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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The lucky and unlucky daughter: Gender, land inheritance and agrarian change in Ratanakiri, Cambodia

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Abstract

In many agrarian societies, women come to own land, and people secure care in old age through land inheritance. The social norms guiding inheritance shape gendered, generational and class-based relations of power in rural areas, and intra-family land rights can be lost when inheritance norms shift. In Cambodia's northeastern Ratanakiri province, rapid agrarian change over the past decade—including the expansion of land grabs, cash cropping and Khmer in-migration—is transforming decision-making around inheritance. Based on a large sample of qualitative interviews and focus groups carried out in 2016 and 2020 with Indigenous and Khmer communities, we focus on the ways in which intergenerational and gendered obligations of care are being reconfigured as land scarcity and inequalities within rural areas become more pronounced. We argue that social norms around land inheritance are in flux, with a proliferation of diverse practices emerging including a shift from matrilineal to bilateral inheritance amongst some Indigenous families, the deferment of marriage and inheritance decisions due to a lack of land and parents taking on debt to buy land and secure care in older age. These changes are reconfiguring gendered and generational identities in relation to land and have potentially negative consequences for land-poor families, in particular, for poor Indigenous women. These

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changes are symptoms of a larger 'crisis of care' in rural communities.

KEYWORDS
Cambodia, crisis of care, land inheritance, matrilineality, moral economy, women's land rights

1 | INTRODUCTION

In many agrarian societies, women come to own land, and people secure care in old age through land inheritance. The social norms guiding inheritance shape both gendered and generational relations of power in rural areas. A small but growing body of work on the gendered implications of commercialisation shows how gender relations influence and are influenced by land commercialisation (Evans, 2016; Bourke Martignoni et al., 2022), and a growing literature on generation in critical agrarian studies recognises the importance of young people's access to land (Kumeh & Omulo, 2019; White, 2012; White & Park, 2015). While this interest in youth has led to insights into the mechanisms through which younger farmers access land, there has been less attention paid to how agricultural and land commercialisation are affecting older people in agrarian communities. In this article, we understand 'generation' as a relational and gendered concept. We argue that the rapid commercialisation of land and agriculture in upland Cambodia is affecting and being affected by the relations of care between young and old and the social norms and moral economies that govern these care relations. We ground this analysis in a feminist ontology of land, recognising that land is central to relations of social reproduction in rural communities; this enables us to draw attention to the increasingly urgent crisis of care as land scarcity and growing indebtedness remake obligations of family care with distinctly gendered consequences.

We bring together literature on land inheritance practices and feminist scholarship to look at the crisis of care and affective dimensions of land use through a focus on the changing political ecology of land in the northeastern uplands of Cambodia. In Ratanakiri, Cambodia, a province with a large population of Indigenous Charay (also spelled in English as 'Jarai') and Tampuan people, institutions of matrilineality and bilineality that can secure women's property rights and social status as well as care for older family members are being reconfigured. The rapidly growing scarcity of land in a context where people have few other viable options for elder care and decent off-farm livelihoods has disrupted established moral economies of land inheritance. As families are forced to reconfigure land and care relationships, new inter-generational and gendered tensions are emerging, with potentially devastating consequences for land-poor families, in particular, for poor Indigenous women.

First, we discuss the contestation and reconfiguring of gendered identities that occurs as intergenerational obligations are reworked. Second, we examine the norms and practices that are emerging as families negotiate the changing landscape of land scarcity and off-farm livelihoods. We then explore the affective and temporal dimensions of decisions over inheritance and the agency of both parents and children as they seek to shore up livelihoods, care, and their rural identities in the context of deepening uncertainty over whether a future in rural areas is viable. Finally, we place these changing norms and practices into the broader context of deepening class, ethnic, and gendered inequalities in rural Cambodia.

In focusing our analytical lens on the generational question, we seek to take work on land grabs and dispossession beyond the immediate act and its aftermath, to the longer term question of how rapid commercialisation changes social relations of class, gender, ethnicity and generation, and the implications for social reproduction in the future in rural communities.

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2 | LITERATURE REVIEW: SHIFTING MORAL ECONOMIES OF LAND INHERITANCE

The literature on land in Cambodia tends to focus on acquisition through the state and market or land conflict between village households and agribusinesses (Beban et al., 2017; Biddulph & Williams, 2016; Schoenberger, 2015; Touch & Neef, 2015). Until recently, there has been little discussion of intra-familial land inheritance practices and the way in which macroeconomic structures influence the everyday struggles and land inheritance strategies within extended families (FAO, 2019).

In practice, the 'moral economy' of land inheritance is based on complex social bargains; transactions related to the transmission and inheritance of land and assets are affective, filled with care, love, guilt, shame, hope and the weighing up of different temporalities, as people negotiate individual aspirations alongside feelings of obligation to past, present and future generations (Carrier, 2018; Gill, 2013; Palomera & Vetta, 2016; Rigg et al., 2018; Wolford, 2005). The incursion of capitalism into rural areas does not necessarily imply a decrease in affective relationships between people and places; rather, these may be reworked in new ways, creating ambiguous logics of dependency, obligation, self-interest, norms, market commodification and competition (Palomera & Vetta, 2016). In Ratanakiri, there is tension between neoliberal economic approaches to private land ownership and industrial forms of agricultural production and the continued sense that land is 'more than just a commodity' in that it incorporates elements of spirituality and belonging to territory as well as being a means for sustainably securing the livelihoods of families and communities (Ironside, 2015, p. 217).

2.1 | Gendered land rights and inheritance

Research in feminist economics and agrarian studies confirms the importance of land rights for food security and poverty reduction, women's autonomy and sense of identity (Agarwal, 1994; Jacobs, 2009; Kieran et al., 2015; Deere & Leon, 2003). Inheritance is often the only means women have to gain access to land (Deere & Leon, 2003). Within Southeast Asia, the predominantly bilateral and matrilineal land inheritance systems[1] are perceived as providing women with more intra-familial bargaining power than in South Asia where the pattern tends to be more patrilineal (Kieran et al., 2015). In matrilineal and bilateral inheritance communities, the rights of daughters are associated with matrilocality/uxorilocality (living in/near wife's family's residence), which can provide women with support networks and more status within the household than in patrilocal communities, where women may be subject to their mother-in-law's control (Agarwal, 1994).

However, owning land does not necessarily mean *control* over land (Peluso & Lund, 2011) and the enjoyment of all of the associated 'bundles of rights' including rights of access and transmission that come with ownership (Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2020). Land rights also do not guarantee that women have access to public authority or bodily autonomy (Agarwal, 1994). Processes of de-agrarianisation and the growth of diverse non-farm livelihoods in Southeast Asia's rural communities call into question the positive correlation between land inheritance and gendered social status, as land inheritance may restrict people's mobility and ability to gain education and off-farm livelihoods (Fernando, 2022). When land fragmentation becomes acute, and participation in off-farm income-earning activities more frequent, land becomes less important as a source of power and wealth within communities. In this situation, women's enhanced land rights may actually increase their work burden without benefitting them in terms of status or decision-making authority in their households and communities (Rao, 2011).

