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Agrarian transition and smallholder success through local networks: A case study from Mindanao

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Editorial Board, Working Paper Series

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Abstract:

On the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, scholars have documented a precarious land tenure, livelihood and security situation for many smallholders. Agrarian political economy studies provide insightful analysis of the underlying causes of much poverty and violence on the island. Less attention has been given to cases of smallholder success. This article proposes that conditions for smallholder farming, even among ethnic minority groups, are more varied across the island than the literature suggests. In upland villages of north-central Mindanao, there are signs of dynamic smallholder economies. The main case study is from a thriving mixed swidden and fixed field Maranao-Muslim farming village. Almost all the households in the village had successfully claimed land as their own and diversified and improved their livelihoods in recent times. To explain this positive outcome of agrarian transition, the article builds on a relational approach developed to assess the bargaining power of smallholders in land deals. To elaborate on the kinds of relationships smallholders use to access land and improve livelihoods, the article draws on anthropological literature on kinship, land tenure and place. A stronger cross-fertilization of key insights in agrarian political economy and anthropological literature on kinship helps develop the debate on agrarian transition in the southern Philippines.

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INTRODUCTION

In many parts of Southeast Asia, the closing of agricultural frontiers and agrarian transition have led to rising levels of landlessness and livelihood insecurity (Hall, Hirsch and Li 2011). On the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, political economy scholars document a precarious land tenure and security situation for many farmers (Vellema et al 2011; Gutierrez and Borras Jr. 2004). Although the island is rich in natural resources and agriculturally fertile, poverty levels are generally high, especially among indigenous groups who have long suffered from political and economic marginalisation, dispossession and violence (Huesca 2016; Eder and McKenna 2008).

The purpose of this article is not to object to the overall thrust of the marginalisation and dispossession argument of agrarian political economy, but to suggest that conditions for smallholder farming, also among ethnic minority groups, are more varied across the island than the literature suggests. To lend support to this proposition, the article draws on data obtained from fieldwork in Mindanao. In several upland villages of north-central Mindanao, among Christian-Cebuano, Muslim-Maranao and Indigenous-Higaonon groups, there are signs of dynamic smallholder economies. Although conflict, dispossession and poverty are part of the picture, several smallholder groups are doing quite well. The main case study is from Pirandangan (pseudonym), a thriving Maranao-Muslim mixed swidden and fixed field farming village. Almost all the households in Pirandangan had successfully claimed land as their own and diversified and improved their livelihoods in recent times.

To explain this positive outcome of agrarian transition, the article draws on insights from some of literature that account for diversity in smallholder experiences of agrarian change

(Montefrio 2017; Scoones 2009; Cramb et al 2009; Rigg 2006). While agrarian political economy scholars have always been concerned with the responses of peasants to capitalist and state-driven change, typically analysed as a mix of accommodation and resistance (Scott 1985), the literature of interest here demonstrates a broader range of responses and outcomes for smallholders (Rutten et al 2017; McCarthy 2010; Long 2003). Complex local dynamics play into and differentially shape the outcome of boom crops and other forms of intensified cash crop production (Hall 2011; Dressler 2009; Li 2002; Brosius 1997). Such developments work out very differently for different groups of smallholders depending on the specific sets of actors, relationships and factors that come together in each instance (Li 2014).

While calling for close attention to place-specific factors (Escobar 2001) and household-level processes (Eder 1999), all of these scholars stress the importance of linking the analysis of such micro-level data to 'the wider power constellations…in which smallholders are enmeshed' (Rutten et al 2017: 2). Rutten et al.'s (2017) 'relational approach' provides a particularly useful framework for locating smallholders in such wider networks. Compared with much of the literature on patron-client relations, political factionalism and elite rule (Sidel 1999; McCoy 1994; Schmidt et al. 1977; Wolf 1966), it examines a wider range of both horizontal and vertical relationships that smallholders use to increase their bargaining power in land deals. Beyond the topic of how smallholders negotiate large-scale land deals with governing elites and transnational corporations, the framework is useful for studying a broader set of issues relating to land tenure and livelihood transformation in smallholder settings.

