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‘A good wife stays home’: gendered negotiations over state agricultural programmes, upland Vietnam

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Rural and livelihood studies, alongside development organisations, are stressing the importance of gender awareness in debates over food security, food crises and land tenure. Yet, within the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, these gender dynamics are frequently disregarded. In Vietnam, rice is intimately linked to the country’s food security. Over the last decade, rice export levels, production methods, and local and global market prices have remained constant preoccupations for governmental and development agencies. Steadfast official approval for agricultural technologies and intensification has seen the domestic growth and importation of hybrid varieties of rice and maize seeds. Yet, the impacts of these technologies on upland ethnic minority rice producers and consumers in Vietnam have been overlooked. For these women and men, such as Hmong and Yao farmers, food security is a daily concern for their near-subsistence livelihoods. While strongly encouraged to grow these new seeds, insufficient research has examined the social realities and experiences of these upland minority groups. Moreover, how such agrarian policies and practices are being implicated in reconfiguring gender roles, relations and identities through transformations to individual and household livelihoods has been ignored. In this article, we focus on the gendered consequences of the government’s hybrid rice programme for upland farmers. We reveal recent impacts on family relations, including rising intergenerational tensions across genders, and shifting responsibilities and new negotiations between young spouses. These dynamics are further complicated by household economic status, as household members access specific opportunities available to them to improve everyday food security.

Keywords: gendered livelihoods; hybrid seeds; Vietnam; Hmong; Yao; agricultural intensification

Introduction

Important academic research in rural and livelihood studies, alongside development organisations, stress the critical need of gender awareness in debates over food security, food crises and land tenure (cf. Ellis 1993; Agarwal 1997; Little 2002; Arun 2012). Yet, there are few reports about how new agrarian intensification programmes might have gendered repercussions on ethnic minority households in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. While Vietnam is one of the world’s top rice exporters, domestically a number of problems remain (Heath 2012). Concerns over rice export quantities, production and storage methods, and local and global market prices are constant preoccupations for the Vietnam state as well as development agencies operating within the country, leading to support for new agrarian intensification programmes (IRIN 2008; Vietnam News 2009; Ho Binh Minh 2011).

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As the Vietnam government takes steps to enhance national food security, the importation and domestic growth of hybrid varieties of rice (and maize) is escalating, backed by strong official assistance (Tinh Hà Giang 2012). Given the urgency with which semi-subsistence, upland minority households have been advised to take up these innovations, minimal attention has been directed towards their socio-economic implications. At the household and commune levels, these processes are creating new sites of debate and struggle, entangling both ethnic tensions and gendered, intra-household frictions. As such, we focus on the emerging reconfigurations of household gender dynamics and identities that we observe taking place in certain upland communities in association with agricultural modernisation initiatives. Our insights are rooted in feminist scholarship which helps explain how identity categories such as gender do not exist *a priori*, but are continually produced through social relations – in this case, through the domestic political economy of agriculture (Butler 1988; Haraway 1991; Whatmore 1994). Here, we consider the situation of ethnic minority Hmong and Yao women and men farmers in Sa Pa district, Lào Cai province (Figure 1). We highlight how gender identities



Figure 1. Case study site in Lào Cai province, Northern Vietnam.

are being reformulated and how, with such processes, tenuous spaces may exist for transformative possibilities (cf. Butler 1988).

Within this upland context in mountainous northern Vietnam, dominant gender ideologies in both Hmong and Yao societies afford men higher social status and greater formal power than women. In turn, this influences intra-household livelihood decision-making and resource access. Men are far more visible in the public sphere within official, customary and ritual institutions, while women are strongly tied to obligations of social reproduction within the home.¹ Customary household divisions of labour also result in designated livelihood tasks for men and women – as well as a few that are shared, such as rice planting and harvesting (Figure 2). Women have generally been responsible for all household reproductive activities, including food preparation and cooking, childcare, healthcare, cleaning, feeding animals and collecting firewood. Women, often assisted by their children, also maintain their families' daily food supply through household gardens. Some Hmong and Yao women additionally play an important role as healers, with vast knowledge of medicinal plants. Substantial time is also spent on producing customary textiles – Hmong women weave cloth from hemp which they grow, while both Hmong and Yao women sew and embroider the garments worn by their families (Figure 3). Men's key roles for both Hmong and Yao involve clearing and ploughing agricultural fields, building and maintaining houses, hunting in the forest, collecting firewood and handling concerns related to buffalo and other large livestock. Men also tend to be the main caretakers of valuable non-timber forest product crops such as cardamom. In summary, while not historically static, gender-ascribed labour roles for Hmong and Yao tend to reveal that men are predominantly engaged in more physically



Figure 2. Hmong women harvesting rice.



Figure 3. Yao woman embroidering beside her household's rice fields.

demanding but shorter-term activities, while women's workloads are ongoing and more time-consuming, notably including the 'double burden' of most of the day-to-day labour for subsistence agriculture in addition to all household reproductive labour (Sowerwine 2004; Bonnin 2012; Turner 2012).