Established moral economies of land inheritance can be disrupted by state initiatives to formalise and privatise land tenure that force households to reconfigure land and labour practices and their intra-household gender relations

[1]Inheritance norms are generally categorised as patrilineal (land passed from father to son or other male relatives), matrilineal (land and often family name traced through mother's line) and bilateral (both daughters and sons inherit property) (Evans, 2016).

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(Carney & Watts, 1990; Chung, 2017). There are tendencies for matrilineal societies to become less extended and more nuclear, for property rights to become more concentrated and for families to adopt patrilineal inheritance (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 2005; Lesorogol, 2010; Martinez-Iglesias, 2015; Razavi, 2009).

2.2 | The care crisis in rural communities

The result of rapid commercialisation in settings where formal, government-provided systems of social protection are absent is a 'crisis of care', as growing land scarcity undermines informal mechanisms of social security for young and old (Bakker & Gill, 2019; Cole & Durham, 2007; Fraser, 2016). The literature on the crisis of care emerges primarily from contexts in which the state has retreated from social provisioning under neoliberalism, but here, we reorient this focus toward the context-specific forms of state involvement and their implications for the transformation of social reproduction (Kunz, 2010). In settings where social reproduction has long been a private matter, such as upland Cambodia, what is new is the aggressive role of the state in facilitating capitalist dispossession of rural land and through this the disruption of intra-familial networks of social security.

In Cambodia, women have primary responsibility for the care of children and the elderly, while men tend to be much freer to form and leave family relationships (Ironside et al., 2013). Male gender identities in relation to land have not been extensively analysed; however, men are expected to perform provider roles as part of their socio-political status and this is significant for understanding women's relations to land (Jackson, 2003). Women in their capacity as mothers, wives and daughters must be willing and ready to take on care work, and to infuse this with emotion (Roces, 2022). Women's reproductive and caring labour are recognised through land inheritance (Manderson & Block, 2016, p. 208). Affects of 'gratefulness' and 'shame' are central to these intra-familial relationships: Children who do not care for their parents may be seen as 'ungrateful'; parents who cannot provide for their children may be considered 'unloving' (Green & Estes, 2019). In times of crisis with increasing pressures being placed on kin-based networks of care, land-poor people unable to provide for their children through land inheritance, or elderly parents left to fend for themselves when children must leave the area for work is suggestive of a moral failure (Bylander, 2014; Dahl, 2009; Derks, 2008). Recognising the obligation of parent to child and child to parent thus directs us toward analysing not just the decisions that parents make over land inheritance but the constrained agency that children have in providing care, or not providing care, for their elderly parents. The shifting moral economy of land inheritance in settings of agricultural and land commercialisation is therefore both multi-generational and deeply gendered.

3 | METHODOLOGY AND STUDY SITE

This article draws on data from a large-scale study carried out between 2015 and 2021 in Ratanakiri Province, an upland Indigenous-majority area of Northern Cambodia, as part of a longitudinal project investigating gendered processes of agricultural commercialisation in Cambodia. We selected two local government areas (communes) that have undergone rapid commercialisation, Malik Commune, in Andong Meas District, and Lum Choar Commune, in Ou Ya Dav District. Ratanakiri, Cambodia's most northeastern province, bordering Vietnam and Lao PDR, is home to many of the country's Indigenous groups (Ironside et al., 2013). These groups have been heavily influenced by nation-building policies and conflict. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge, Indigenous people had a period of relative insulation from modern state-making projects, but since the late 1990s, the Cambodian government has undertaken 'Khmerization' policies in the uplands, including the establishment of local state authorities, schooling and health services, infrastructure and provision of incentives for the settlement of Khmer migrants and large-scale agribusiness concessions (Ironside et al., 2013; Padwe, 2011). By the mid-2000s, land across the province was being zoned into economic land concessions for agribusiness, conservation areas, private land holdings and forestry (Frewer, 2017). Neo-liberal prescriptions from international development institutions that promote individual ownership as a means

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of attracting investment in rural areas are driving state policies regulating land ownership through private, individual land titling schemes, while state support for Communal Land Title (CLT) remains limited (Beban, 2021; Dwyer, 2015). In remote areas of the province, much land remain untitled and is susceptible to enclosure. Furthermore, while the World Bank has recently increased support for CLT, community CLT claims are falling apart as MFI loans proliferate and people desire individual land certificates to collateralise their MFI loans and sell land (Baird, 2023). These dynamics are facilitating shifts away from communal land practices.

The research team carried out both individual interviews and focus groups. The focus groups allowed us to engage people in conversations about social norms and changes they observed at the community level. We held 10 village focus groups in 2019–2020, each of which included six to eight people. Six focus groups were held with men only, three with women only and one with a mix of men and women. The individual interviews enabled us to understand different inheritance practices. The research team conducted 197 semi-structured interviews with farmers (women and men) in 2016 and 2017 and a second round of interviews in 2019 and 2020 with 217 farmers.

There was some overlap with respondents in rounds 1 and 2, although this was not complete as some people had moved or were unavailable in the second round. We included 167 male respondents, 210 female respondents and 37 couples as well as people of different ages, wealth levels and ethnicities. We also undertook 45 interviews with local authorities at the village, commune and district levels. The local authorities interviewed were village heads and deputies (21), commune gender focal points (5), commune heads (5) and officials working in different capacities at the district level of governance in agriculture, gender and local development (14).

All interviews were conducted in Khmer, Tampuan or Charay languages and then transcribed into English. The core research team was composed of 12 Cambodian researchers (eight men and four women), with a number of additional local researchers who acted as informants, interviewers and interpreters for the interviews in the Charay and Tampuan languages. The authors conducted 20 interviews as part of the pre-testing of our open-ended interview guide ahead of each round of interviews. These interviews were done in Khmer with the help of interpreters from the Cambodian team for Bourke-Martignoni, while Beban, who is fluent in Khmer, was able to record and observe the interviews independently. The majority of the interviews were carried out by the Cambodian members of the research team in several intensive blocks of ~3 weeks in each province, with nightly team debriefs to ensure the contexts of the interviews were accurately captured. Research permissions were granted by provincial and communal level authorities in Cambodia and ethics approval was received from the Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies in Geneva. The written transcripts of the semi-structured interviews were analysed with the research coordinators from the Cambodia team and then classified and inductively coded—using a collaborative, cross-checking methodology—by the authors with NVivo qualitative analysis software.

The research process was challenging due to the political sensitivity of discussions related to land rights and conflicts over resources in the authoritarian context of Cambodia. We took a number of steps to ensure the safety of our participants, including the adoption of a rigorous protocol for anonymising the data so that individuals and their locations cannot be identified.

