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“I saw the impact of the [Economic Land Concession] on the men.” Notes towards a feminist political ecology of land access in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

While recent work on land grabbing in Cambodia examines the role of gender with regard to women's roles in Cambodia (Brickell 2014, Amnesty International 2011, Licadho 2015), in this paper we reflect on gender and land access in rural Cambodia, considering the impacts to gender not only as related to "women" but as related to male identity and masculinity as well as related to livelihood change. To do so, we draw on a case study of forced eviction and subsequent creation of a Social Land Concession (SLC) in Kratie Province in Cambodia's northeast. The paper is based on fieldwork and a systematic review of literature and policies of land access in Cambodia. Analysis of the case reveals that gender relationships were being significantly altered as a result of land title changes and struggles against eviction. We argue, furthermore, that it is not only women's gender roles and responsibilities that are changing – it is also male responsibility, identity, and belonging that are being significantly altered, which is an aspect too often overlooked in gender and land literatures.

Introduction

Land for the majority rural Cambodian population is inextricably linked to livelihood and food security, as well as family and community history and wellbeing. This paper presents some reflections on gender and land access in Cambodia, drawing on a case study of forced eviction followed by the creation of a Social Land Concession in Khsem Commune, Snuol District, Kratie Province. Analysis of the case reveals that study gender relationships are at stake and were being significantly altered as a result of land title changes and struggles against eviction. We argue that it is not necessarily only women's gender roles and responsibilities that are changing – it is also male responsibility, identity, and belonging that are being significantly altered. Through the case study, we also aim to expand upon how in broader gender and land literatures there is often an assumption that women are a stand in for gender, and that this easily overlooks changing gender relations as something that men also experience or that men and women experience in relationship with one another.

At the time of our fieldwork, undertaken in late July and early August 2014, the Khsem community had experienced just months earlier a violent eviction that involved the burning of their houses linked to the creation of a rubber plantation. In response, many of the community's members had marched through Phnom Penh on several occasions, gaining significant media coverage. Cambodia's Prime Minister, Hun Sen, in turn provided to the community a Social Land Concession (SLC), in doing so short-cutting official processes. When we visited, the community were working to establish the SLC. We focus on how over the course of this community's history, the documents for land have gone through several changes, up until the most recent: where local male leaders (not the state) are collecting their census data and are keeping and making land-related documents for their own "settler" community.

There are many details that we must still draw out – but as a starting point – we consider what self-documentation of land access may tell us about gender/land relationships in a country which has seen a general lack of documented land tenure for rural peoples (we are thinking specifically in terms of empowerment, identity, and contribution/participation in the "national" project" – not only as a victim to be sacrificed for the nation, but as an individual land owner and taxpayer). We will provide examples of changing gender relationships within the case study as embodied and located around the space of the home, and also consider how gender-land relations are being reconstituted through contests over land access and exclusion – particularly around the violent attempt at eviction that this community has experienced –and community response through documentation and governance of changing land tenure regimes.

The main evidence we have to draw out these arguments is based on fieldwork conducted in 2014. This included systematic review of literature and policies of land access and exclusion across the Lower Mekong Basin countries of Thailand, Laos, Vietnam as well as Cambodia. In addition, research for three case studies in Cambodia was conducted over a period of 2 months in July-August 2014. The work that we present in this paper draws on that fieldwork, literature review, as well as the authors' own research and analysis of gaps in the literature as part of preparing and reviewing literature on gender and land across the 4 countries. The focus here is on Cambodia – and we will use one case study in Kratie to draw out key points. However, in future versions of this paper we will incorporate work from the other 2 case studies in rural Cambodia in Koh Kong and Takeo provinces.

The motivation for this analysis is to contribute to an expanding literature on gender and land in Southeast Asia, but to also highlight that it is one that seems to focus explicitly on women. We argue that this matters because it is part of a legacy of scholarship and programming that tends to use "women" as a placeholder for gender, and that this has implications for and should inform future civil society, aid and government programming to broaden its focus and understanding on gender. We understand that there are very good reasons for a focus on women – women-headed households in

Cambodia are more likely to be poor, to be landless or land-poor, and to experience greater vulnerability in the great land rush the country is experiencing (FAO and Ministry of Planning 2010; UNIFEM et al 2004).

