

Reading remittance landscapes: female migration and agricultural transition in the Philippines

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Abstract

In the Philippines, female migration for overseas contract work is transforming local agricultural landscapes. Yet the changes in land, labour, crops and cropping patterns that are occurring may not reflect local ecology or economic opportunity as much as they represent gendered versions of local modernity, envisioned at a new global scale. This study links local agricultural change to local interests in global migration and reads local landscapes as reflecting those links.

Drawing on interviews and observations from a case study of a community in the northern Philippine province of Ifugao, this paper suggests how women's migration is both a cause and a result of a transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture. Migrating for waged work overseas, women withdraw their labour and knowledge from agriculture. At

home, solo fathers usually choose to plant new, in-put intensive crops with the cash remittances they receive from their absent wives. Men's interests in 'modern' commercial crops may overdetermine their wives' preferences for more secure and ecologically sustainable cropping patterns. Tracing migrants' remittances into investment in crops and labour, the analysis ties female migration to household land-use decisions, suggesting how such decisions may undermine or enhance long-term agricultural sustainability.

Keywords: gender relations, migration, remittances, agricultural transformation

Introduction – migration and changing landscapes

In rural Southeast Asia, circular migration for work both overseas and in urban centres is recreating translocalities from what were previously imagined as isolated, peripheral communities (Rigg, 2001; Seddon et al., 2002; Bouahom et al, 2004). My case study site, Haliap, is one such Philippine *barangay* (village). The community of Haliap is located in Asipulo Municipality, in the southeastern foothills of Ifugao Province and is part of the Cordillera Central region of the Philippine island of Northern Luzon. The people of Haliap hosted me for two periods of field research on gender and agriculture, first in 1991-1992, followed by a second visit in 1996-1997.

Ifugao Province is classified as an area inhabited by 'cultural communities' or 'tribes' and the communities of Asipulo Municipality speak one of several indigenous languages. Most people in Haliap speak the Adyangan 'dialect' of Ifugao at home while they learn Pilipino and English, the national languages, through the school system, radio and print

media. Approximately fourteen hours from Manila, Asipulo's town centre at Amduntog is accessible by jeepney down a gravel road passing through Haliap. There is no telephone service and electricity only arrived in 1996. Yet the indigenous Filipino people from this area understand themselves as world-travellers and global subjects, rather than 'tribal minorities'. This self-understanding as part of a 'modern' and 'global' world is largely constructed through the experiences of female overseas contract workers (OCWs) and their households (McKay, 2001). These migrant women generally take short-term contracts as live-in domestic workers in places referred to by Haliap residents as 'abroad' – predominantly in Singapore and Hong Kong and occasionally in 'Saudi', the Arabian Gulf region. .

OCWs remit money into their home communities through their families. Money arriving from workers abroad is often invested in material goods. Remittances are spent on the construction and renovation of houses and corner shops (called *sari-sari* stores), and the purchase of agricultural implements, cars and motorcycles. Returning workers themselves bring additional appliances, clothing and toys as gifts as well as frequently sending home large boxes of household goods. Sometimes OCW remittance money is used to start a small business such as a tailor shop, a woodcraft shop or such like. In many rural communities, though, remittances from overseas are initially used as capital for new commercial agricultural crops in an attempt to diversify livelihoods and increase household livelihood security. Investment in agriculture appears to be particularly frequent where men farm without the labour of female partners and require new technologies and wage workers to replace and supplement household labour flows. The movement of OCWs to and from 'abroad' thus transforms rural landscapes in material

ways. In Haliap, people assert that a community with many workers overseas can be distinguished both by the newness of its houses, cars, and exotic appliances, as well as the number of farmers producing commercial crops.

This paper explores the intersection between OCW migration and the conversion of agricultural land from subsistence rice production to the new commercial crop of beans. In Haliap, I argue, bean gardens can be read as remittance landscapes – they are sites for the investment of remittances and they are also a source of the capital outlay needed for overseas migration. The case study, below, shows that crops planted in Haliap fields say volumes about how the people planting them envision themselves in relation to global labour markets and processes of globalisation (Kelly, 1999). To demonstrate this, the analysis links local landscapes and land use to the translocal nature of what seem, at first glance, to be apparently ‘local’ places and engages a growing literature on land-use transitions and globalisation.

Sandra

Comment: Doesn't flow well.