In this article we examine the interrelations between these dominant gender ideologies and customary household divisions of labour for Hmong and Yao societies on the one hand, and the rapid increase in agricultural modernisation via the introduction of state-sponsored hybrid rice seed initiatives on the other. Focusing on households in Sa Pa district, Lào Cai province, we investigate the necessary negotiations with the state for Hmong and Yao decision-making strategies regarding the use of these seeds. Furthermore, we analyse the degree to which these strategies have been gendered and whether new gender dynamics are developing in this emerging resource landscape.

This research is underpinned by longitudinal ethnographic research in northern upland Vietnam since 1999. The authors undertook fieldwork together with a focus on the gendered implications of hybrid rice cultivation in Sa Pa district, Lào Cai province during six months in 2009, with individual follow-up research in 2011 and 2012, completing a total of 58 conversational interviews with female (85%) and male farmers.² Fieldwork was undertaken with Hmong and Yao interpreters, as appropriate, all women; and with non-state Vietnamese interpreters or alone when talking with state officials or other Vietnamese (Kinh).

To understand more about the gendered effects of this state-sponsored agricultural programme, our conceptual framework, drawing upon literature on livelihood diversification, gendered livelihoods and women and rural change, is outlined next. We then introduce the Hmong and Yao ethnic minority farmers at the core of our study, and the gendered

dimensions of their resource access, before outlining the state-sponsored development schemes that bear directly on their livelihood decision-making. The broad impacts of the hybrid rice scheme are analysed, before specifically focusing on how gender is increasingly shaping and being shaped by experiences of livelihood diversification. We argue that Hmong and Yao farming households in Sa Pa district have engaged with these technologies with divergent responses, with new gendered dynamics, dialogues and conflicts surfacing.

Conceptual approaches to gendered livelihoods in upland rural Vietnam

Focusing upon livelihood sustainability and diversification in the rural Global South, analysts have demonstrated how individual and household livelihoods are continually reworked as opportunities and assets shift over time with the mediation of various external economic, political, social and environmental factors (Hapke and Ayyankeri 2004). Enthusiasts of the sustainable livelihoods approach argue that this concept recognises and facilitates an examination of these dynamics. Chambers and Conway (1991, 6) propose that a sustainable livelihood is one that can ‘cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long-term’. This attention to flexibility over time means that analyses must consider the interactions of livelihoods not only with resources, but also with relationships concerning security, equity, well-being, capability and poverty (cf. Scoones 1998; Conway et al. 2002; de Haan and Zoomers 2005; Turner 2012).

Diversification is often core to individuals’ and households’ ongoing actions to form sustainable livelihoods (Moser 1998; Eakin, Tucker, and Castellanos 2006). In a rural context, livelihood diversification is ‘the process by which rural families construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in their struggle for survival and in order to improve their standards of living’ (Ellis 1998, 4). Diversification can stem from survival strategies to overcome barriers and withstand shocks and stresses, namely distress diversification; it can be undertaken as opportunities arise as selective diversification or it can be a tactic for enhanced material enrichment and expansion in progressive diversification (Bouahom, Douangsavanh, and Rigg 2004; Turner 2007). A diversification approach may comprise adopting new income opportunities, experimenting with different crops such as hybrid seeds, or combining agriculture, animal husbandry and off-farm activities. As market integration and extensive agricultural processes result in unprecedented challenges for rural households in the Global South, everchanging diversification routes are being experimented with (de Haan and Zoomers 2005; Eakin, Tucker, and Castellanos 2006).

Livelihood diversification is strongly influenced by intra-household dynamics and gender identities which differentially shape household members’ access to specific livelihood resources and opportunities (Carney 1993; Agarwal 1997). Yet, although gender plays a central role in mediating people’s access to particular livelihood options, this has not been frequently reflected upon in the literature on sustainable livelihoods in the Global South (Dolan 2002; Oberhauser, Mandel, and Hapke 2004). Alternatively, important advances to the literature on gendered livelihoods have been made in extensive work on farm women and the gendered implications of agricultural change in the Global North (see Brandth [2002], Little [2002] and Shortall [2006] for comprehensive overviews of this literature). Much of this scholarship has sought to make visible the significant economic contributions of ‘farming women’, focusing on the gendered impacts of the transition to capital-intensive agriculture and decline of the family farm (Trauger 2001).

Jellison (1993) and Neth (1995) have explored how such processes of agricultural modernisation work to marginalise women's roles as farm producers, repositioning them instead as 'farmwives' and helpers. Attention has also been drawn to different gender roles in farm work and to the status attached to and ways of valuing these forms of work, as well as how patriarchal gender relations intersect with processes of commoditisation through the organisation of farm work in ways that often continue hierarchical relations (Whatmore 1991; Sachs 1996). Whatmore (1991) has demonstrated the importance of analysing production and reproduction as integrated because of the unique way in which work and home are conjoined on the family farm. Although most of this literature is based in industrial settings (as noted by McDonagh 2013), contemporary agricultural modernisation and development agendas unfolding throughout the Global South make it possible to identify some common themes.