However, as critical scholarship in other regions have shown – such as Sub-saharan Africa (Schroeder 1999, Hovorka 2006, etc) and South Asia (Gururani 2002a, 2002b) –an analysis of gender and the environment that overlooks historical relationships between men and women has the potential to not only mis-identify the problems or challenges, but can also have unintended consequences which may further marginalize those for who it seeks to understand or empower.

This paper presentation will proceed as follows: first, we will provide a short background to the changing land access dynamics in Southeast Asia and Cambodia. Second, we will introduce the conceptual approach, expanding on work in feminist political ecology to help understand changing human-environment-gender relationships. Third, we will present the case in Kratie Province and draw out key themes for analysis. Finally, we will identify key points for discussion.

Broader trends and Background: Land Access

Since the 1980s, Southeast Asia has rapidly urbanized, industrialized and de-agrarianized (Li 2014, Hall et al. 2011, Rigg and Vandergeest 2012). At the same time, we see profound rural land use transformation beyond agriculture, including for industrial, urban, tourism and conservation purposes, increasing competition. For instance, in Cambodia we have seen an explosion of economic land concessions; since 2002, even by government estimates, almost ten percent of Cambodia’s total land has been allocated for economic land concessions.

There have also been moves from “flexible and overlapping” to “more rigid and clearly defined” definitions of access to land – as seen in push for land titling programs, which also relate to the broader shift from access defined by kinship and locally constructed norms, to access as state-centered and with formalized rules (Hall et al. 2011). In other words, we have not only seen a shift in land access, but a shift in what we understand or consider when we write or talk about land access and tenure.

Finally, across the region there is an increasingly transnational component of exclusionary dynamics – where international and regional companies are influencing national development and land policies, with different and conflicting aims.

Alongside these broader dynamics of land access, are also shifting gender relations. Work in development studies and political ecology has demonstrated how it is essential to understand local resource access with regard to gendered rights and responsibilities. In her landmark work on this topic, Bina Agarwal argues that “the gender gap in the ownership and control of property is the single most critical contributor to the gender gap in economic well-being, social status and empowerment...In primarily rural economies... the most important property in question is arable land” (1994: 1455).

Since Agrawal’s insights were published, increasing women’s participation in decision-making over natural resources and in development has been identified as a particular challenge, even as these decisions may affect women resource users the most (Resurreccion and Elmhirst 2008, O’Reilly et al 2009, Harris 2005, 2006, Cornwall 2003, Agarwal 2001, Agrawal and Gibson 1999, Schroeder 1999, Rocheleau et al. 1996). Even with the best of intentions for full inclusion of “women” as a group in development and participatory decision-making, depending on the specific context and responsibilities, an un-critical requirement for women’s participation in conventional processes may actually serve to further marginalize and exclude women as a group (Schroeder 1999). At times, programs aimed at women’s participation may actually increase the burden on women (Gururani 2002).

In Cambodia specifically, the country is generally considered to be in a land crisis. The number of landless and land-poor people are growing, a consequence of many factors including population

growth and contested government policies that promote ELCs. While large-scale land titling programs are expected to complete their work within 10 years (GIZ 2014), today at least 7.7 million parcels of land remain to be titled. Placing this land dispossession and consolidation in context, a study in 2007 found that while at that time one-third of the population lived below the poverty line, the vast majority of the poor—90 percent—lived and worked in rural areas (Cambodia Ministry of Planning and UNDP Cambodia. 2007).

In terms of gender and land, while gender mainstreaming is a well-established part of most NGO programming, and is included in more recent government implemented land titling programs, perhaps some of the most high profile connections between gender and land in Cambodia have been seen in recent protests against land evictions where women are at the forefront of a very public movement to fight for land rights (Brickell 2014, Amnesty International 2011, Licadho 2015).