Theorising landscape change and globalisation

Around the world, increasing rural participation in global flows of labour, information and value is creating transnational networks that change the future trajectories of local places and livelihoods (Bebbington and Batterbury, 2001: 375). Just as places are transformed by globalisation, so are the significance and meanings local people attribute to the practices that produce local landscapes (Bebbington and Batterbury, 2001: 371). Such transformations can be seen through changes in the gendered division of labour. In Haliap, the possibilities apparently prised open by female migration for work in global

labour markets are changing livelihoods, ecological dynamics, and cultural norms for gender and labour.

To theorise contemporary rural agricultural change, researchers are investigating how non-farm work, both local and extra-local, impinges on farming practices. Rigg and Ritchie (2002: 360) show how successful rural Thai experiences of globalisation are producing creative combinations of production for household subsistence, commercial markets and specialist 'niche' markets. In other communities, however, vulnerable households lose subsistence security and end up in cash-dependent poverty. As Rigg and his co-authors amply demonstrate, recent rural experiences of globalisation have had very diverse outcomes (Bouahom et al., 2004; Rigg and Nattapoolwat, 2001; Rigg and Ritchie, 2002). Globalisation in rural Southeast Asia does not necessarily have universalising effects, but can open up new spaces for local agency and livelihood diversification.

The diversity of globalisation outcomes means that contemporary processes of rural agricultural transition cannot be described through one explanatory sequence that has predictive utility for all cases (Rigg and Ritchie, 2002: 369). Each case exhibits a diverse array of differentiating processes occurring in local labour, land tenure and land-use practices and, instead of being able to tell a common story of the impacts of globalisation on rural livelihoods, researchers find they must describe and puzzle out 'a mosaic of divergent responses from rural households' (Bouahom et al., 2004: 608).

Thus far, there is little work on gender and migration in this ‘mosaic’, yet migrant’s off-farm work is clearly becoming an important rural livelihood strategy in some areas. In rural Thailand, for example, local households are engaged in multiple activities because agriculture, except for those households with ample landholdings, can no longer meet the needs of the average family (Rigg and Nattapoolwat, 2001: 957). Here, globalisation has provided wider local job opportunities for some of the rural poor (Rigg and Nattapoolwat, 2001: 953). Meanwhile, in Laos, female migration for domestic work across the border in Thailand has levered some distressed households out of poverty (Bouahom et al, 2004: 616). Other non-migrant households, unable to find waged work nearby, are losing livelihood security and increasingly making decisions based on distress. Both the Thai and Lao studies illustrate how sustaining local subsistence in rural agrarian communities is becoming increasingly predicated on a certain level of engagement in the non-farm market economy (Bouahom et al, 2004: 610).

Increasing engagement with the non-farm market economy and local mobility suggest that, across Southeast Asia, globalization means sending labour across international borders. This implies that both poverty and sufficiency are now being locally produced and reproduced in new ways – through new, globalized forms of livelihood strategy and locality that are producing new spatial forms of organization for rural places.

My analysis of agricultural transition in Haliap suggests how these new globalised forms of livelihood can be seen, as Bebbington and Batterbury (2001) suggest, in local landscapes and through local land-use preferences. My contribution to the research on the ‘mosaic of divergent responses’ to globalisation will be to gender some of these

local changes. Below, I examine how gender identities and gendered relations within households come into play in a case where migration is both a cause and a result of an ongoing agricultural transition.

Observations – tradition and change in Ifugao landscapes

‘Ifugao culture is rice culture’ is a truism repeated to visitors to the province. It almost goes without saying that if you are asking an Ifugao person about ‘land’, you are discussing rice paddies, traditionally the only kind of land to represent subsistence security. Terraced rice fields are the most secure form of real property in the local land tenure system (see Scott, 1988). Held in trust by individual households for family lineages, traditional protocols for sales, rental, mortgages and sharecropping overdetermine their management. Historically, the possession and proper cultivation of rice fields determines social status in a system that divides people into two groups. People in the wealthy *kadangyan* group achieved this status through inheritance – bilateral primogeniture with lands transferred on marriage – or through the staging of elaborate prestige feasts that redistribute their accumulated wealth. Poor people, *nawotwot*, were their clients, exchanging labour in planting and harvesting rice for a share of the crop and providing political support as required.

In Haliap, traditional class relations and subsistence land-use patterns are being superseded by a new kind of wealth, based in subsistence security, but largely created through successful investment in commercial crops, education, and entry into local politics. Most households combine subsistence cultivation or simple commodity production of wet rice with swidden and the commercial production of coffee and beans.