In the context of rural Southeast Asia, we have a general understanding of women's agricultural activities and contributions to household food security (cf. Cartier and Rothenberg-Aalami 2000; Price 2000; Truong and Yamada 2003; Balakrishnan 2005; Datta 2007; Price and Ogle 2008; Paris et al. 2009, among others). However, we still lack a detailed analysis of how government policies that aim to intensify agricultural production and improve food security in this region can, through their very implementation, alter gender balances in work and household livelihood negotiations based on customary, socially sanctioned understandings of gender roles. This article is a small step to address this gap, explicitly incorporating gender into an analysis of rural farming livelihoods in upland Vietnam in order to demonstrate how gender relations both configure and are configured by livelihood strategies as households experiment with agrarian intensification.

Hmong and Yao livelihood fundamentals

Rice is at the core of Hmong and Yao semi-subsistence livelihoods and food security equations in upland regions of northern Vietnam where the agro-ecological conditions are best suited to rice production rather than maize (grown more to the east of the Red River). Hmong and Yao harvest one crop per year (of hybrid or traditional varieties) in the high-elevation districts of Lào Cai province. The household remains the central economic unit, with members tending to their household's small farm, within a biophysical and political environment that supports only limited land for wet rice. In these uplands, rice production is oriented mainly for home consumption rather than for the market, distinguishing Hmong and Yao households from lowland producers. A Hmong or Yao household that does not grow sufficient rice, regardless of variety, to last the annual agricultural calendar is considered poor and sometimes also lacking in industriousness by endogenous definitions of wealth and livelihood success. Beyond rice, Hmong and Yao farmers in this region maintain small produce gardens for everyday use, some also relying on rotational swidden plots, albeit now officially banned. Additional food sources such as wild game and honey as well as medicinal herbs are gathered from forests. Uplanders also participate in small-scale commerce, obtaining cash through the trade of cultivated cardamom, textiles, livestock, and rice and maize alcohol (cf. Leisz et al. 2004; Turner 2012).

Hmong and Yao are customarily patrilineal, and when a son gets married following clanic exogamy he inherits his own fields, typically from his parents' land parcel.³ Land tenure practices are deeply gendered, whereby women's customary entitlements to land hinge on their conjugal relationship status, often becoming tenuous after a divorce or their husband's death, at which point the gender of their children can play a role. Household rights to land are officially acknowledged through Land Use Certificates (Red Books), and

in the case of a married couple, both names should usually be registered. However, in practice, it is frequently only the male household head who is formally recognised in these Red Books for Hmong and Yao households in Lào Cai.

When discussing land access for separated or widowed women, a number of Hmong and Yao women noted that land is normally viewed as an asset belonging to men. For instance, as Lys, a Hmong woman, put it: ‘Hmong people here see the land as for the boy only, not for the girl’. Lu May, a Yao woman, similarly explained:

for Yao, land is always considered the man’s land . . . it’s the husband or the father’s land. Rice land is only for the wife as long as she remains married to her husband. On the household paper [land use certificate], everyone’s name is on it, but according to Yao it belongs to the husband. If the mother is widowed, she can keep the land but the rice land is really for her sons.

Thus, while men and women have equal rights to land ownership according to Vietnam law, cultural norms reconfigure local realities.

These local realities are also strongly influenced by a squeeze on land availability occurring due to population growth, alongside the state discouraging the creation of new rice terraces, especially in areas near forested lands and within National Parks (Corlin 2004; Vuong Duy Quang 2004). Infrastructure development such as dam construction, as well as lowlanders launching new land-hungry enterprises such as large-scale flower and vegetable cultivation, is also capturing vital rice terrain. These are some of the push factors leading local households to switch from traditional to hybrid rice seeds.

Intensifying upland agriculture: hybrid rice

In Asia, hybrid rice⁴ initially became popular in China, introduced on a large scale from 1976. The Chinese state supplied the seeds as well as procuring the subsequent crops, so quality and cost did not hinder implementation. Nevertheless, since the early 1990s and ongoing economic liberalisation, hybrid rice adoption in China has been declining (Dalrymple 1986). India and Bangladesh began hybrids trials in the early 1990s, with mixed farmer reactions (Chengappa, Janaiah, and Srinivasa Gowda 2003; Hossain, Janaiah, and Husain 2003). While the Vietnam state has promoted improved varieties for food security in the uplands since the cooperative era (Thai Thi Minh, Neef, and Hoffman 2011), hybrid rice seeds were first distributed in the early 1990s in the country’s north. The socialist government has worked hard to increase the national coverage of hybrid rice, and by 2008 it was grown in 31 provinces in the north and five provinces in central Vietnam (Dang Quy Nhan, Duong Ngo Thanh Trung, and Hoang Kim Dieu 2008).