At the same time, livelihoods across the country are changing. While agriculture remains absolutely central to rural livelihoods, farming is experiencing a shift. Following a baby boom in the early 1980s, Cambodia nowadays has a demographically young population who are entering the workforce. On the one hand, the aspiration of many young people is to move away from farming (Cambodia Ministry of Planning 2012). On the other, the country's growing population has placed more pressure on existing agricultural land; this, together with the massive expansion of Economic Land Concessions, is also pushing many younger people away from farming (Rigg 2006). The move into other labor sectors also serves as a livelihood diversification strategy for many rural households, to spread risk and maximize opportunity (This approach has also been referred to as a "multi-local livelihood strategy" e.g. see Elmhirst 2012). More research on the links between gender, livelihood change, and migration is warranted, but beyond the scope of this paper.

ELCs have been implemented in Cambodia at a massive scale in the process altering – often involuntarily – livelihoods. As of 2012, even the Royal Government of Cambodia's own records show that it has issued 118 companies a total land area of over 1.2 million hectares, which is a little less than 10% of entire country. An independent estimate from the NGO LICARDO shows that an even larger area of land – as much as 2.2 million hectares has actually been granted to ELCs. Alongside other land grabs, these ELCs have affected more than 420,000 people since 2003 (LICADHO 2014).

Proponents of ELCs have justified their benefit as contribution to economic growth of the country, generating state revenues and creating employment in rural areas. In actual practice, however, this is quite contested. Critics argue that ELCs encourage the accumulation of the country's productive assets by a local elite and foreign investors, and really symbolize the deficit of institutional protection for the country's majority population.

Moreover, while landlessness and near-landlessness in Cambodia emerge from a number of dynamics (Kato 1999), forced eviction from land, whether through ELCs or other means, is also an important reason for rising landlessness. Land tenure security is weak in Cambodia, particularly in places where formal land certificates have not been issued (as is often the case in ELC areas). Powerful local elites—often working in partnership with foreign direct investment, and through their own companies in Cambodia—are able to acquire large areas of land. State land, previously used under customary arrangements by both indigenous and rural Khmer communities, has been readily appropriated in a process the state legitimizes with claims that either the community does not have the right to the land, or that the land is unused when in fact its condition may simply reflect periods of customary fallow production. As we discuss further below, women have often taken a community leadership role in challenging forced land evictions (Amnesty International 2011, LICADHO 2015).

The rapid expansion of ELCs has been enabled by new set of laws and policies, including the 2001 Land Law, government policy supportive of ELCs as a model for economic development, and a weak justice system that fails to enable communities to challenge egregious projects. Cambodia's ELCs are also driven by international commodities markets, for example in sugar and rubber, that

draws FDI to Cambodia in search of land suited to growing such crops on an expansive scale and a supportive government willing to repress dissent.

There are three subsequent sub-decrees that further developed the 2001 Land Law, and that are relevant to our paper's case study. The 2003 Social Land Concessions sub-decree provides state private land to landless families for residence and farming; the 2005 Sub-decree on Economic Land Concessions prescribes a process for approval and management of ELCs; and the 2009 Sub-decree on Procedures for Registration of Land of Indigenous Communities implements the indigenous land category contained in the original law.

In order to understand these multi-scale changes, we draw on work in feminist political ecology to consider the links between state, gender and land across local and national scales.

Conceptual Approach

Work in feminist political ecology has considered gender identity alongside issues of ecological politics, development, and rural resource use in the global south (Harris 2005, 2006, Schroeder 1999, Rocheleau et al. 1996, Elmhirst 2011).

While we build on rich insights on gender and land from Southeast Asia (Resurreccion and Elmhirst 2008), we also draw from critical scholarship in Africa (Schroeder 1999, Hovorka 2006) and South Asia (Gururani 2002a, 2002b). Schroeder's (1999) ground-breaking study demonstrates some of the unintended consequences of "gender in development."

Specifically, Schroeder shows us "how the notion of women's "special" status as environmental managers was invoked to justify the use of their unpaid labor in agroforestry projects" (1999: xxix). For him, such social behavior "is neither inherent or natural" and claims to this end only provide more evidence that additional burden should be expected to be fulfilled by women (1999: 10). Moreover, Schroeder's analysis pays attention to the ways that seemingly "progressive" critique of development can be and are co-opted by development donors, "stripped of their critical political content, and redeployed to purposes that counter their original intentions" (1999: xxix).