Farmers make their cropping decisions on the availability of water and the arrival of the rainy season, typically in May through November. The availability of labour is also a crucial factor. Farmers must juggle the specific requirements of each crop and the vagaries of climate as well as anticipate the particular bottlenecks in the supply of agricultural labour each year. As we will see, non-agricultural wages and the daily rates paid for work on commercial crops are increasingly competing for the exchange and household labour flows that have traditionally sustained subsistence rice production. Thus farmers who have the resources to pay cash for work have a comparative productive advantage. My respondents identified labour shortages as a key factor in the changing prevalence of crops on the local landscape.

The most spectacular shift in the agricultural landscape has been the conversion of wet rice paddies into ‘gardens’ of green beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*). Data collected in April 1996 by Central Cordillera Agricultural Programme extension workers show that twenty three percent of terraced ricefields in Haliap, formerly used for wet rice, were then being cultivated as bean gardens (CECAP, 1996). Recalling Rigg and Ritchie’s (2002: 369) comments on the lack of a single explanatory sequence for agricultural change, respondents attributed the conversion of rice paddies to gardens to several factors. One reason cited was the interest of younger farmers in ‘modern’ methods of input-intensive crop production being promoted by the local officers of the Department of Agriculture. Another factor was the utility of gardening beans as a site to invest comparatively smaller amounts of cash earned through wage labour or arriving from workers abroad. However, the over-arching cause for land-use change identified by many respondents was a growing lack of water to irrigate the rice terraces. People attributed this lack of water to geological

causes – the after-effects of a recent earthquake – or climatic change – ‘global warming’ – as well as the social effects of increasing population and resource competition. Traditional inheritance patterns and large family sizes produced a small number of land-secure households with many land-poor and land-less younger siblings. These land-poor households were involved both in intensified logging in the forested areas of the upper watershed and clearing swidden on the forested slopes.

A paradox of cultivation

Population growth, inheritance and production for the market are creating a ‘paradox in cultivation’ in Haliap where each form of land-use limits the suitable land and resources available for other forms of agriculture or extraction. Most of the desirable, flat and fertile areas near water sources have long been terraced for wet rice paddies. The ownership of this land, traditionally used to produce subsistence security in rice, is concentrated in the wealthier third of households in the community. Meanwhile, households who have not inherited any rice paddies are forced to engage in production for the market and grow all of their subsistence crops, including dry rice and *camote* (sweet potato), in swidden plots. These poorer and necessarily more market-oriented households are depleting the forest in the upslope recharge area to extract lumber, and to make gardens and swidden. Their land-use choices appeared to be reducing the water supply available for irrigating the wet rice of the more subsistence-secure farmers below.

In response to the water shortage, the wealthier rice field owners were themselves converting more and more paddies into ‘garden’, producing beans as a cash crop that could be sold to purchase rice and other food through the national market. Cultivating

paddy fields as garden meant a permanent land-use transition. Once planted with beans, paddy fields could then only be replanted with similarly input-intensive hybrid varieties of rice.

Not all households can make the switch to cash-cropping beans. Some 'landed' households produce just enough rice for their subsistence and supplement this with swidden vegetables and fruit, but cannot generate the capital or do not want to take the risk of diversifying into bean farming or migration. These households want secure irrigation for their fields. Meanwhile, other households want to rent, purchase or create new 'garden' areas close to water sources and the road network to grow beans in the best possible position. Conflicts over land use have emerged between households who wished to invest in the new bean crop and those struggling for subsistence solely by growing wet-rice. Though some forest is being converted to swidden and fallowed swidden to garden, it is terraced pond fields that make the 'best' and most productive garden plots.

Migration intensifies these pre-existing conflicts when the newly cashed-up households of migrants want access, through cash-based rental agreements, to paddy land in order to invest their money in beans. By creating demand for more 'garden' land, the investment of OCW remittances produces further water shortages and limits the land available for wet rice. Though it is plausible that the ten percent of Haliap households who reported engaging in transnational migration (a likely under-reporting) could own this twenty three percent of ricefields, it is unlikely. Some of the fields were probably converted to beans 'in advance' to raise the cash to support eventual migration, as will be outlined in the household example below.