The Vietnam state has maintained a deep-seated interest in the national integration of ethnic minority peoples, and with helping the mountainous regions ‘catch up’ to lowland standards of economic productivity and market integration. The application of science and technology, especially to agriculture, is often seen as the ‘driving force’ of this modernisation (McElwee 2004; Sowerwine 2004; Turner and Michaud 2009; CPV 2011; Lào Cai Government 2012a). More than a dozen national policies and projects currently aim to ‘develop’ ethnic minority upland areas. Two of the most extensive are the Programme for Socio-Economic Development of Extremely Difficult Communes in Ethnic, Mountainous, Boundary and Remote Areas (Programme 135) and the Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction Programme (HEPR or Programme 143), with the delivery of agricultural extension and technology being central elements of both (Swinkels and Turk 2006). In turn, ensuring farmer access to hybrid seeds, either subsidised or donated, has become an important feature. Nevertheless, while the provision of agricultural inputs is directed by national-level frameworks, the on-the-

ground procedures by which this occurs vary extensively at both provincial and local levels in upland areas (see [Bonnin and Turner 2012](#)).

The state promotes hybrids for improving agricultural production yields and local food security. Controlling consistency is important for the state, unlike the typical upland rice cultivator method of planting a diversity of rice types, oftentimes within a single field. For upland farmers, this century-old method has been vital for mitigating crop failures within a context where climatic conditions can fluctuate dramatically from year to year. It is also important because different local varieties achieve a number of culturally specific purposes. Yet this ‘mixture’ of rice is considered by the state as neither marketable nor valuable, and while very recently there has been some interest shown in the market potential for certain local varieties, on the whole, mainstream official interest in local, upland agro-diversity is limited ([Lào Cai Government 2012b](#)). Most of the hybrid seed supplying Lào Cai was initially procured from China, but the Vietnam state is keen to reduce its dependency on imports by developing domestic hybrids ([Tran Duc Vien and Nguyen Thi Duong Nga 2009](#)). In the last few years, new rice hybrids with ‘high economic efficiency’ have been bred specifically for Lào Cai province, while additional strains are being developed to cope with the effects of climate change and cold weather – with tests being run in upland localities including Sa Pa district ([CEMA 2011](#); [CPV 2012](#); [Lào Cai Government 2012b](#)).

While one Yao woman interviewee noted that ‘we women know more about the seeds’, referring to women’s knowledge of traditional varieties, men are more likely to decide upon major cropping schedules. Yet, in both Hmong and Yao households, men and women usually discuss crops and seed selection together. Nowadays, this shared decision-making is being increasingly challenged through the gendering of formal knowledge transfers relating to the state’s introduction of hybrid seeds and associated agricultural practices. Although state agricultural extension services are in theory available to men and women, they are usually only provided in Vietnamese – which Hmong and Yao men rather than women tend to speak – thus access is instantly gendered (Oxfam representative interview). Farming women such as Chao Ta May, a Yao woman in her 30s, expressed a need for greater inclusivity at these sessions, stating: ‘I think that the government officials [extension officers] should speak Yao language so that everyone can understand them’. Moreover, as might be expected, Hmong and Yao women in Sa Pa district explained that the demands of their domestic responsibilities left them with little time to attend such meetings.

Local impacts of hybrid rice schemes

We have reported on the general impacts of the hybrid rice scheme in these uplands for Hmong and Yao farmers elsewhere ([Bonnin and Turner 2012](#)). To summarise briefly, both male and female interviewees explained that before the arrival of hybrid varieties, if a household lacked enough rice for the year they would turn to alternatives, namely potatoes, maize and cassava. One elderly Hmong woman, Paj recalled:

Before, when I was a little girl, we often had to eat potatoes and other foods from the mountain instead of rice. Right now it’s much better than before ... even if people are very poor and only have a small house, they can still eat rice.

Since hybrids were introduced, the consumption of these less preferred substitutes has become less common and official sources note that hybrid seeds have enabled 60% of the province’s rice demand to be met ([Lào Cai Government 2012b](#)).

Ostensibly, hybrid seeds are seen as a constructive intervention by both men and women, yet, concomitantly, deeply engrained misgivings have emerged. First, many are

hesitant to become dependent on the government's management of this subsidised programme due to historical ethnic tensions (see Scott 2009) and because they have found the system unreliable. Second, and most salient to the issues that we raise here, new concerns have emerged because households must pay cash for these seeds and fertiliser every year. Furthermore, Hmong and Yao men and women are worried about the loss of traditional seed varieties, greatly preferred for their taste, texture and cooking properties compared to hybrid rice.

Hmong and Yao households attempt to keep at least a small area of their terraces for traditional rice, with those we interviewed growing between one and eight types for different health, ceremonial, ritual or celebratory purposes. It is predominantly women and elders who are responsible for the safeguarding and exchange of these traditional varieties within the community. In large part, this is due to women's knowledge of the health benefits of specific local rice types. Moreover, married women who have moved to new villages play an important role in extending ethnically rooted knowledge networks beyond the local scale.

Significantly, male and female interviewees alike explained that if they could put all other factors influencing food security aside – such as rice terrace size and number of sons that land has to be divided among – they would plant only traditional Hmong or Yao rice because of its superior quality. Interviewees clarified that the decision to grow hybrid rice is only taken after a household's landholdings are no longer adequate to grow enough traditional rice for the year. Indeed, it tends to be wealthier households with larger landholdings that maintain traditional varieties, balancing this with hybrids where needed, rather than switching completely.