His analysis of programs on gender and the environment that overlook historical relationships between men and women points to how such approaches have the potential to not only mis-identify the problems or challenges, but can also have unintended consequences which may further marginalize women, even under the auspices of empowerment. Hovorka (2006) also cautions about how an assumed focus on women in development can further burden women in terms of requiring more of their (unpaid) labor (see also: Gururani 2002).

In Cambodia, recent work by Brickell (2014) has considered the ways that forced eviction and women's activism in Phnom Penh is shaping/being shaped by changing gender roles. Brickell links the 'home' to the 'geopolitical' to consider the very intimate ways that eviction is influencing relationships to the home; in her own words she argues "that the occurrence of, and activism against, forced eviction is an embodiment of intimate geopolitics" (2014: 1257).

Similar to our own case in Kratie province, Brickell explains that "Community members of both genders initially conceived of women's leadership as a means to maximize the associational value of Khmer women to peace. It was rationalized as a way to minimize the potential for (male) violence and reduce disruption to men's income earning. BKL [Boeung Kak Lake] women also couched their protection of home as an extension and elevation of their traditional responsibilities as wives and mothers to ensure family harmony and stability" (2014: 1257). The public protests are described as "woman's struggle." One of the group's leaders noted that "We can do more than take our husband's clothes, wash them, and hang them" (Vital Voices 2013). Brickell explains that, "Many men, meanwhile, have worked to sustain the financial viability of their households and have taken on "behind-the-scenes" administrative and logistical roles to enable protest events. Rather than men

acquiescing, the community collectively strategized their advocacy campaign with women on its front line” (2014: 1257).

Forced eviction is devastating for the women, men, husbands, wives, children and entire community; however, while women’s relationship to the home and forced eviction in Cambodia context has been started to be explored (Brickell 2014), understanding of rural men’s identity and relationship to the home and forced eviction has not. If considering the general status of men as “owners” and heads of household, though, you would expect that forced eviction, including the burning and razing of houses (and as we describe below, the police actions to explicitly not allow men to return or to protect homes) would have serious implications for male identity and men’s relationships to land.

Work on masculinity and the environment is an emerging field of inquiry (Bull 2009, Ekers 2009), with implications for how we understand our changing human-environment relationships. For instance, looking at rural male identity in Canada and the ‘work’ of the forest, Ekers explains that “These projects were intended to modernize the forestry industry and remake unemployed men in body and soul” (Ekers 2009). In the development literature there is also increasing attention on ‘mainstreaming men in development’ (Connell 2003, Chant and Guttman 2000, Connell 2005, Silberschmidt 2001). Chant and Guttman also recognize that while “men have always been involved intentionally, indirectly, or otherwise, in a field concerned primarily with a vast range of inequities experienced by their female counterparts” (2000: 1) the authors argue that “A major factor [in the “new” focus on men and masculinities] is a widely-shared aim of professionals in this field to disrupt the stubbornly persistent association of gender with women.” (2000: 2) For instance, in the Political Declaration of the twenty-third special session of the UN General Assembly held in Beijing in 2000, “men in development’ was invoked explicitly, stating that governments should “Emphasize that men must involve themselves and take joint responsibility with women for the promotion of gender equality” (cited in Connell 2003: 4-5).

Thus, what we consider in this paper are the ways that gender roles and identity in the case of Khsem Commune are bound up with control over land rights, access/documentation, and violence.

Case Study: Forced eviction, Social Land Concession, and the emerging new roles for men and women in Khsem Commune, Snuol District, Kratie Province

Kratie province in Cambodia’s northeast is a key target area for Economic Land Concessions (ELCs). The case study of Khsem commune, Snuol district presented is also located near to the border with Vietnam. In this community, the Binh Phuoc II rubber plantation holds an ELC and has encroached on the community’s land since 2012. In March 2013 and then again in April 2014, violent evictions saw hundreds of houses razed and burned. The following months, villagers from Khsem commune made headlines in Cambodia as they launched a series of marches throughout the capital Phnom Penh in response to the destruction of 266 homes by private and public security forces (i.e., Khy 2014, May 17). The community was subsequently successful in receiving a Social Land Concession (SLC), discussed in more detail below.