Addressing the tension between livelihood strategies and land-use choices, several Haliap elders described it as one of ‘tradition’ versus ‘modern’ ways. They see that traditional livelihoods based on subsistence rice cultivation, supported by household and exchange labour and religious ritual, are coming into conflict with the ‘modernity’ of intensified market relations, wage labour, migration and secular practices producing beans.

Analysis of gender in an ongoing agricultural transition

To better understand the context of female migration from Haliap, we need a fine-grained, temporal analysis of the local agricultural cycle and the diversity of subsistence and commercial activities into which households allocate their labour (see also McKay, 2003).

Below, I sketch out the rice-farming system.

Two types of rice are grown in Asipulo – a dwindling number of paddies are planted with local, traditional varieties while the majority of farmers plant the ‘improved’ hybrid varieties of rice. Exchange labour work groups of women traditionally planted and harvested native rice. The traditional harvest was carried out with a small knife to preserve the seeds on the panicles and the rice was then bundled and carried from the fields to granaries by men. None of the crop was sold; instead, the rice was stored in bundles in family granaries for home consumption.

Hybrid rice is cultivated from seed bought in the market and planted twice in the year, in roughly January and July. Hybrid varieties require ‘medicines’ – chemical fertilisers and pesticides – for proper cultivation. People purchase these outright or on credit against the

sale of the harvest. Hybrid rice can be successfully alternated with beans, whereas traditional rice cannot. Respondents attribute this to the chemical inputs used for the beans drawing down the natural fertility of the soil (see Engelhard et al., 1991). Both men and women plant and harvest the hybrid rice. During the harvest of hybrid varieties, panicles are cut in swathes with a scythe and threshed in the field. Because harvesters use a scythe, rather than the knife, threshing is considered 'heavy work' so the harvest is now predominantly performed by male wage labourers. Threshed hybrid rice is placed in *cavan* bags (50 kg each) and men carry it to the road where it will be transported to a commercial rice mill, rather than a family granary. The field owner burns the rice straw on the field to return some nutrients to the soil. Post-milling, the owner either sells the harvest or stores it for family consumption. Since the varieties are standardised, a harvest of hybrid rice can be sold at the prevailing market price like any other commercial crop.

The gendered labour patterns for each type of rice are depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

This figure illustrates how the conversion of fields to hybrid rice from native varieties has freed up female labour. Men help with the planting and do most of the harvesting of the new varieties. Weeding, though done by women, is an intermittent task that requires less intense labour input over a longer period. Because the hybrid rice crops are most often sold for cash, farming tasks can be performed by day labourers paid in cash, rather than family or exchange labour. Men are first hired for waged work, while women's weeding

is usually unpaid family labour and women participate in planting and harvesting through exchange labour.

Labour bottlenecks

Both wage and exchange labour may be in short supply because of the attractions of waged work or cash-generating self-employment in agriculture. These labour shortages correspond to a yearly cycle. March through May are pre-harvest 'slack' months where both men and women look for paid contract work out-of-province – road paving, fruit picking and the like. May is the month for planting the swidden. Women spend their days working as exchange labour and household labour in the fields, while their husbands typically stay at home, caring for the children. Respondents reported that peak labour demand for both genders occurred during the August harvest through December field preparation and again, in the February planting season. At these bottleneck points in the yearly labour cycle, people are in demand as both exchange labourers and daily wage labourers.

Both men and women noted that, although tasks such as repairing the rice paddies may be ideally masculine, women often share in the labour when it is unpaid, while men are offered more waged work. For instance, in January, many of the younger men are busy with their own bean gardening and do not want to neglect their cash crop in order to perform exchange labour, which is 'unpaid' work. Women from poorer households now take their places in the exchange labour groups repairing the rice terraces. These young male gardeners have also started to hire landless and land-poor women as wage labourers to weed their bean gardens. These poorer women, from households that largely depend on

the market to meet their subsistence needs, are pleased to work for cash as many of their husbands already do.

Transitions in land-use and local identities

People have moved through this transition from traditional to commercial rice varieties while simultaneously experiencing much broader changes in the way they understand themselves. Women were traditionally the custodians of native rice varieties and the rituals used to ensure their productivity. But, by choosing to try to access the benefits available from certain religious practices, formal education and different roles within a gendered division of labour, many women have moved away from what community elders would call 'traditional' knowledge.