Unlike traditional seeds, which are selected and stored from year to year without a need for cash outlays, hybrid seeds must be purchased annually to sustain their high yield advantage. They then require further expenditures on recurring applications of fertilisers and pesticides, as well as regular irrigation supplies. Although such expenses should be counterbalanced by higher yields, farmers are frequently concerned about these new monetary demands. The costs of the government hybrid seeds, though subsidised, have more than doubled in the space of four years, as has fertiliser. If these trends continue, such technologies will become increasingly unaffordable to upland semi-subsistence farmers.

Rice planting timing is also of critical concern. As seed supplies repeatedly fail to arrive on time at official distribution points, planting may be pushed back two to four weeks raising concerns over how this will affect growing/harvest timing in light of the rainy season. Some households also prefer to acquire seeds before the government distribution centres supply them, relying upon local knowledge of seasonal planting calendars and weather patterns to establish optimal sowing times or because their land is at higher elevations where crops take longer to mature; important food security considerations neglected by government delivery schedules. Under the official supply arrangements, households of a given area end up having to plant at the same time, leaving less space for labour exchange within or beyond kin groups, making it necessary to hire labour from outside the locality. These new shifts in labour relations for rice production have significant gender implications, which are explored next.

Gendered implications of hybrid rice schemes

The increasing need for cash to purchase hybrid seeds and associated inputs is having unexpected yet distinct impacts on contemporary gender relations within Hmong and Yao households in our study area. Historically, Hmong and Yao have been only marginally involved in cash economies through the sale of opium and timber, with male household

members partaking in trade negotiations, often with lowland Vietnamese, Han Chinese or Tai-speaking intermediaries. Both of these trades were banned in the early 1990s. Nowadays, within Sa Pa district, it is increasingly women who are entering into new trade opportunities that have become vital as cash sources, bringing money into the household through their involvement in the textile and alcohol trades as well as with trekking.

Indeed, concurrent with this state-supported drive for agricultural intensification in the uplands, market integration has increased for Hmong and Yao households in close proximity to towns or with access to transportation, opening livelihood diversification opportunities through four main channels. First, a growing trade in cardamom, a highly sought-after spice in China, has developed. Cardamom is cultivated by Yao and Hmong men, often helped by women family members, then sold to male and female Tày and Kinh intermediaries before being transported to markets elsewhere in Vietnam and China (see [Tugault-Lafleur and Turner 2009](#)). Second, there is a long-standing tradition of both men and women producing rice and maize alcohol. This is becoming an increasingly profitable trade to meet lowland Kinh consumer demand, in addition to local sales ([Bonnin 2012](#)). The remaining two channels comprise opportunities that have opened almost exclusively to women. These include a rapidly expanding demand for ethnic handicrafts and textiles since the area reopened to foreign tourists in 1993, as well as a dynamic transnational trade in manufactured Hmong textiles, produced in China and imported by mostly Hmong female border residents from Vietnam. The gendered nature of textile knowledge and production has positioned women as the main drivers behind this now spatially extensive trade. Finally, and thus far very locally – emerging from exchanges between female Hmong handicraft traders and tourists – there has been small but growing number of Hmong and Yao young women working as trekking guides, based in Sa Pa town. Thus, while cash has never been at the heart of Hmong and Yao livelihoods in the past, the growing need for funds to purchase inputs for hybrid seed cultivation is providing the impetus for much of this market integration. The gendered features and consequences of these trades are complex.

Local perspectives on these gendered shifts are not fixed, but we noticed important differences in attitudes based on people's age and socio-economic circumstance. Khu and My, two elderly Hmong women who were among the first to work in Sa Pa town selling handicrafts, noted that before the introduction of hybrid seeds, the few women selling textiles like them were very poor and often stigmatised – either widows needing money to hire farm labour or elderly women from households needing cash to buy extra rice. Such socio-economic distinctions are less noticeable today as women of all ages are increasingly becoming handicraft or textile sellers. Moreover, this new cash earning opportunity and associated greater mobility provides women with experiences of personal and economic autonomy that have not been enjoyed by previous generations (cf. [Duong Bich Hanh 2012](#)).

During the early 2000s, it was the norm that once a Hmong woman married she would move to her new husband's village and stop working as a tourist guide or textile seller, at the very least while raising their children. Today, however, we observe a growing number of women trying to strike a balance between paid work and reproductive tasks after giving birth. Some, like Cho and Xua in their mid-20s, who both had their first child in 2011, continued to work almost until the end of their pregnancies, and resumed trekking (albeit taking much shorter trips) just a few months later, bringing their infants along with them.