Both agrarian political economy and the livelihood diversification studies point out that "local social networks", "local groups" or "kinship organisations" can be an important source of power for smallholders (Rutten et al 2017; de Haan and Zoomers 2005). Still, there is in the literature limited data on how these networks, groups and organisations take shape, operate and alter under varying conditions. To elaborate on the kinds of relationships smallholders in upland Mindanao use to access land and improve livelihoods, the article draws on anthropological literature on kinship, land tenure and place (Escobar 2001; Sather 1997; Sather 1996; Carsten 1997; Helbling 1989; Rodman 1987). The aim of this section is to expand on the vocabulary and sharpen the concepts for analysing group dynamics, land tenure and livelihood relations in agrarian change. This conceptual fine-tuning also serves as a critique of commonly circulating

assumptions about indigenous social organisation in the southern Philippines, including the idea that forest dwellers and upland farmers are part of, or have in some distant or more recent past belonged to, descent groups, clans or tribes. Often-repeated assumptions about the nature of bilateral kinship and the kindred are also critically assessed, particularly the notion that bilateral societies necessarily produce "loosely" structured groups with limited capacity for cooperation and protection.

As an alternative to the invocation of clans and descent groups in kinship analysis, the article draws on regional literature on house-based societies (Hugh-Jones and Carsten 1995; Waterson 1995). To more clearly differentiate the notion of "house group" from the notion of kindred (Freeman 1961), I stress the importance of co-residence and the associated notion of place (Feld and Basso 1996). The theory of precedence (Fox and Sather 1996), developed to analyse founder-focused ideologies in the Austronesian-speaking world, provides additional insights into processes of house group and community formation. It is through co-residence, ongoing use of land and membership in kin-based house groups, and through participation in wider bilateral networks of kin linked to pioneer settlers, that many upland smallholders in north-central Mindanao access and secure rights in land. That smallholders and their local leaders continue to act in such networks of "horizontal" relations in the midst of rapid agrarian change is not sufficiently acknowledged in the clientelist and elite rule literature.

Some of the anthropological literature on kinship, however, pays limited attention to how larger-scale dynamics of power and politics interact with household, family and community dynamics. This is unfortunate, as it is often in rapidly changing rural settings that members of "founding families" seek to strengthen or alter rules of access (Knudsen 2012, 2013). While smallholders may trace links to ancestors and tell origin stories for a variety of reasons, in land-claiming situations, tracing of descent is "always" about exclusion, and the exclusion of some is the inclusion of others (Hill, Hirsch and Li 2011). If, where and when splits and divisions occur depends on many factors, including the intensity of external demand for resources, the nature of the state, policy context, the strength of pro-farmer movements, and local dynamics of class, ethnicity and gender. It also depends on local practices of kinship. A stronger cross-fertilization of key insights in agrarian political economy and anthropological literature on kinship is

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beneficial for both, and helps develop the debate on agrarian transition in the Southern Philippines and the wider region.

The first section introduces the field site and methods. Next, I engage the marginalization and dispossession argument of agrarian political economy, focusing on Mindanao, and spell out how Rutten et al.'s (2017) relational approach and anthropological literature on kinship, land tenure and place add useful insights to the study of agrarian transition in upland communities in the region. The main ethnographic section presents the case of Pirandangan. It traces the oral history of land use and kinship formation, examines livelihood activities and land tenure arrangements, and analyses the extra-local relationships, policy context and conditions that have enabled smallholder success over the last two decades.

Background to the study, field site and methods
When I first formulated this project in 2011, the aim was to learn of the kinds of family networks that are common or tend to be effective in claiming land and other resources in an area of Mindanao with considerable ethnolinguistic diversity and a complex settlement history. In hinterland villages of north-central Mindanao, Christian-*Bisaya* settlers and their descendants (mostly Cebuano speakers), Higaonon (*Lumad*) indigenous people and Maranao (*Moro* or Muslim) indigenous people live side-by-side, sometimes mixed in the same villages.