This area is also a historically forested region, and the community we interviewed lives within the boundaries of a Wildlife Sanctuary. As we describe below, much of their fight is for newly settled lands now planted with cassava, but the struggles of the community with changing land tenure and evictions are not limited to this geographic area or to recent history. Many of those residing in the Khsem commune have lived and worked elsewhere; they came to Khsem, a “frontier”, in search of opportunity.

As a research team, we examined the processes surrounding community mobilizing and work to secure land claims from the ground up in response to forced eviction to reveal the struggles of a geographically disparate community fighting for more secure land access and livelihood, and the multiple displacements that accompany the fight for rural land ownership and for making a life in rural Cambodia. While many themes emerged (see our forthcoming Oxfam report), one of the main issues we focus on here is related to gender and land access, as part of a broader constellation of social, political and ecological forces.

The research team arrived when the community was strong from a month of more than 100 people living together in the temple in Phnom Penh. They were also actively working to maintain this momentum and accomplish the administrative work that is necessary for preparing the SLC. As one resident named Sovann, a farmer taking a break from clearing land for the community temple, explained at a meeting, “We are happy we won and we got the land back, and are living on that land.” This meeting was attended by more than 100 people, and as the researcher team saw throughout, residents were keen to discuss their struggles and successes (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Male village leader, with documents, speaking to community members.



This case is quite unique in that the group obtained a Social Land Concessions by direct order of Cambodia’s Prime Minister, Hun Sen, which deviates from the process outlined in the Land Law (2001) and relevant Sub-decrees. This deviation emphasizes the discretionary power of government to intervene in land conflicts and to retool the legal instruments of regulation.

Our visit was also quite an exceptional experience in the way that we were received. A small group of men escorted us around the village each day and communicated across the expansive community by walkie-talkie/radio. They explained that their escort was partly for our safety and also to help explain and guide us. As we saw, it was also because this group of community leaders (all male) were doing the work to count and document the residents of the community, work that we were initially not included in, but that we were eager to better understand.

One of the reasons for this work is related to the community’s recent forced evictions. When we visited, what most constrained the community’s work to recover from the violent eviction and destruction of their homes in April and May has been the lack of clarity about how the SLC will be

subdivided among the families; people simply do not know where their land will be so they cannot build houses and adjust their everyday agricultural activities accordingly. Without the final awarding of the SLC in the form of the subdivision of the land into individual plots and the systematic awarding of those plots to families, many people still feel insecure about their land claims and future access to land. Added to that, doubts remain about the sufficiency of the land allotments for a viable livelihood, as one Khmer settler explained,

“I want five hectares of land for each family from the government. I have four children, and if the land is only 2.5 hectares it won't be enough to plant crops for my family's survival. If it were five hectares it would be good for our livelihoods.”

Added to their difficulties is the work needed to discern which families will be a part of the deal.

In spite of these lingering concerns, people are eager to get work underway to build the infrastructure their community needs. Settlers and leaders stressed the importance of establishing roads, a school, a health centre, a police station and a temple as part of the process of making the SLC liveable and as part of their hopes for the future.

Added to the tension and the struggle, there are families living within the community who are not on the list of those families who will get participate in the SLC. This “list” is loosely correlated to those who both settled in the area early and who went to Phnom Penh to protest the evictions. We spoke with 17 households who confirmed their name were in the list of families to get land, and 11 households who were both in the list and their land fell within the borders of the SLC. We met 3 Stieng households whose land was outside of the SLC but whose name were on the list, and 2 Khmer households in the same situation. Some could not participate in the protests due to health reasons, other families faced different sources of insecurity. For instance, there are multiple instances where family names were included on the SLC list, but their lands under current cultivation are outside of the designated SLC area.

Yet, all those consulted, both in and out of the list of families waiting for the SLC are hoping that the local authorities will do something and get involved on behalf of those not in the list to find land for them. In the meantime, they continue to work towards this goal by taking matters, like a local census and documentation of all land records and receipts, into their own hands.