Many young husbands who have grown up in the context of tourism in the district seem to accept and appreciate their wives' cash earnings; though usually after some initial negotiations and jealousies. Indeed, quite a few young Hmong and Yao women we spoke to explained that a 'good husband' is one who does not get upset or jealous but is happy

when his wife earns money by trading or guiding. In some cases, these new labour dynamics for women are prompting shifts in customary gender-ascribed divisions of labour in young households. We found it increasingly common for young married men to cooperate by taking over 'female responsibilities' such as childcare and cooking, while their wives are engaged in trekking or selling handicrafts. For example, Xia, a Hmong woman in her early 30s affirmed:

my husband is happy with me selling. As long as I'm not coming to the market for love it's fine with him. Whenever I want to come back to Sa Pa to sell he says 'don't worry it's ok, you go'. He helps me out by taking care of the home.

However, not all husbands are fully supportive of their wives working outside the home. Hmong trader Ai is in her mid-20s and sells handicrafts in town, sleeping in a rented room shared with other female traders most days of the week. She expressed that:

sometimes my husband feels that I don't do anything in Sa Pa even though I am working hard for our family, and give him half of the money I earn every weekend when he comes to the market. It makes me feel sad that he doesn't understand.

When directly asked, some of these young married Hmong and Yao men responded rather ambivalently about these transformations and blurring of household gender roles. However, observations of their behaviour – their willingness to support their spouses by child-minding, cooking and driving them several kilometres by motorbike to the market town and back every day – suggests that many are nevertheless cognizant of the need for changing gender roles *vis-à-vis* the cash demands now required by the household.

We found more resistance to women working independently in the marketplace as traders and tour guides at the intergenerational level between parents and their daughters, and married women and their in-laws. In particular, some fathers of unmarried Hmong and Yao young women have great difficulty adjusting to their daughters' newfound wealth and independence. While daughters who are selling textiles in the marketplace or who are away leading day-long or overnight treks are now supporting their families to afford hybrid seeds and hire labourers to plant it, a number of fathers we interviewed resented such arrangements. This demand for hired labour is now important given the shortened time span for planting and its implications on labour exchange, as we noted earlier. Yet, despite having enough hired labour, several fathers wanted their daughters to come back to the village and participate in rice planting rather than staying in town to trade or trek with tourists, often personally coming into town to request their daughter to return.

Verbal disagreements between daughters and fathers have taken place over these expected roles, while in other instances, fathers object to their daughter's independence through less direct, passive acts of disapproval. Some young women are upset at their father's reactions and worry about how to appease them, while others take a more rebellious approach, ignoring their parent's wishes. Many women reasoned that their substantial financial contributions should be more highly valued and appreciated by their families, allowing them a greater level of autonomy. Sho, a Hmong woman in her late teens, who feels she must continually negotiate with her parents to trade textiles in town stated:

before, I just stayed in the village, but then I heard people made a lot of money here selling so I came too. My parents worked very hard, so I wanted to come here to earn money so they wouldn't have to work so hard. They were not very rich, sometimes there was not enough food for the whole family and they couldn't hire labour. But since I am working we can do this now, and they should see that.

We suggest that these intergenerational responses reflect newly emerging conflicts and negotiations over intra-household power dynamics in at least two regards. First, there are

contestations over perceptions of Hmong and Yao daughters' 'disobedience', as well as a sense of disloyalty by daughters for choosing to earn cash rather than contribute their own physical labour to the household farm, which has long been the most highly valued productive activity. Second, as Hmong and Yao women adopt these roles as new and often superior income-earners relative to their male household heads and spouses, the challenges and stresses we see materialising are suggestive of what other researchers have called a 'crisis of masculinity' in regard to the gendered impacts of livelihood change (Ong and Peletz 1995; Hill 2008). As the dominant traditional construct of men as 'providers' – a fundamentally important source of adult male identity – is being called into question, this creates tensions, frictions and new types of bargaining within households and across generations (cf. Agarwal 1997; Cleaver 2002).

We also observe that young women's engagement in trade is sometimes viewed as a threat to family honour and status, and for single women, their marriageability. Female independence and mobility are often construed on moral terms as linked to a lack of control over women's sexuality, as a risk to a woman's propriety, or equated with a loss of the needed skills to be an attractive marriage partner (cf. Nguyen, Oosterhoff, and White 2012). With regard to the latter, Hmong handicraft vendor Chu explained: 'fathers usually get worried that their daughters won't be able to marry a Hmong man if they come here to sell. They are afraid that women will not do housework or learn to embroider and will lose their traditional ways'. A number of young, recently married Hmong and Yao women expressed how their in-laws in particular begrudge them for leaving the village to trade or work in Sa Pa town. Doing so is deemed inappropriate behaviour for a married woman, as 'a good wife stays home'. As the marketplace has long symbolised a place to meet potential marriage partners, some Hmong believe that women should not visit a local market independently. Vang, a Hmong man, stated, 'when you are married, it's proper that a man and a woman should always go to the market together. The woman should never go alone'. Adding to this, Be, a Hmong woman in her 20s voiced: 'the problem is that some men say that when their wives come to the market they might meet other men'.