As part of this locally-mediated process of 'modernisation', the desirable gendering of work has become more specified and women, in particular, have withdrawn from the unpaid manual labour traditionally part of subsistence rice production. These local ideas of modernity and gender have developed in explicit dialogue with globalised representations of gender and ideas of progress promulgated by government departments, international aid projects and the national media. For instance, in my research interviews I found that an Asipulo woman referred to as a 'pure housewife' might well have a large agricultural supply business or own a store. Here, being identified as a housewife marks not a woman's confinement to a 'domestic' space, but her 'liberation' from the traditional manual labour of farming work and the 'modernity' of her business activities.

Opportunities for domestic work overseas mean that women's economic choices are not limited to the subsistence realm or the local labour market. Because people in Haliap struggle to make ends meet on an agricultural landbase that is inadequate to the needs of the population and to which they do not have secure tenure, the flexibility and mobility of local women is an important element within household strategies for secure livelihoods. The remittances sent by women working abroad are not only invested in new crops but also in land in areas outside Ifugao sending communities (see Gibson et al., 2001). The value of labour abroad means migrant women are the 'new heroines' of the Philippine economy and their families at home (Gibson et al, 2001). Sending households receiving regular flows of cash are the envy of their struggling neighbours. In these circumstances, female outmigration becomes simultaneously an option or strategy to consider, an actual material practice, and a way of constructing local femininity and reshaping senses of self and place (McKay, 2001).

Gloria's Story

Gloria is a returned migrant worker (*balikbayan*) interviewed in Haliap. Her story is not intended to stand as the definitive example of female circular migration and its local impacts, but offered as a way of opening discussion on how agricultural transformations can be linked to gender and globalisation in both the material and discursive terms I have outlined, above.

I surveyed Gloria's household and conducted a follow-up interview with her husband and mother. Gloria herself did several in-depth and open-ended interviews with me during my year of fieldwork in 1996-1997. Though it is likely that she is not being entirely accurate

in her recollection of the amounts she earned abroad and remitted home, her story neatly outlines the ways in which female migration links to new crops in the form of bean gardening.

Gloria was twenty-seven years old, a high school graduate, married, with three children. At the time of our interviews, she had just returned from a contract in Singapore, sporting a Chicago Bull's ballcap and sunglasses that marked her as a balikbayan.

Gloria married her husband, Nardo, when they graduated from high school at age eighteen. Neither had any money to pursue further studies, nor did they inherit any wet rice fields from their parents when they married. This makes them 'landless' and, since neither could find regular waged work in Ifugao, Nardo liked the idea of Gloria working overseas. Going 'abroad' was also an important part of Gloria's self-identity as adventurous, capable and 'modern'. Gloria describes herself as curious by nature: 'When I hear of far places, I think "I would also like to see that place!"'

Gloria was recruited by an agent who was visiting her own family in Asipulo. This recruiter was the sister of one of Gloria's high school classmates, herself working in Singapore. Though Gloria is married, her passport says she is single because her agent advised her that employment agencies in Singapore prefer to place single workers. Presented with this opportunity, Gloria decided that overseas work experience would be a stepping-stone to future earnings. Gloria's family supported her ambitions. Her brother loaned her P10,000, profits from his bean gardening, to pay the fees for her Philippine recruiting agency and domestic worker training course. At

the time, Nardo, Gloria's husband, was working for this brother as a day-labourer because he lacked the capital to go into gardening for himself.

Gloria left Ifugao for Singapore two years ago, when her youngest child was almost two. Her sister-in-law, the wife of her gardener brother, took care of the children while she was abroad, helping out Nardo and Gloria's elderly mother.

As a first-time worker in Singapore, Gloria didn't expect that she would earn very much, perhaps only P5000 (US\$191) per month. [There were 26.2 pesos to the US dollar and 18.7 pesos to the Singapore dollar at the time of interview in May, 1996. Gloria actually earned \$S270, as she later reports.]

While working in Singapore, Gloria was able to send P5000 every month for her family. She sent the money to her family in Asipulo through a bank-to-bank transfer. Most often, she called an agent who came to the employer's house in Singapore. This agent charged a service fee of \$S13-\$S16. When she had time off, Gloria went to Lucky Plaza (a mall that services Filipino migrant workers) and paid about the same amount to send the money through a bank. The money went to her mother's bank account at the Philippine National Bank in Ifugao's provincial capital of Lagawe. Gloria then sent a letter, telling her mother to travel to Lagawe with her ID and the tax declaration papers for their Asipulo house lot in order to access the money.

