced by compartmentalisation of gender roles and exacerbation of social differences. In the context of broader resource politics and widespread negative perceptions of indigeneity (Padwe 2013), this translates into a reconfiguration of power dynamics that not only alienates indigenous communities from their lands and resources and hampers their social reproduction but significantly marginalises women and girls based on a system of values that relies on income, possession of goods and 'modernity'.

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