To expand a bit on the local census, in Khseum the community had known they needed some official numbers and documentation to present to authorities for their SLC requests, but their previous efforts to request a formal resident count were disappointing. At one time, monks were enlisted to conduct a census because they were seen as more “trustworthy” by the community and by government officials and other outsiders. That attempt, however, was not “formal” enough and did not provide enough information. As one community leader emphasized, we decided if “not the monks, we will do it by ourselves” (Group Interview, 02/08/2014). In another instance (in past 4 years), provincial authorities showed up unannounced to count people in the community, but due to a lack of trust, many residents hid. In addition, many people had work outside the village – at the nearby plantation, or in nearby cities – and were unavailable. These individuals were not counted. This is actually one of the main reasons that the group of male leaders decided to start their own count, and these contests over counting relate to who is or is not included in the SLC.

As we describe below, many post-eviction tasks and responsibilities break down along gendered lines, and we identify that in the rush to rebuild the community and provide a legitimate claim as part of the SLC, the role of the local census, done by men, (compared with public protests in Phnom Penh by women) are an important post-eviction shift. First, we describe a bit about the livelihood activities and evolution of the community.

Current livelihood activities and history of displacement

Cassava cultivation is the dominant livelihood activity in the community at present, followed by wage labour. There is very little additional crop diversification, with the exception of several Stieng households cultivation of small plots of inter-cropped upland rice. All 28 households we interviewed – whether Khmer or Stieng – centred their livelihoods on cassava production. Even a cursory visit reveals quite a striking landscape, with large-scale cassava planting (and lack of other crops) leaving a significant impression.

Nearly all of the families we interviewed were rice-poor, meaning that they did not have enough rice stocks to last the year. As Phal, a woman from Kandal, who lives in a household of 10 people attested,

"There is not enough rice to eat [shakes head] and we have a lot of family members but I have just a little bag - and I share it with the other family that has no rice. When we finish it, we will finish it together" (Interviewee 10, 1/08/2014).

In terms of food production, one of the biggest differences between the Khmer settlers from Kampong Cham and Prey Veng was that several had limited access to small plots of farming land in their home villages, which they split their time between according to the agricultural seasons. Yet, the majority of villagers we spoke with had no land in their homeland, and many from Kampong Cham had lost land to shifts in the border with Vietnam in the 1990s. Typical of this story is a 40-year-old woman from Kampong Cham who explained her reasons for migrating as:

"I came here because I thought there were more opportunities for wage labour than in my homeland and my living situation there was severely lacking. I came here to claim land for farming and because I thought there would be more hope here than in my homeland" (Interview 7, 01/08/2014).

Like others from her district of Phonhea Kraek (Kampong Cham Province), she lost her rice fields nearly 20 years ago when Vietnamese soldiers seized her rice land near the border. The soldiers also prevented her from planting her land further afield from the border. As another farmer from her province explained to the research team:

"After Pol Pot, I came back to my village - then Vietnam came and took my land. I got this land from my parents - many generations already. I had only the homestead title, but no title for the farmland" (Interview 11, 01/08/2014).

For others, the country's history of violence and conflict also underscored their experiences of landlessness, as a number of household heads in their 30s and 40s lost their parents to the Khmer Rouge and as orphans did not receive land in the 1980s as part of the privatization of collectively held land.

In the case of the indigenous Stieng families from Snuol, this was the endpoint of a number of displacements that began during the Khmer Rouge regime and continued throughout the internal conflict and culminated in the loss of their chamkar land in their new village in 2003. At that time an official from the district cadastral office came to the commune and informed people that the land was state land, offering 20,000 riel (US\$5) as compensation for their labour invested in clearing the land and then took control of it to plant rubber. This official now is active in the District Governor's Office and the owner of prominent businesses in the district.

The imbalance of power in this situation is exemplified in the explanation of a 50-year old Stieng woman, named Srey Mom, who had collected resin in the area for a number of years but only came to settle in 2008: "even if I was given a piece of candy [for my land], I would accept it. I could not do anything" (Interview 19, 1/08/2014). Five years later, the Srey Mom's community decided to shift their residence to the Khsuem commune area where many families had been coming intermittently to collect resin since the 1950s, and to settle there permanently. The decision was partially underscored by the destruction of their resin trees, which were completely logged out by 2008, leaving them without that important source of income, along with the condition of the land being more open to permanent agriculture.