After six months in Singapore, her brother asked Gloria to repay the P 10,000 loan so he could again go into gardening. Gloria got the whole sum from her employer as an

advance on her salary, then sent the money through the bank. She repaid her employer with a monthly \$S200 deduction from her \$S270 per month salary. Gloria then sent most of the remaining \$70 per month home so Nardo, could rent land, buy seeds, hire labour and start his own bean garden.

Though her employers liked her, Gloria didn't want to renew her contract. She found the work boring, the salary was comparatively low by Singaporean standards, and she had to stay inside and do the same work every day. Thus, when the contract ended after 24 months, Gloria brought home just over P20,000, about four months salary, as her savings. She also bought some clothes and a tape deck, in hopes that they'll eventually be able to afford electricity. While she was overseas, apart from her remittances, the major source of household income was Nardo's bean gardening.

Now that Gloria is back in Asipulo, she wants to go abroad again, explaining: 'There is no improvement here. I send money, but it is scattered. Just for usual expenses: food, fare, school books... Nothing permanent, still just beans. This time, I will reserve some money for myself and then look for land to buy. If we have ricefields, we will always be able to eat'.

Going abroad is Gloria's preferred option to earn money. She believes that she will fit in to a hierarchy of experience: 'There, abroad, the first time your salary is very small – like me, only P5000, but after five or six years, maybe you get P7500 per month'. She has already used her savings to pay the fees for an agency in Canada where she knows that contract migrants can become 'permanent' (residents).

Her husband, Nardo, agrees that she should go abroad again. Nardo anticipates that Gloria would eventually reunite the family overseas, or maybe gather enough capital to move their nuclear family to a frontier region where land can be bought for less, so he doesn't want to invest too much time and money into acquiring terraced ricefields in Asipulo. He has decided to continue gardening and save money to invest in a chainsaw, so he can earn extra cash as a day labourer in logging.

Visions of new local futures

The story of Gloria and her household shows how migration creates new economic identities and new visions of the future both for the migrant and her family. Gloria sees security in terms of buying riceland at home in Haliap. Nardo, on the other hand, envisions himself as participating in a modernity created by small-scale commodity producers of beans and 'carabao' loggers, felling trees and cutting planks to order in the upslope forests. Nardo represents a larger group of 'sole parent' gardeners in his community, all relying on OCW remittances for their capital outlay and searching for land to buy, rent or convert from wet-rice to garden. This search for suitable land and the popularity of gardening creates changes in the broader agricultural landscape where beans are becoming a marker of mobility.

This shows how conflicting visions of the future for the household and for the locality are gendered in particular ways. It is not the women who go overseas, but the men left at home who envision a modernity where they 'play' the market by investing in small-scale commercial agriculture. These conflicting views of local futures are played out on the

landscape, just as much as they are in discussions of appropriate work for women and men.

Local futures are also determined through new forms of class relations. Nardo used Gloria's remittances to become self-employed as a producer of a commercial crop, yet his class transformation depends on Gloria's networks overseas and the support of her family. Because Gloria's brother was already gardening it was he, and not her husband, who was the source of the capital to send Gloria overseas and she owes him an ongoing debt of gratitude. In order to repay her brother, Gloria went into debt with her employer, possibly opening herself up to more exploitative working conditions such as extra overtime or fewer days off to express her 'gratitude' for the loan.

Now that she is home, Gloria is not satisfied with bean gardening as an investment for her savings. She wants to buy riceland because it can provide either a steady stream of rice or of cash income, if sharecropped or rented out to tenants as garden. Owning rice land would elevate Gloria's household in terms of traditional ideas of status in Haliap. As Bouanthon et al. (2002) found in Laos, migrant women's remittances can produce class transformations. Here, Gloria and Nardo envision new forms of self-employment and perhaps eventual feudal patronage that could arise from purchasing their own productive lands and new technologies.

Beans are not, in Gloria's view, a real improvement for the family's livelihood security. This is because there are high levels of local competition in bean farming (see McKay, 2003). Gardening can both make and lose money, so planting beans does not guarantee

the household will always be 'able to eat'. Beans in Haliap are like many other sites of migrant investment in the Philippines – a risky business.

In many cases, women like Gloria have little control over the way that their household distributes or invests the money they send while they are away. Migrants often describe their remittances (as Gloria did) as being 'scattered', meaning they have only gone to support the household's subsistence consumption or have been put into failed investments. The migrant then returns home to find 'no improvement'.