A family's relative economic status further complicates these gendered negotiations. For instance, one young Hmong woman we interviewed had 'married down' by customary wealth understandings to a family with far fewer land and livestock assets, and a husband whose parents were both deceased. This provided her with greater freedom to maintain decision-making power over her involvement in tourism trekking, having to negotiate only with her spouse. On the other hand, another young Hmong woman who had married into a relatively wealthy family, now residing with her in-laws, was expected to play a more traditional female household role. While still trekking, the degree of her participation was far more controlled and she was less involved in daily decision-making and household livelihood considerations. Such findings can be situated within the broader literature on farm women, which demonstrates that household economic standing and class can differentially influence how gender identities and divisions of labour are transformed during processes of agricultural modernisation (cf. Jellison 1993; Neth 1995).

These negotiations highlight how important ideological elements can often be attached to or embedded in particular livelihood practices and strategies, which in turn present a vital way of comprehending livelihoods as gendered (Radel 2012). The long-term implications of these gendered cash earning opportunities on household and marital dynamics have yet to be seen, these being very recent transformations. We envision that such shifts will become even more evident as the costs of hybrid seeds and their essential inputs continue to climb. Concurrently, in other locales outside of Sa Pa district or within households where these specific gendered economic opportunities are not available, it

appears to be cardamom harvesting providing the cash required for hybrid rice seeds. In these cases, traditional gender dynamics appear less challenged, with men tending to do the majority of the cultivating and trade and therefore providing the cash income to purchase hybrid seeds.

Concluding comments

This article has explored the place-specific gender (re)negotiations occurring with the Vietnam state's introduction of hybrid seed technologies. These technologies, comprising one of the more systematic state development efforts in the uplands, pose a dramatic change for ethnic minority smallholder livelihoods. While Vietnam's current *Gender Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development* calls for the inclusion of 'gender issues' in the design, planning and implementation of all rural development programmes (SRV 2006), to date there is no explicit gender component to the hybrid seed initiative. This agricultural intensification programme has not been paralleled with aims to progress women's empowerment or to specifically improve women's socio-economic status. An in-depth search for evidence in Vietnamese or English of discussions regarding the gendered implications of the hybrid seed programme in academic, governmental or 'grey literature' revealed no results whatsoever.⁵ Indeed as van Esterik (1999, 231) writes: 'women are the most likely to be responsible for feeding their families on a daily basis, and least likely to be involved in shaping the policies that determine the food system they must access'. Yet, as we have shown, despite its supposed 'gender neutrality' on the surface, this state intervention has the capacity to impact household level negotiations and to challenge, reconfigure or even reinforce gendered societal contracts in unanticipated ways.

As a whole, it can be argued that the current hybrid rice scheme has increased vulnerability within the livelihoods of these upland farmer's households. While the overall quantity of rice harvested has risen, the uncertainty surrounding access to seeds, timing of delivery, suitability of seeds to micro-climatic conditions and the cash required to purchase seeds and other inputs, have all intensified livelihood uncertainties and food-security concerns. Farmers deciding to purchase hybrid seeds on the market at greater cost, and planting traditional seeds for as long as their landholdings allow them, highlight anxieties over this state programme. As livelihoods have diversified to gain necessary cash income, gender relations have also been reworked and new tensions have arisen. We have shown how this is especially the case for a number of households in Sa Pa district where emerging cash earning opportunities favour women, repositioning them in an entirely new, pivotal role for their households' well-being, buttressing the new costs of farming that hybrid seeds have introduced. Oberhauser, Mandel and Hapke (2004, 206) have written of the possibility for livelihood strategies to 'involve transformative struggles through which women work to empower themselves by reshaping their identities, lives, and relationships within households and communities'. For this group of Hmong and Yao women, now increasingly involved in textile production and trekking, there has been growth in empowerment within their relationships with their husbands – empowerment that has nonetheless been fraught with conflict, especially when it comes to intergenerational and in-law relations. This is not to say that these changes would not have occurred at some stage in the future anyway, but this state agenda has created the environment in which these tensions have emerged far more rapidly, and in relation to a state-sponsored programme that had no gender-awareness angle.

Every day gendered politics in these uplands are extremely complex and contested. On the one hand, upland ethnic minority women appear to be increasingly pushed out of

decision-making due to the state's interventions and associated extension services that are far more easily accessible to men. On the other hand, women's innovative market activities are creating new avenues for income generation vital to purchasing 'modern' agricultural inputs. As food security concerns continue to be fundamental to Hmong and Yao livelihood equations, with growing land squeezes, increasing extreme climatic events and limited off-farm opportunities, it is clear that political-economic processes can profoundly alter the gendered negotiations and relationships that emerge as ethnic minority households strive to create food secure futures.