4 | THE CHANGING POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LAND IN RATANAKIRI

In Ratanakiri's Indigenous groups, people's identity and sense of unity is closely tied to their extended family, although the norms governing usufruct, ownership and access rights over land and other collectively held resources vary significantly within and between different communities. Both the Charay and Tampuan are generally matrilineal with inheritance and clan relationships passed down through the female line (Ironside et al., 2013; Padwe, 2020). Charay families are also matrilocal in that daughters tend to live close to their mothers once they marry. All Charay families in our study confirmed that social relations were organised through matrilineal descent groups (called *phung*),

and the usual practice in their communities was to pass on family property and the family name to their daughters. It is said that a Charay man enters a marriage 'owning nothing but the clothes on his back' because heritable property (drăm) passes from mothers to their daughters (Padwe, 2020). Following marriage, men move into the village of their wives, traditionally in communal longhouses, and now generally in independent houses close to the wife's parent's house. Men play an active role in increasing the family's wealth through trading relationships, alliances and obtaining household property (e.g., livestock, items of ritual importance such as gongs and ceramic jars), but property acquired through this trade is traditionally held within the wife's *phung* and is passed down only to the female children.

Inheritance practices in Tampuan families are highly localised and vary from one village to the next; however, in general, they also tend to practice matrilineal inheritance, while practising a system of bi-locality after marriage with couples alternating residence between their parents' houses for a number of years (Bourdier, 2013). In both the Tampouan and Charay groups, valuable assets are inherited by the female descendants, while sons leave the family household 'empty handed' (other than for hunting tools) as they are supposed to join the spouse's clan and work with them until reaching their independence as a married couple (Dournes, 1972). The family house is generally inherited by the youngest child, usually the youngest daughter, who will take care of the aging parents until their death (Dournes, 1972). This system of property relations provides women social status in Charay and Tampuan communities and ensures inter-generational care relations are maintained between parents, children and grandchildren (FAO, 2019). Many Charay and Tampuan express a preference for having daughters over sons, as daughters remain in the parent's village and provide care for their parents, and the couple's property stay within the matriline.

Both Charay and Tampuan groups have traditionally practiced shifting modes of cultivation, and prior to the early 2000s, large areas of communal forest land were available for clearing and use by members of each group. Land was traditionally not seen as individual property; rather, animist beliefs defined land as a realm that could be used through the intermediation of spirits (Bourdier, 1995). Family groups would prepare land for farming, and this labour would give them usufruct rights for the cultivation cycle (usually 1–3 years), while the fallow land would then revert back to community control and be free for use by other farmers (Baird, 2000; Ironside et al., 2013). In practice, families tended to farm land nearby their old plots or revert periodically to their old plots left fallow, and this practice established a 'lineage right' on some of the land within community boundaries (FAO, 2019). The traditional system of recognising a mosaic of familial and communal rights over forest and farming lands also allowed for the sustainable management of communal forest resources (Ironside, 2015). Interviewees in our study were clear that both forest and farming lands were abundant in the past and that newly married couples could clear communal land (often with the permission of village elders).

Amongst Khmer families, the most common norm is bilateral inheritance, with all children receiving the same amount of farm land, while the residential land is held back for the person who would look after the parents in old age—usually the youngest daughter (Yaguro, 2012). Khmer families have a long established norm of land as private property, with farming systems based around low-land paddy rice as well as annual and perennial cash crops, fruit and vegetables. However, rice fields are also used communally as fodder for grazing cattle in the dry season with the manure providing fertilizer, and rural Khmer often describe the forest as a communal resource, owned by water and land spirits and available for all people in the community to use sustainably (Swift & Cock, 2015; Work & Beban, 2016).

Starting from the 1990s, and increasing in the mid-2000s, agribusiness concessions, land speculators and lowland migrants have moved into Ratanakiri *en masse* (McAndrew, 2000; Padwe, 2011). This set off a rush to clear land before it was gone. A Tampuan man in his 30s remembered that in his village, the rush occurred in the mid-2000s: 'many people cleared lands during that time of 2010-2011 because we heard that ELC companies will come. So everyone hurried to clear land for farming' (II125).

While land fragmentation and the creation of smallholder 'enclaves' is a common issue in communities where widespread agricultural commercialisation is underway (Li, 2014), this trend has occurred in a compressed time frame

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in upland Cambodia. Communities that previously saw land as something plentiful have rapidly developed a sense that it is now a scarce resource. As a Charay woman farmer explained,

> If we have land, we can work on it for survival. But if we do not have land, we sell labour and just earn income from day to day. How can we survive? … Previously, life was happier. As a mother, I worry about land. I have given 2 hectares to the first child and 1.5 hectares to the second. So, if we don't have any more land, how can a mother pass on land to all her children?
>
> (55)

As this woman's worries about what land scarcity will mean for her children's future suggests, the arrival of economic land concessions (ELCs) and Khmer in-migration had a profound effect on local modes of land governance and agricultural practices (Scurrah & Hirsch, 2015). Families that had previously engaged in shifting cultivation, cleared new land from the forest or taken over their family's fallowed rice fields prior to marriage, were suddenly forced to clear, permanently cultivate or buy whatever land they could in order to prevent that land from being grabbed by companies or in-migrants. Ontologies of land as spiritual entity to which people gain usufruct are being subverted by ontologies of land as individual property. In our interviews with young people, it was evident that the desire and need for cash to operate in this new social world is pervasive, while the value of spiritual objects has declined. In their discussions of inheritance, people overwhelmingly felt that land is the most valuable object they can transmit to their children. People lamented that ‘land is not plenty like before. If parents do not pass on land to children, they will not have land. They cannot clear forest land for farming’ (Charay man, II024).

This situation has disrupted the complex mosaic of communal and family land use arrangements that existed within these communities, reshaping matrilineal and bilateral inheritance practices and gender and generational relations that previously secured women's social status and intergenerational care. Park and Maffi (2017) note that while both young men and women are impacted by the changes in traditional agricultural and land-use practices, young Indigenous men are more likely to speak Khmer and to be better connected with the outside world through access to mobile phones and motorbikes and the opportunities for employment, education and social status that these provide. Young women face the cumulative obstacles of time scarcity and responsibilities as farmers and carers, as well as the socio-economic barriers created by patriarchal and racist norms and discrimination (FAO, 2019).

The wave of land grabbing and rapid commercialisation of agriculture over the past decade has upended established moral economies of inheritance. Notions of what is acceptable and ‘right’ are shaped by multiple factors: the influx of Khmer migrants with their own concepts of morality and relationships to the land; state initiatives to institute private property and facilitate agribusiness and commercial agriculture; and the shifting ecology, as commons forest areas decrease and tree crops become valued and the devastating impacts of climate change make themselves felt. Now, moral economies of inheritance involve negotiations and tensions between generations and household members and between class and ethnic groups in communities, which are creating new vulnerabilities for the poor and particularly for poor women.

Literature on agrarian transformation makes clear; however, that we cannot assume that the commercialisation of agriculture and land affects people in uniform ways (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2009; Hart et al., 1989; Peluso & Purwanto, 2015). While women, and particularly upland women in Cambodia, are often presented as ‘victims of the state and capital’ and are portrayed in many NGO and government discourses as dependent upon and desiring subsistence-based forest livelihoods, this oversimplifies the diverse aspirations, class positions and integration into commercial agriculture and off-farm livelihoods amongst Indigenous women (Baird, 2014; Frewer, 2017). The influx of capital into the uplands has presented opportunities for some people—mainly men—who have been able to style themselves as land brokers, creditors, suppliers and labourers and those families who had the labour available to clear and claim land before it became scarce, while others find themselves increasingly marginalised from these new networks of production and able to access only low-paid wage work.