In a study of migrant households, Rodriguez (1998) documents how the most common investment strategies increase social and economic polarisation at the community level. Across the Philippines, most migrant households invest remittances in small-scale enterprises through new crops, new public transport vehicles, and small stores that employ few waged workers. These investments actually enter into competition with each other, rather than generating the kind of productive investments that could strengthen or diversify the broader Philippine economy and many of the investments fail. In Haliap, bean gardeners compete with each other and with their co-villagers for land and water. Perhaps because of the risk and frequent failures of bean crops, sending workers 'out' (to Baguio or Manila) or 'abroad' (overseas) are becoming essential livelihood strategies (McKay, 2003) and thus, part of the local discourse on 'modernity' and 'development'.

Gender, cultural capital and landscape

To read this landscape as being transformed by remittances requires an understanding of how migration intersects with other changes occurring in Haliap. Quantifying the

percentage of rice paddies converted to bean garden does not tell us how migration may contribute to land-use change. Qualitative data, garnered from interviews with migrants and their households, suggests that new land-use practices accompanying migration are guided not simply by local economic opportunities, but by a longer-term vision for accumulating cultural capital and discourses of modernisation and development.

My observations in Asipulo suggested that rural families also invest cash received from overseas in cultural capital by spending on weddings, funerals and education. It is through education, in particular, that migration is changing local ideas on the value of labour. Sending other family members to urban schools for post-secondary training is one of the remittance goals of many OCWs. Ironically, new graduates find themselves un- or under-employed and unwilling to return permanently to agriculture (Rigg, 2002: 246). Many female graduates, especially, cannot find a job commensurate to their qualifications in their home community or in Philippine urban centres and then join the mothers, aunts and sisters who paid for their schooling in working overseas.

The value of migration as feminine cultural capital is not unique to the Philippines. Mills (1997: 39) reports that, in Thailand, 'female labour mobility reflects... powerful perceptions of status lost to already mobile peers'. While the manual labour of domestic work is considered low status, like planting rice is in Haliap, doing such work overseas is refigured as prestigious because of the income it generates. Returnee OCWs like Gloria can indulge in patterns of local consumption that increase their status. Movies, radio and TV shows, popular music and the press glamorise and sometimes distort the reality of migrants working overseas while migrants themselves are often seen as the best

advertisement for the values of migration. Where sun-browned skin marks a farmer, returnees are often just as proud of their lighter-coloured complexions as they are of their new clothes, accessories and appliances (McKay, 2001).

People in Haliap express pride in the women who have been ‘abroad’ and call them ‘*balikbayans*’ (Tagalog for returned to the nation) or the ‘new *kadangyans*’ (local elite). The cultural capital accumulated by going abroad – fairer skin, a particular style of presentation, distinctively imported clothes like Gloria’s baseball cap and sunglasses, make-up etc. – are considered very important, both for the women themselves and for what this indicates about the abilities, resources and sophistication of the community. Migrants are thus negotiating new, locally recognised forms of femininity through overseas work – a new, ‘modern’ femininity that incorporates an idea of female self-actualisation through travel (McKay 2001).

Migration opens up new possibilities. Contract work is undertaken on the understanding that the migrant will return home when the contract expires, but it often serves as an entry point to living overseas. Some OCWs stay ‘abroad’ for many years on continual contract renewals. They can also find work, as Nardo hopes, for their friends and family members still in the Philippines. In Asipulo, it seems there is always someone going ‘abroad’, someone working there to receive them, and someone on the way back home to bring news, money and gifts. Such networks of migrants bring long-term translocal relations between groups overseas and local households, into being (McKay, 2001). Circular migration thus creates one community that can imagine itself as moving within an

imaginative hyphenated space of practiced locality that extends across international borders.

Seen through the personal performances of 'modern' and 'feminine', the impact of female migration may be even more important at the discursive level than the actual remittances received (McKay, 2001). Modern farmers engage in bean gardening because, with beans, unlike traditional wet-rice, the pay is in cash, the time frames are short and moves from place to place are frequent. I met two young women, Fely and Grace, who were trying gardening themselves, with the support of their households, as part of a plan to save money for the fees required to go to 'Saudi' as contract workers. While they were doing 'heavy' work in their gardens, they saw this as an investment directed to achieving more 'feminine' non-agricultural work in the future through eventual migration.