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Notes

1. Historically, Hmong and Yao house clusters or hamlets would consist of one lineage, and senior men would make core decisions. Nowadays, with growing land pressure, larger villages often contain more than one lineage, and the Vietnamese state often imposes a headman (in all cases that we know of, this has been a man) onto such villages. When women are involved in the formal sphere, this tends to occur through the mass organisation of the Women's Union.
2. All names are pseudonyms.
3. In the case of Hmong, women switch to become part of, and derive their identity from, their husband's lineage and clan upon marriage (Symonds 2004). Hmong kinship affinities through clan membership are the basis for all significant interactions and networks of support. Within clans, specific lineages exist, and within these, daily interactions and a sense of identity occur, especially as lineage members often live in the vicinity of each other (Cooper 1998; Lee and Tapp 2010). The situation is very similar for Yao with the patrilineal clan being the basic unit of social organisation, while households act as economic cores. When a Yao son gets married, he usually moves to his own house and is given a portion of the family's land (Sowerwine 2004). We are cognisant that every Hmong and Yao individual and household in upland Northern Vietnam may have different livelihood strategies and gender negotiations, and by no means have we covered them all here.
4. Hybrid rice is selectively bred by crossing two genetically distinct parents, producing 'heterosis or hybrid vigour' (Husain, Hossain, and Janaiah 2001, 5). These seeds lose their capacity with successive replanting, thus farmers must buy new seeds each season (Kloppenburg 2004; Pray and Naseem 2007).
5. The only document touching on gender and hybrid seeds in Vietnam was a MARD-AusAID (2010) project report briefly mentioning the gender ratio of farmers participating in trials of hybrid vegetables. No gender-linked recommendations were made.

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

"Una buena esposa se queda en casa": negociaciones generizadas sobre el programa agrario estatal, en las tierras altas de Vietnam

Los estudios rurales y de sustento junto con organizaciones de desarrollo están remarcando la importancia de la consciencia de género en los debates sobre la seguridad alimentaria, las crisis alimentarias y la tenencia de la tierra. Sin embargo, dentro de la República Socialista de Vietnam, esta dinámica de género es con frecuencia dejada de lado. En Vietnam, el arroz está íntimamente ligado a la seguridad alimentaria del país. En la última década, los niveles de exportación de arroz, los métodos de producción, y los precios del mercado local y global han sido una preocupación permanente para los organismos gubernamentales y de desarrollo. El firme apoyo oficial a las tecnologías agrícolas y a la intensificación ha producido el crecimiento doméstico y la importación de variedades híbridas de semillas de arroz y maíz. Sin embargo los impactos de estas tecnologías sobre los productores y consumidores de arroz de las minorías étnicas de las tierras altas de Vietnam no se han tenido en cuenta. Para estas mujeres y hombres, como los campesinos Hmong y Yao, la seguridad alimentaria es una preocupación constante para su modo de sustento casi de subsistencia. Mientras la plantación de estas nuevas semillas se alienta fuertemente, la investigación que estudie las realidades y experiencias sociales de estos grupos minoritarios de las tierras altas es insuficiente. Además, se ha ignorado cómo esas políticas y prácticas agrarias están implicadas en la reconfiguración de los roles, las relaciones y las identidades de género a través de las transformaciones de los modos de sustento individuales. En este artículo nos centramos en las consecuencias generizadas que tiene el programa gubernamental de híbridos del arroz para los campesinos de las tierras altas. Revelamos los impactos recientes sobre las relaciones familiares, incluyendo las mayores tensiones intergeneracionales entre los géneros, y los cambios de responsabilidades y las nuevas negociaciones entre maridos y esposas jóvenes. Estas dinámicas son más complicadas aún por el estatus económico del hogar, cuando sus miembros acceden a oportunidades específicas de mejorar la seguridad alimentaria cotidiana.

Palabras claves: sustentos generizados; semillas híbridas; Vietnam; Hmong; Yao; intensificación agrícola

“好女人该待在家”：越南高地中对国家农业计划的性别化协商

农村与生计研究及发展组织，在有关粮食安全、粮食危机与土地权属的辩论中，共同强调性别意识的重要性。但在越南社会主义共和国中，这些性别动态却经常被忽略。在越南，稻米与国家的粮食安全密切连结。过去十多年来，稻米出口的程度、生产方法，以及地方与全球的市场价格，持续成为政府和发展机构长期关注之事。官方对于农业技术和集约化的坚定批准，已促成国内成长以及多元化的稻米和玉米种子进口。但这些技术对于越南高地少数民族裔的稻米生产者和消费者所造成的影响，仍然受到忽略。对于这些男女，例如苗族和傣族的农夫而言，粮食安全是他们近乎自给自足的家计生活形态中的日常考量。儘管他们被大力鼓励种植这些新的种子，但却未有足够的研究检视这些高地少数民族裔的生活现实与经验。此外，这些农业政策与措施，如何在个人与家庭生计的改变中，牵涉性别角色、关系与认同的重组，仍然被忽略。我们将在本文中聚焦政府针对高地农民推动的多元稻米计划的性别化后果。我们将揭露该计划对于家庭关系的晚近影响，包含持续增加中的跨性别代际冲突、转变中的责任及年轻配偶之间的崭新协商。当家户成员获得特定的机会来改善每日生活中的粮食安全时，这些动态则进一步受到家户经济境况的影响而更加复杂化。

关键词：性别化的生计；多元种子；越南；苗族；傣族；农业集约化