5 | MORAL ECONOMIES OF INHERITANCE AND GENDERED IDENTITIES

Inheritance systems that favour the child who cares for elderly parents means that inheritance decisions are concerned with how to give children the best start in life when they marry and how to ensure that they themselves are cared for in older age where no formal systems of social security (such as pensions or paid carers) are available. These systems may be relatively stable as long as there are land and other resources to share that will provide the younger generation with a livelihood and support, and the older generation with care, but the rapid shift to land scarcity has undermined this system.

Everyone we talked with, however, said that land continues to be important for their future, and the precarity of off-farm work helps explain why this is. Land is also a central aspect of people's social status, kinship and identity in their communities, and this means that decisions over land inheritance are deeply emotional, and changes to land access and ownership can meet with resistance. Rigg et al. (2018) suggest that the household becomes a social site 'where generational – rather more than gendered – roles, relations, presents and futures are navigated'. In this section, we discuss the shifts in moral economies that are emerging as land scarcity and inequalities within rural areas become more pronounced; in this shift, gender and generation are not separable dimensions of the household—as intergenerational obligations are reworked, gendered identities in relation to land are also contested.

5.1 | Female gender identities in relation to land, 'The lucky and unlucky daughter'

Traditionally, Charay and Tampuan matrilineal inheritance practices as well as matrilocal residence have provided a higher status for women than in patrilineal and patrilocal communities (Manderson & Block, 2016). With no dowry to pay and the woman bringing wealth into the relationship as well as carrying on the family name, many research participants said that daughters were favoured both in material and cultural terms because they continued the family line (128) and secured land. Strict customary rules regulating marriage break-up also favour women; older Charay interviewees said that women in their community could divorce, but if a man divorced a woman, he would be fined and forced to return any assets acquired through the marriage. This custom is important as widows/divorcee women are often most vulnerable in rural communities, particularly if the estranged spouse (or his family) takes the land (Agarwal, 1994).

In group discussions, which are particularly useful for providing a sense of prevailing social norms, we found that Indigenous men and women strongly expressed the view that land is the most important asset for Indigenous families and that land inheritance should be matrilineal in keeping with matrilineal inheritance traditions, while boys should be given other assets. Many people listed the assets given to sons and daughters in detail, such as in a focus group with six Charay and Tampuan men in Lumchoir:

> For sons, we provide motorbikes and assets including a pillow, mosquito net, dishes, spoon and a gourd for storing water for drinking. For land, we do not provide it to son because he will get land from his parents-in-law. For daughter, she will get farm land, residential land, money for business, however parents do not have money, but at least she get 100,000KHR.
>
> (FGD 6)

This custom for matrilineal inheritance means, as one young Charay woman said, that the youngest daughter is the 'lucky and unlucky daughter':

> She is lucky because she will get the property more than any other daughter in the family even the home not only land. She is unlucky because when parents get older and cannot do farming anymore, she will take all responsibilities for taking care of them and feeding them.
>
> (124)

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This ambiguous status recognises that being the provider of land is a double-edged sword, as women are expected to perform all the physically and emotionally demanding work of caring for elderly parents, while caring for children and their households and also working on the family farm and engaging in off-farm work as well (Evans, 2016).

Women's ties to their natal village take on new vulnerabilities as land is increasingly scarce. It may constrain their ability to move into decent off-farm employment, to seek educational opportunities or to migrate. In fact, many families said they did not provide land to their sons, but they passed on other things like ‘money, motorbikes and golden necklaces’ (Tampuan woman, 132), which give men the mobility to access education and jobs outside the village, and capital to make different livelihood choices (Charay woman, 141). The downside to having girls is seen to be a lack of labour for heavy agricultural work, in particular land clearing, which is gendered male in the Charay and Tampuan communities. In households that do not have enough labour for farm work, girls may still be married off young in order to bring more labour into the household (Charay woman, 141).

In Charay and Tampuan communities, land provides social status for daughters and mothers. Parents have a great deal of control over their children's marriage partners, largely because they can choose whether and how much land to give to the couple. Mothers make the final agreement about whether a couple can marry, as one young Charay man said;

> In Charay culture, we ask the woman's mother when we want to propose to her. We cannot live together if the woman's parents do not agree. We can hardly do anything. If we insist on living with each other, they won't organize a ceremony for us.
>
> (II024)

By delaying decisions about land inheritance until after the couple has married, the bride's mother can assess whether the new son-in-law is of good character and deserving of her trust. One woman whose daughter married 6 months prior to the interview said, ‘I don't give them the land yet, maybe in the next two years, after I could say my son-in-law is good enough and I trust him first, then I will give some land to them’ (II013). The mother's ability to veto marriage partners is not absolute, however; one Tampuan woman (the wife of the village chief) whose young daughter was already married said she tried to dissuade them, but ‘they already love each other … We can prevent animals by tying them with rope but we cannot ban people from what they want to do’ (KI06).

While parents' control over their children's marriage partner is not absolute, several people said that because of the importance of land inheritance, possessing land enables them to have more say over who their children can marry. In the context of increased land scarcity, this suggests a growing class dimension whereby those who have more land are more likely (or at least are encouraged) to marry others from land-rich families. This trend is noted in other literature, whereby parents often endeavour to marry their children into rich families, and children aspire to find wealthy spouses, leading to ‘positive assortative matching’, wherein the assets contributed by husband and wife are positively correlated (Yaguro, 2012). This may increase economic disparity and mean that children from poor families find it difficult to find a spouse.

In interviews, young women talked about the challenges they face in marrying if they have no land. They suggested that in lieu of land, men might request assets from the wife's family. A focus group of young Charay men and women nodded in agreement when one person noted: ‘the husband would ask his wife if the parents-in-law have money for buying something such as a motorbike. Then we will ask our parents for what he wants’. Furthermore, even if the man's family would accept their son marrying a landless woman, they may require her to live with them, as a Charay man suggested in a focus group.

5.2 | Male gender identities in relation to land

Across focus groups and interviews, people often commented that young men do not get angry or upset about matrilineal practices; this is just ‘the way things are done’ and is justified because young men know they will receive

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land from their spouses. These explanations often referenced gendered ideologies about men being able to find their own land and women being more likely to stay on the land in order to care for elderly parents (91, 17, 186); sons are seen to 'have capacity to seek land [but] for the daughter, she doesn't know what to do if we do not have land for her' (focus group with Charay and Tampuan men, FGD6). The expectations placed on daughters to support parents and associated ideas of limited mobility and self-sacrifice (a 'good' daughter looks after parents and thinks of others first) are entirely different from the expectations for sons. Most parents did not expect sons to support them; 'It is not like Khmer', one Charay woman patiently explained to us; 'They can't even feed themselves so how they can help their parents?' (II018).