In the current situation, as a result of the eviction in May 2014 and the month-long struggle to gain an SLC, a number of families also lost their chance to plant cassava as they missed the important parts of the agricultural cycle, or are hesitant to attempt to plant on land that they may not continue to own after the SLC distribution has taken place. The lack of clear delineation of the formalized land claims within the SLC means that people are unable to fully resume their livelihoods and begin the process of recovery as their specific household level land access and rights remain murky without formal, government-led delineation. As one middle-aged Khmer man explained to the team during a large discussion,

"The real situation is that we are all waiting, we hesitate to invest because we don't know where our land will be. We can't fully get to work and so our livelihoods are affected" (Group discussion 31/07/2014).

Across our interviews, people's plans for their immediate future are bound up in remaking homes and settling into their future land plots. As far as farming goes, they wish to continue planting cassava in the immediate future, with the goal of upgrading to black pepper or rubber in the future, which were described as more lucrative and "modern" by interviewees. There has been no agricultural extension work in this village, and along with the lack of irrigation works and that most households are forming livelihoods with very little diversification, there may be room for future work in the community of diversification which could ultimately help to avoid getting trapped in the debt cycles commonly associated with mono-cropping cash crops – especially ones with volatile prices such as cassava.

Gender, household strategies, and protest

Considering the implications of the evictions in April and May, it was clear the burning and destruction of the community's houses shattered what were already somewhat precarious livelihoods. Boupba, another mother of four young children, described the scene as:

"They took the rice even – they destroyed it, they spilled it out. They took the tools, like the axe, they took the axe. They took the boards to my house too, if it was a good board. Who was it? I just know it was the Binh Phuoc II company. There was no warning they just came and burned it. What could I do? Just watch it burn. My husband was angrier than me, but the men needed to run away because we were afraid the men would be caught. The military shot in the air to threaten us. The men had to escape into the forest" (Interview 12, 1/08/2014).

As Boupba, the mother of four, notes above women and men reacted differently to the recent events in the community. Not only did she see her husband display anger more visibly, but also the

family believed he had to flee to the forest in order to escape the threat of violent retaliation for his response to the military. Som, a Khmer women in her 30s, told us that,

I noticed the impact of ELC on the men. After the houses were destroyed, the men were not allowed to go into the village. Only women are allowed to come in and collect belongings” [-#9 Khmer women in her 30s, who plants cassava and works as a hired labour planting and weeding soybeans]

What the research team documented from the outset was, as Som and Boupha suggest, that women and men worked differently, but also together, often splitting responsibilities for child care, finding ways to make income while being forcibly evicted or displaced from their land and source of livelihood. In this case, gender also played a key role in the act of public protest (see also: Brickell 2014). Women told us that they were “leading the front line” of the protest as a strategy to avoid conflict with the police, who would not “want to fight them [women]” (Group Discussion #2, 31/07/2014). This was also reflected in the responses to eviction – the men were forced to flee while the women felt that they could stay and observe what their evictors did, without attracting unwanted attention.

In interviews, we were told of the struggles for the entire family as reflected in the loss of one member. For instance, if one individual, either mother or father, was unable to work or fell ill then the family would not be able to make ends meet. The risk was also increased because of the circumstances; as noted above, in the current situation, the community’s evictions saw everything – from homes, to rice stocks, to household tools, like an axe – confiscated. Thus, the loss of one individual was more visible than at previous times in their family histories when they had income and belongings to “fall back on.”

It is not our intent to make broad generalizations on this issue, but gender relations were integral to not only securing family income during a time of crisis, but also to the work of community organizing.

Moreover, it is significant that the whole family, not just at community level, had to organize and coordinate their activities over an extended period of time in order to be able to protest, emphasizing the gendered divisions of labour in the household. Paying attention to such nuance also reveals how easily people can be left out of such efforts.