Here, a crop can represent cultural capital written onto a landscape. Beans thus mark potential mobility and this discursive marking happens often before there is any material connection established at the household level between bean crops and remittance money. This nuances Rigg's observation that agriculture is a low-status occupation to be avoided by the young in rural Asia and my own observations that 'heavy' work is increasingly masculine. Here, in Haliap, different kinds of agricultural work are valued differently. Bean farming is preferable because it can act as a stepping-stone to non-farm work elsewhere.

Conclusion – reading remittances into the landscape

Across the globe, land use practices are changing in unforeseen ways in response to globalisation (Rigg and Ritchie, 2002). In this case study, migration has emerged from within an already complex situation of transitions in land-use and conflicts over land. I have shown how bean gardens can be read as remittance landscapes, yet it is clear that remittances are modifying a pre-existing set of factors producing land-use change. I suspect that this pattern will intensify, as remitted money is becoming critical to the livelihoods of households like Gloria's. For many of Asia's poor, near-poor and landless, migration is becoming the best solution to the problem of securing a subsistence livelihood. This is particularly true where the intensification of market production is limited, as it is in Haliap by lack of water and population pressure.

By reading remittances into the landscape here, I have been able to sketch some of the gendered dimensions of these changes in more detail. The analysis raises questions of long-term environmental sustainability. In Haliap, the irony is that Gloria's remittances support her husband's gardening and that gardening may, in turn, be undermining Gloria's dream of acquiring rice land. Nardo wants to invest their income in a chainsaw for logging, as well as commercial crops. Unfortunately, given local concerns over deforestation and water supply, the ecological impacts of logging and gardening may undermine Gloria's ability to purchase ricefields by reducing the water in the irrigation system and changing the quality of the soils in the terraces.

Such concerns over environmental sustainability do not yet appear in current communal investment initiatives designed for migrant households (Gibson et al., 2001). New ideas

for investing remittance earnings in rural areas will be sorely needed, especially if left-behind household members continue to choose less ecologically sound and shorter-term strategies in the hope of enhancing their own mobility. For these reasons, larger-scale and diverse government and donor initiatives to support the productive investment of migrant remittances with local ecological sustainability in mind are likely to be a growth area for national development planners and international donors in the next decades.

Building from this example, similar arguments might be made for the specific links between migration, gender relations and transitions to commercial crops and non-farm labour in other remittance economies. The literature on rural globalisation and my analysis here suggest that the changes in land, labour, crops and cropping patterns that comprise such transitions may not, in fact, reflect local ecology or economic opportunity as much as represent gendered versions of new local futures, envisioned at a new global scale.

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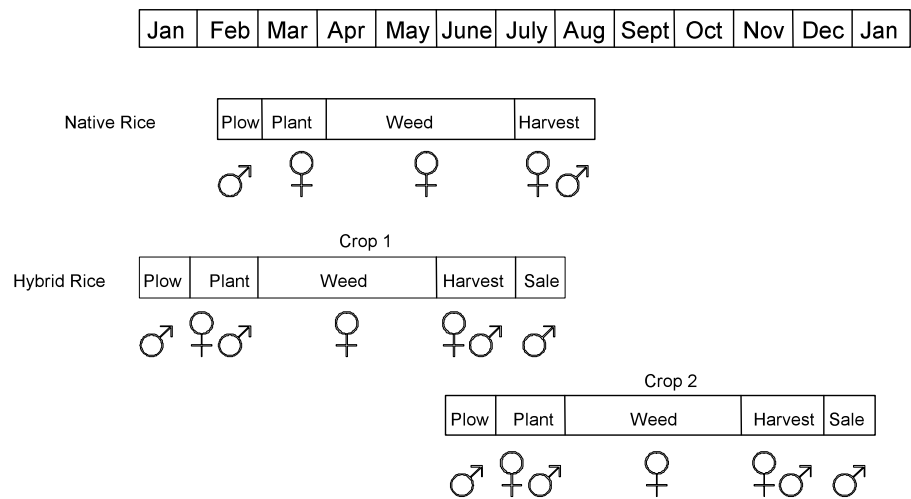


Figure 1. Gendered labour patterns in rice cultivation for native and hybrid varieties grown in paddy fields.

Source: Field data gathered for ERMP Rapid Rural Appraisal Workshop, 1991, and adapted from version published in Guy (1995.)