Male gender identity is thus tied up with being able to physically clear land to provide more food and income for the family and to draw on their greater social and political networks beyond the village to claim land through purchase. Now that land is increasingly scarce in the uplands, however, families with sons face the possibility that their daughter-in-law's family will not have land to pass down to her, and with enclosure of former commons areas for land concessions and private plots, young men can no longer depend on clearing land. Land price rises in recent years mean that poor families cannot afford to buy land either. The implications of land scarcity are already being felt by young people in families with small land plots. One newly married Charay man expressed the frustration of many people we spoke with: 'In my father's generation, he could clear land as much as he needed for farming. But in my generation, everywhere, there are owners. We cannot clear land. If we want land, we have to buy it. Land is very expensive now. We have to work to earn money and save money for buying land for farming' (II126).

What was evident over the period of our study, between 2015 and 2020, was the increase in young people who are embarking on forming their own family without land and a growing distinction between land-poor families and those who have managed to accumulate or hold onto their land. Young men without land expressed their frustration as they see others' lives improving. A 21-year-old Charay man illustrates this growing divide. He married 6 months ago, and neither his in-laws nor his parents have enough land to pass on to the couple. He currently lives with his wife's family although he is itching to build his own house for his family. However, his wife suffers from a chronic illness that requires frequent doctor visits and expensive medication.

> I do not know where to go now. As Indigenous people, whatever effort we make, when we live with our parents, we plant cassava, cashew, etc. and the result is kept for daughters. When we marry, we will leave home and come to live with our parents-in-law and we do not bring any resources along with us.
> [Did your mother pass on some land to you?]
> She only has 2 hectares of cashew. She asked how could she share land with me as it was kept for my sister? She said I could come to live with my parents-in-law, so I would get land from them. I agreed and came out with empty hands. Now I cannot compete with the others because I have no resources. If the parents of both sides are able to help then it's OK, but in our case this is not possible.
> (II025)

This man's frustration with his current condition and prospects is evident; the system that ensures land for young people has broken down as his wife's family has no land and his family have only enough to share with his sisters. Thus, while the matrilineal inheritance norm was previously understood as fair, given that men inherited from their wife's side, for this man, this norm is now seen as immoral, for he contributes labour and resources to the household but comes out 'empty handed'. This man accepts that wage work will be the future for many young Charay but does not imagine this to be a viable income, because 'every day, people sell labour for 10,000Riel or 20,000Riel per day. So how can they survive with that income?' His narrative reveals an inter-generational tension between the 'traditional' customs and young people's ideas. In the interview, he was dismissive of Charay customs, such as spending money slaughtering valuable animals for funerals, because he said the context of land has changed:

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> If we still had land, fish and wildlife that used to provide us food, then it would be alright to stick to custom. But now, resources decrease and the custom of slaughtering twenty cattle would make the situation worse… I believe that if [Indigenous elders] considered young people's ideas, their situation could be better. Khmer come with no land, but now they have big areas of land. Indigenous people used to own big areas of land but now they have two hectares per family. So how about the next generation?

In this quote, the young man is both despairing at the thought of the next generation but also hopeful that young people have potential for change. His analysis of the social and ecological crisis in his community with the loss of land sees the Khmer migrants not as one force facilitating the loss of Indigenous land, but as a 'modern' model that the new generation needs to emulate. His desire to do something different from his elders motivates his desire to move out from his in-laws house; he does not dare raise this idea himself but urges his wife to discuss it with her parents, because 'if we separate from them, we may face shortage or fulfilment'. The ambiguity in this sentiment reveals his frustration; with extremely limited choices available to him, he would rather express agency in taking the risk of moving away from the (limited) protection of family.

6 | SHIFTING INHERITANCE PRACTICES

As people negotiate the tensions between often conflicting moral values, we see a proliferation of inheritance practices, rather than any one practice becoming dominant. We discuss two main trends in our interviews below.

6.1 | From matrilineality to bilateralism

One of the most pronounced shifts (and with the greatest repercussions for gender relations) is the move from matrilineal to bilateral land inheritance amongst Charay families. People discussed this change primarily in interviews, which focused on what people have actually done, rather than the focus group discussions that articulated social norms of what people *ought* to do, and which tended to articulate ongoing expectations of matrilineal inheritance. One focus group of Charay participants explored the way bilateral inheritance was becoming a norm, with one woman saying:

> If we have resources, we also give them to [our sons] such as motorbikes. If we have land, we also give them land. Now, we follow Khmer people. Sons are also our children. As long as we have enough land, we give land to them, too
>
> (Charay woman, FGD2).

Here, following Khmer norms implies a different moral economy of land inheritance whereby equality between boys and girls is most important, although this only applies to land-rich families who have 'enough land' to share with all their children. When the interviewer pushed the group to clarify what this shift to bilateralism might look like in a specific situation of a mid-sized landholding, they clarified that the norm for poorer families with less land was still matrilineal inheritance:

Q: For example, you have 4 children and you have 2 hectares of *Chamkar* (crop) land. Do you still give land to the son?

Participant 1: No, we do not because the family only has two hectares…

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Participant 2: … Only when we have a large landholding, then we can give land to our sons too. Sons only get the remaining land after giving it to daughters. (FGD2)

While other focus group discussions suggested that normative expectations of what people ought to do is still focused on matrilineality, it was clear that this norm is breaking down and a diversity of practices are proliferating. In interviews, people suggested that the old inheritance norms were no longer fair if men were unable to gain use rights on land from in-laws or clear new land plots from the forest, and families said they were starting to pass small land parcels down to their sons as well as daughters (111, 123, 156, 168):

> We start to share small parcels of land to our sons when we have some land. When my daughter got married, it was my responsibility to share land with the couple. And when my son got married, then it was the responsibility of the woman's parents. But the woman's side does not have land, so I shared some land to the couple also. We now behave like Khmer culture.
>
> (Charay man, II019)

> Now, many people do not follow our culture, particularly land inheritance. They give lands to both sons and daughters, if they can, if they have enough land. But for sons living with parents after marriage, I do not see this so much yet, but sons also take care of their parents when their parents get old.
>
> (Charay man, II130)

As this person suggests, the drift towards bilateral inheritance was generally seen only in cases where people had large enough land holdings to share. The shifting sense of what ought to be done emerged from a concern for the next generation. One 55-year-old Charay man, in conversation with his son, spoke eloquently about land scarcity and deepening inequality within his community and said he was determined to give land to all his children:

Father: For me, I equally passed on land to all of my children. No matter how big or small the residential land is, I wanted to share it equally to all my children.

Son: If parents do not give land to their sons, how can they have land for living? If my parents did not pass on land to me, everything would be finished. If a son gets married to a woman whose parents do not have land, what can he do? Where could he find land these days?

Father: I agree that we should give land to all children. It is not like the past where people could clear land wherever they wanted. I lie down and I think of the next generation; they face difficulty from today onwards.

This exchange highlights the way inheritance is negotiated inter-generationally. The son here puts his case to his father that if he cannot get land from his or his wife's family, it now cannot be found elsewhere, and his father agrees with him.