At the same time, in conversation among the researchers, we discussed how it was because women and men were seen as playing acceptable and empowering roles that “gender” was not considered an issue of importance. As one of team explained: gender did not appear significant in this study because it appeared that women’s empowerment was already being addressed (i.e., through public protest, and in seeing women play public speaking roles). As a result of this conversation, in our ensuing discussion, we considered that it was perhaps men’s gender roles and responsibilities that were being more radically transformed.

Following the forced evictions, husbands and single men were not allowed back to the houses to collect belongings. The women were informed they could collect belongings from the rubble “quickly” but that men would be shot. In addition, I was informed that men were being more closely monitored by the police (going in/out of the community) after the evictions. Considering how male bodies and the very heated, politicized role that men were seen as playing, it is not surprising then that: a) women continued to play a greater role in public protest, especially that which required travel, and b) that men took more de-politicized (less public, less confrontational, more “rational”) roles. What we saw was that men were now involved in logistics and in community governance which focused on creating and keeping documentation. This documentation included carrying out a local census, and also making

records of all correspondence with government officials, including all land-related documents (including receipts for payment, letters issued to particular individuals regarding the “students” visiting). Similar to the gendered protest strategies of women, we can see a corollary influence on male roles and responsibilities.

Meeting with (male) community leaders

As we were preparing to carry out the final interviews in Khseum with the small group of men who had formed the village committee and the village leader, we assembled our things (recording devices, backpacks, water bottles) on the table in front of the house we had stayed in during our visit.

Figure 2: Timber trader on route through village



While we were seated, an older man driving a buffalo cart appeared and started to pass by the house (see Figure 2). I (Lamb) stopped to snap a photograph of the trader. As he came closer, approaching on the dirt road that crosses just in front of the house that we had used to traverse the community for interviews and that the community itself had maintained, some of the group we were meant to interview left to speak to him. “Uncle” they called; eventually he halted. The conversation between him and the group of male community leaders became heated. The main community leader left our interview and also joined their conversation.

Immediately following the confrontation, we were informed what the buffalo cart was carrying: timber, for sale. The reason for the debate was that timber came from within the community, within the SLC boundaries. The community leaders believed timber, or other resources, should only be used in the community or to benefit the community. This timber was intended for a “middle man” outside of

the community who would sell it to his networks, and did not fit their criteria. The trader was given a warning, and told not to return – that he should not come to purchase timber again, and that he should not use the community road.

As was emphasized later in interviews with NGOs working on the issue, such as the director of local NGO Wathnapheap, a crucial issue in these newly allocated or settled SLCs are that residents need infrastructure to improve their lives, and to get out of poverty. “We have all the people – but no road, well, school or health clinic. It is very hard for them. No school, no health clinic – very difficult for them. They need support, but really they need to have this all prepared before [the villagers move to SLC land]. So far [before] just move the people – and they don’t want to stay” (Wathnapheap Interview, 6 Aug 2014). This represents a whole new set of responsibilities for communities to take on, post eviction and post-SLC.

This paper has reflected on the Khseum community to draw out how gender roles and responsibilities are changing – for both women and men – from forced eviction followed by the process of the creation of a Social Land Concession. In this case, the communities are taking responsibility for tasks usually led by the local authorities in anticipation of their engagement with them, and thus to “prove” their land or other status through documentation. At the same time, communities are also using this emphasis on documentation to their advantage. In this community and its newly allocated SLC, not only was the community instituting a local census, but had been hard at work to secure infrastructure such as the road, and regulations for use of the road and for resources within the boundaries of the concession, for the community. We heard plans for a school, and saw the start to a temple. These changes – and challenges - raise questions about the future of these communities, and who will play what roles in addressing the challenges of the ‘frontier’ in rural Cambodia.

Points for Discussion

As this draft is still in progress, we would like to finish with a few points for discussion rather than concluding points.

1. What is at stake in focusing on “women” as gender in rural development? What does this overlook in our understanding of the impacts of land grabbing and eviction in Cambodia?
2. What are the ways that rural male identity in Cambodia is constructed, and how is it being transformed alongside large scale land and livelihood change?
3. How to proceed with analysis of changing male identity in rural Cambodia? While interviews were useful, we were also limited and are considering the documentation and establishment of SLC as an entry point for understanding shifting gender relations. We’d be interested in discussing pros/cons of a more text based approach.

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