Other participants more explicitly suggested the son's role in re-shaping inheritance norms. The power of the younger generation in inheritance negotiations also extended to some adult children who said that they chose to give back their land or not take land their parents promised them because they knew that this would leave their parents in a difficult position in future years (Charay man, 116). Others said it was inconvenient to take the land as they did not live nearby, or they would choose and buy land themselves (Charay woman, 168). For example, a Khmer man who was brought up by his grandmother inherited land and livestock from his wife's grandmother and from his parents, while his in-laws offered him land which he and his wife refused because they felt that the in-laws did not have enough land to survive themselves. He noted, ‘This is because on my side we have enough land and some property but for my wife's family, they have nothing. Actually, they gave us the land but we rejected it because I know they don't have anything’ (75).

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The increasing numbers of Khmer in-migrants in the Cambodian uplands has strongly influenced the move towards bilateral inheritance norms and has encouraged a reimagining of ideas of fairness. In one of our interviews, an older Indigenous man said that he started thinking about new ways of distributing family land after discussions with Khmer people he knows:

> I started to think like this about three or four years. We have to provide for our children equally and not give land to other relatives who won't take care of me and my wife when we are old… Currently, I still have power to work and it's ok, but when I'm old, how can I survive? If I get sick, who can help me? Only my children.
>
> (Tampuan man, 142)

This quote suggests that the emerging norm of inheriting land bilaterally to both daughters and sons appears to be motivated both by the possibility that sons will not receive land from their in-laws, as well as the influence of Khmer migrant practices of bilateral inheritance. One 25-year-old Charay women said: 'Charay people learn from Khmer practice. They are afraid of their sons getting jealous of their sisters who inherited land. So some families start passing land on to sons too' (141).

A second way in which the Khmer migrants influence inheritance norms in Indigenous communities is through the growing number of mixed marriages between Khmer and Indigenous couples, most often with Khmer men marrying Indigenous women. Some Indigenous interviewees felt that Khmer migrant men married Indigenous women just so they could claim land from them. Some Indigenous families responded by changing their practices when their daughters married Khmer, such as several Indigenous women who said their mothers did not share any land with them upon marriage as they did not trust their Khmer husbands not to take the land and sell it (128).

6.2 | Delay and deferment

A common theme that emerged was that decisions on land use rights are now made through negotiation between both families. If the wife's parents do not have land, for example, the couple could ask to use the land belonging to her husband's side, often with the caveat that they were only given temporary usufruct rights. This allows children time to save money for themselves while ensuring control over land is maintained within the wife's family. It also enables parents to potentially ensure land is not parcelled out into plots too small to farm.

This sense of inheritance decisions as a temporary stop-gap emerged in different ways as parents and children looked to delay decisions. It became apparent that families who found themselves quite suddenly in the position of not having enough land to provide for their children—whether because of land grabs, forest enclosure or land sales—did not yet have a strategy for passing on their assets, and many seemed unsure what they would do. In some cases, families were putting off passing on land, even though their children had already married (126, 147). Some young people said they were delaying getting married; such as one young Charay woman with a partner and 2-year-old baby, who stated 'I do not marry yet. I do not organize the wedding reception because we do not have money and cannot sell land to get some' (145).

Some families said that they were using family planning methods to have fewer children, because, as one 38-year-old Charay woman with three children noted, 'I don't want to have more children because at this time there are no free lands for the next generation to access.' (156). A focus group of women said they only had two to three children each 'because we do not have land. We won't have land for our children if we have many children. Children won't get land for doing farming' (FG4). The desire for fewer children was also bound up with the shift to cash cropping and the broader competitive capitalist environment that made families a burden, as one woman said when asked why she had fewer children than her parent's generation: 'During that time, we did not cultivate cassava yet.

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Now, people compete with each other in doing farming. If we have small children, we won't be able to compete with other people. Only when we have money to spend can we have more children' (Charay woman, II048).

In focus groups, people said that if families do not have enough land to give to all their daughters, they may collectively farm the land, with the plan that their children would eventually earn enough money to support themselves (Charay women, FGD01). A Charay woman in her 50s who had eight children said that she had not distributed land to her daughters when they married because she was worried it was not enough for all of them and so she instead gave use rights to her married daughters to share management of the land (147). Several Indigenous people said they share cultivation of rice with their parents/parents-in-law because the land is not large enough to divide between children, and then the wider family shares the rice harvest amongst themselves for eating. This arrangement is more unusual with cash crops, however (Charay woman, 186). Some families with mature cashew plantations said that even if they had only a small amount of land to pass on to their children, they would allow their children and grandchildren to harvest the cashew and keep the money, or find other jobs as labourers (Tampuan man, 74).

For those couples who choose to continue living with their parents (and in-laws) to save money, or because they have no land, the question of how the family arranges everyday expenses, food and care arrangements must be continually negotiated. Some young married couples who are still living with their parents articulated their plans for saving money to buy land, as one 24-year-old Tampuan man laid out: ‘Yes I have a plan, first I will farm and save money to buy land, then make a house to build on my parents' home land’ (II036). We only heard this kind of firm plan amongst those who had some hope of finding a decent job that would enable them to save; in this case, the man works as a truck driver that pays better than the daily wage labour most of the village young men are involved with. For many young people, the possibility of saving to buy land was simply not on the horizon. People wryly noted, ‘for Charay men, they do not save money. When they get money, they spend it all. They depend on their parents and parents-in-law’ (Charay men, FGD05).

The shifting temporalities in inheritance decisions are also apparent with the changes in what is seen as valuable land to pass on to children. With the constant need for cash to pay for food that now must be bought from the market due to the reduction in rice production and forest loss, passing on rice land or forest land that has not yet been cleared was seen as less desirable than passing on land with mature fruiting cashew trees. Even if parents had very little land to give to children, growing cashew on the land was viewed as a way of increasing its value for children through providing a steady income source (Charay woman, 156). How well someone did through inheritance was also dependent on what crop ‘boomed’, how old the existing crop was and how fertile the soil (Charay man, 99). One young Charay woman from a family of eight siblings including four daughters said that her parents had passed on 1.5 ha land each to the daughters when they married (land that the father had previously ‘cleared little by little with family labour’) and also grew cashew trees on the land to provide an ongoing income for the grandchildren so they did not have to work on other people's farms:

> My father grows cashew trees for me. It is my land which he passed down to me but since he's still alive and has physical strength, he tries to grow cashew trees for me. He says that if he passes away, at least there are cashew nuts for his grandchildren to harvest and sell to get cash … All of this land, someone tried to buy but my father said he doesn't sell land. … Land is now very expensive. Like my land, if I decide to sell, they would give me $30,000 but my father said he doesn't want to sell because he has many children and grandchildren.

This statement further raises the issue evoked in other interviews of who retains decision-making power over what can be done with inherited land. In this exchange, it is unclear whether the father's status as the patriarch prevails over his daughter's interest in potentially selling the land or if it is due to the fact that he is still working and receiving returns from the cashew farm that he does not want to give it up. Several of our other interviews also evoked the idea of time horizons and returns on investments in cash crops that may require farmers to withstand pressures to sell land for short term gain in the interest of an ongoing stream of income.

7 | SECURING LOVE: THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS OF LAND INHERITANCE

There was a strong sense that caring for parents was a moral obligation expected of children, but also that it was not automatic. The care of daughters for their parents is expected, but the obligation is not guaranteed; many people said that it depended on whether the daughters 'love them' and wanted to care for them.

> [If parents don't have land to share with their daughters] it is up to each person. Some daughters take care of their parents but some do not. They just let their parents live on their own.
>
> (Charay and Tampuan women, FDG1)

> If children love parents, then they would give them some money. But if they do not them, then they won't.
>
> (Charay woman married to Khmer man, 128)

Even amongst Charay male focus groups from the same commune, people differed in their opinions on what would be expected from daughters when parents do not have land to share.

> When parents do not have land, the daughter would come to live with the man's side. In this case, the old aged parents dare not come to live with their daughter. It is forbidden. However, she also looks after her parents from afar. She cannot bring her parents to live with her anymore because the man's side already brought her.
>
> (FGD03)

> For a daughter who has an elderly mother or a family who has a daughter without land, the couple needs to take care of the mother. In case the mother has only one daughter, the daughter needs to take care of her mother until she passes away. It is the culture. The daughter can live with the man's side when the man's side is nearby. If the daughter's mother is a widow, then it is prohibited to ask the daughter to come to live with man's side.
>
> (FGD04)

These two groups articulated strong norms about what should be ('it is the culture') and what should *not* be ('it is prohibited', 'it is forbidden'), although the two views appear to contradict one another. In both focus groups and interviews, these questions of what ought to be done when the wife's family has no land were met with conflicting answers that drew on different moral logics. In the first quote, it is the landless wife's family who 'dare not' ask to be cared for; the obligation is on them to enable the daughter to leave because they cannot provide land and the younger generation's land access is privileged; while in the second quote, the obligation is on the man's side not to ask, as the care for older people (particularly widows who may have little support) is privileged. Others also articulated the obligation to care for older people as a young person's duty. As one Charay male focus group member declared, this obligation is part of loving and marrying a woman whether or not her family have land: 'In case the man already loved the women, he must take care of his parents-in-law and agree to sell his labour so the couple can live with the wife's parents until they pass away. Because this is the Charay culture' (FGD06).

Older people who do not have land to share with their children said they were fearful that they would not be cared for, such as a Charay woman who commented:

> I used to feel that I am so happy because I thought that I have a lot of land for my children, but now I don't know what to think because if I share my land with my children, I will have no land when I am

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> old. If I am old and I still have land, my children will come close to me and take care of me. But if I don't have land when I am old, no one will come to see me.
>
> (162)

Some older people are taking on risky strategies to try to secure land (and thus care), including taking on debt in order to buy land, on the understanding that this would mean that they would be cared for once they were no longer able to work (Tampuan woman 87, Charay man 71). Others tried to secure more land by selling the small amount of land they inherited and buying land in more remote areas that was cheaper so that they could give their children a farming livelihood and continue to live with them (Tampuan family 64, Charay man 80). 'We know it's far from here but it's better than having nothing. We are afraid of having no land for our children when we get old. If we can plant cashew trees we will earn an income even though we are old' (Charay man, 80). These strategies bring into stark relief the class differences that shape the various strategies people use to secure care. Older people whose children did not live nearby said they hired others to work their land if they could afford it (151). One wealthier older Charay man who grew cashew, banana and pepper said 'I earn money from renting out my 10 hectares of farming land to buy rice to eat… Both of us are old enough to relax' (151).

To understand the fraught idea of love in inheritance decisions, considering families who have only sons is instructive, for in this case another woman is expected to care for older parents-in-law, normally the daughter-in-law or the maternal niece. A Tampuan woman with five sons said that she is dividing her land and gifting 1 ha to each son upon marriage but has kept 3 ha in reserve:

> This 3 ha, I will give to any son that wants to live with me and take care of me when I am old until the end of my life … I have 5 sons, I am sure someone will want to live with me. If we do not have anything for them, maybe my daughter-in-law won't want to live with us, but if we have land for them, they would agree to live with me. Or if not, I will give land to anyone that wants to take care of me during my old age until the end of our lives.

While this woman planned to secure care from her sons by promising them land and was prepared to give her land to someone else if her sons could not care for her, some interviewees disagreed with the custom of the maternal niece inheriting land and taking care of them when people did not have daughters of their own. One Charay man said that this was a 'stupid idea' because only their own children would take care of them, so they would rather pass land down to their son and his wife, even if this meant doing things differently from tradition (142).

8 | MORAL ECONOMIES OF LAND INHERITANCE AND DEEPENING CLASS, GENDER, AGE AND ETHNIC DIVISIONS

One of the main implications of land scarcity and the changing patterns of inheritance is a deepening of class, ethnic and generational divisions within communities. The narratives emerging from our research identified growing inequality between those who were able to amass land and capital through logging prior to land prices rising and forest land enclosure and those who have little or no land to pass on to their children and few other decent livelihood options available.

The discussion of moral economy illuminates the multiple obligations within families, which may be privileged over class- or ethnic-based collective action over land. In Ratanakiri, Indigenous communities, including those who participated in our research, have been active in mobilising collectively in resistance to ELC-based displacement and agitating for Communal Land Title, since the mid-2000s. This action contributed to an anger toward agri-business companies in our 2015–2016 interviews, in which some people said they did not want to work at the rubber plantations as the ELCs had stolen community land. There was also a marked sense of shame associated with working on

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the plantations. But in 2019–2020 interviews, this sense of anger and shame was much less apparent. Young people in particular rationalised their move into wage work as an inevitable shift. Furthermore, despite more visible class inequality between the wealthy (primarily Khmer as well as some Indigenous families) who were able to accumulate more land and fulfil care obligations and the poor families (Indigenous land-poor families and landless Khmer migrants who migrated to the area because they had no land in their home provinces) who struggle to fulfil care obligations, there was little discussion of class-based solidarity in our more recent interviews.

Discussing a similar acceptance of land loss and increased inequality in lowland Cambodia, Green and Bylander (2021) suggest that due to the individualising narrative of microfinance, the extent of personal debt and cash crop boom/bust cycles that facilitate livelihood crises is seen as a personal failing rather than a structural problem and thus does not engender the same kind of anger and collective resistance as land grabbing does. In this context, for those without land, the shame felt by people for failing to provide for their children, and young men's growing insistence that inheritance norms are unjust are encouraging some parents to also give land to their sons. Those without land generally provide their sons with motorbikes; this is a long-standing practice in some families, but many people noted that now young men want the latest sport motorbike, and parents will go into debt to buy it, such as one Charay man who said he and his wife took a loan because ‘my son asked for a motorbike; Honda Dream 2018. It costs 2020USD’ (II19). The need for cash to purchase expensive motorbikes for all sons can create financial stress, as one young Charay woman noted:

> My parents love their children equally. Like my older brother who married a woman at Plang village. After a few years, he did not have money to buy a motorbike, so we found money to buy a motorbike for him. My younger brother also wants to have a motorbike, but since my father is now old and I don't have money, we do not know what to do
>
> (131).

One couple (a Khmer wife and Charay husband) who gave their son an expensive motorbike said, ‘we gave them [motorbikes] so that they have their own assets. If we did not give them the motorbikes, other parents would say we do not love our children’ (KI12).

A lack of family land is a particular issue for girls, as their status has previously been reproduced as holders of the family name and property, but they get married early and usually receive limited schooling. This means it is difficult for them to move into jobs that require literacy or capital, and they are more likely to end up labouring on farms if they do not have sufficient land in their own family. Indigenous families who had limited land often connected land scarcity to the growing class of landless labourers in the village, and the potential that their children would become labourers:

> I also do not know [what we will do about land inheritance]. We will wait and see and follow other people. Now, parents could only inherit around one hectare to each of their children. And it is hard to make a living with this amount of land. They would have to live by selling their labour their whole lives.
>
> (Charay man, 158)

Khmer families without land similarly worried about their ability to provide for their children and expressed concern that their children would become labourers or migrants to the city or Thailand. Others suggested that they may have to delay forming their own household, because without land ‘they can only continue living with their parents and taking care of their parent's farm, tapping their parents’ rubber trees or going to work for other people’ (Khmer woman, 131).

Migration out of the community due to land scarcity was evident amongst Khmer families but not Indigenous families. Indigenous women in particular are less mobile as they are constrained by social norms from driving

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motorbikes or travelling to the city, and they are also less able to take on jobs where they cannot bring young children with them to work. Education levels for women in Ratanakiri remain much lower than for men, and for many interviewees, this was linked with marrying young and needing to perform farm labour, as one 21-year-old Charay woman noted: 'I decided to stop studying and get married when I was young, so I do not have enough education, which has caused me difficulty, I cannot do anything besides farming' (II005). In contrast, men have taken jobs in mines or plantations, are much more likely to have an education and are migrating around the province for wage labour opportunities (Gironde et al., 2021). Some young Indigenous men are now migrating to Thailand or Phnom Penh, as is common amongst lowland Khmer (Bylander, 2014; Derks, 2008), although this was still rare at the time of our interviews. Very few young people said that they had aspirations to migrate or to move into off-farm occupations; even those with very small land plots could only imagine farming in the future, as a 25-year-old Charay woman said, 'I think it is only my cashew and my cassava farm that would provide me a good living in the future. I do not see any other opportunities' (II014).

Labouring opportunities available locally are often low paid, and the rate of remuneration is generally even lower for women than it is for men. Because most labour is paid piecemeal (depending on performance), older people and those who are unable to work quickly receive less pay, and some told us that they are simply not considered for work. It is uncommon in some communities for Indigenous people to labour on the large plantations. They are more likely to work for other Indigenous families, and sometimes for Khmer migrants, but the availability of these jobs fluctuates.

Some mothers talked about the need to educate their daughters, as they could not rely on having land, and education was seen as a potential path out of poverty and the dependence on labouring. One Charay woman whose Khmer husband secretly sold the land she had inherited from her parents, then deserted her and their five young children, said she was determined to keep the children in school:

> It will be up to them whether they can survive… It would be difficult to sustain daily living as I only have 1 ha land each to give to my daughters … They can grow cassava and get money to buy rice. Besides that, they can sell their labour to others [bitter laugh]. I think it will be hard for them.
>
> Q: Do your children go to school?
>
> A: Yes, they go every day. I always push them to go to school. If they do not listen to me, they will become labourers. They would be shamed in the future … And any children who follow me, they won't become labourers. …
>
> (160)

Most families, however, did not talk about strategies for preparing their daughters for off-farm employment, and while many families hoped to give their daughters more education, this was limited by the inaccessibility of schools and gender norms on early marriage for girls. Many young people were well aware that they may not receive land from their parents, but in the absence of any obvious decent off-farm livelihood options, and with out-migration not (yet) a feature of life for most Charay and Tampuan communities, there was a sense of anxiety about what the future without access to farming and forest land might hold.

9 | CONCLUSIONS

In Ratanakiri, the moral economy of land inheritance is changing, as people no longer have enough land to pass on to children and access to forest resources for clearing new land is increasingly limited. Traditional mosaics of flexible private and communal land use and mixed agricultural and forest production are being supplanted by fixed plantations of privately-owned commercial mono-crops. An impact of these rapid land-use changes has been that social and cultural norms around land inheritance appear to be in flux, as people find different strategies to cope with land scarcity, help their children get established, and prepare for old age. At the same time, the Cambodian government,

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together with multinational agribusiness companies and international financial institutions, is actively involved in promoting forms of neo-liberal land governance that undermine traditional systems of land tenure and inheritance, without replacing these with any state-based forms of social security.

Our research shows that access to communal forest and grazing land as well as the social security that comes through matrilineal inheritance patterns are particularly important for women and girls, as well as for elderly family members, and that land continues to perform a crucial affective and cultural function in upland communities in addition to being an economic asset. The role played by land in securing social reproduction is, however, filled with ambiguity and some respondents highlighted that possession of land could also serve to limit young women's aspirations for greater mobility and non-farming livelihoods.

Analysing the moral economy of inheritance brings attention to affect in land and social relations of care in agrarian communities. Inheritance decisions are deeply emotional and filled with ambivalence, familial loyalties, attachment to specific places, hope and love. Ageing farmers keep hold of their land partly to secure their own subsistence and support, but also because they have inherited it from ancestors and because they have an obligation to pass it on to their children (Evans, 2016). Gill (2013) points to the temporality tied up with inheritance, as every decision is 'made within a web of competing responsibilities' to the past ancestral connection a family may have to the land, to the present in which socio-economic and ecological pressures make rural livelihoods increasingly difficult, and to the uncertain future. In rural Cambodia, parents feel an obligation to provide land for their children, and children feel an obligation to care for the parents who raised them. People talk about the relationship children have towards their parents as a 'debt of gratitude' (Green & Bylander, 2021).

The shifts that we are seeing away from matrilineality and matrilocality toward bilateralism, and potentially to patrilocality for women from land-poor families, have implications for gender and inter-generational relations. These changes may mean less support for care labour—and the women who predominantly perform this. And in the context of women's lack of mobility and education and gendered and racialised ideologies of the dangers of migration and urban areas, women who do not have land have few choices other than low-paid wage labour. For poor women, particularly, not having land to bring into marriage may mean difficulty in finding a suitable marriage partner. And for young men from poor families, this means they cannot get land and can no longer clear land or benefit from financial and political connections to accumulate it; in this context, the gendered ideologies of the way both partners provide in marriage have broken down. This creates new inter-generational tensions as parents concerned about securing their own care in old age and providing for their children continue with the tradition of passing on land to daughters, while sons feel as though they have been treated unjustly, and demand new assets such as motorbikes or money, that families may go into debt to provide.

The rapid commercialisation of land and agriculture in upland Cambodia in the absence of state-provided social protected has created a 'crisis of care'. As growing land scarcity undermines the informal mechanisms of social security for young and old that were previously provided through traditional patterns of matrilineal and matrilocal land inheritance, it remains to be seen what forms of familial care will prevail.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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