Between March 2012 and December 2016, I went on four field trips to Iligan City, about six weeks in total. The territory of Iligan is large, covering 81,000 hectares, and stretches from the coast of Iligan Bay and inland east of Marawi City (see Figure 1). On my last two visits, in June and December 2016, I focused on the farmers of Pirandangan, a majority Maranao-Muslim hamlet (*purok*) located in one of four Muslim majority *barangays*[1] in the Christian majority City of Iligan. The hamlet constitutes part of the border between Iligan and the Province of Lanao del Sur. Lanao del Sur is part the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Through collaboration with members of a local NGO who had serviced Pirandangan for more than ten years, I was granted access to the village. By affiliating with the NGO, I became less of a stranger to the local residents than I otherwise would I have been. Cebuano, a language I am

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[1] A *barangay* is the smallest administrative unit of the Philippine state.

familiar with from previous fieldwork in the Philippines, is widely understood in the area. A research assistant from the NGO and a local *Bisaya* farmer helped me translate between Maranao, Cebuano and English.

Following a bottom-up approach, I began the study by mapping residential and livelihood patterns, focusing on actual land use. Together with farmers, I walked around the area, asking questions about their livelihood activities, listening to how they described changes in land use, and the stories they told about who had first cleared the land. I conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews with men and women, early settlers and newcomers, and not merely with village heads. I mapped kinship relations (genealogies), inheritance rules and residence patterns. The NGO provided me with additional data on land use. I also paid attention to the relationships residents maintained with extra-local parties, including the NGO that helped me with my research. Focus was on the relationships that were used to help strengthen land claims, secure tenure and improve livelihoods. While each field trip was relatively short, repeat visits have allowed me to observe changes in land use, livelihoods and kinship over nearly a five-year period.

Figure 1: Map of the Philippines. The two white dots in the dark circle show the location of the cities of Iligan and Marawi in north-central Mindanao. Marawi is located on the north shore of Lake Lanao, about 700 meters above sea level. Pirandangan is located between the cities, about 350 meters above sea level.

Marginalisation, dispossession and violence in the Southern Philippines

Popular and academic accounts of Mindanao, and Muslim Mindanao in particular, portray the island as mired in poverty and violence, a conflict-ridden frontier where warlords and shadow economies thrive, and where ongoing conflicts between the nation state and numerous insurgency groups prevent any effort at broad-based socio-economic development (Sterkens et al 2016; Lara and Scoofs 2013; Kreuzer 2005; Gutierrez 2000). The five-month "Marawi siege" in 2017, led by Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-inspired militants, is just the latest manifestation of political disorder.

Agrarian political economy and social history scholars have contributed much to our understanding of the underlying forces and relationships that produce high levels of poverty and violence on the island. While acknowledging complex conflict issues, the literature shows that many of the conflicts stem from inequalities in access to land, economic opportunities and state resources (Vellema et al. 2011). These inequalities have long historical roots, going back to discriminatory land tenure policies and governance practices during Spanish and U.S. colonial rule (Rodil 2004). Spanish rulers in the Philippines implemented the legal principle that all lands not formally claimed and granted by the Crown are automatically part of the public domain (Dressler 2009: 37). This Regalian Doctrine was further strengthened under U.S. colonial rule. Land rights were issued 'on the basis of priority of claim filed, not priority of occupation' (McKenna 1998: 118). Native conceptions of ownership were ignored. Swidden agriculturalists and other subsistence farmers, and many others who lacked connections, know-how and money, lost out in the process of formalisation (Kerkvliet 1997). In addition to class discrimination, the American colonial government incorporated racial discrimination into the new land laws. The Public Land Act of 1903 (and its amendments in 1919 and 1936) allowed Christian settlers and corporations to own much more land than non-Christian natives (Rodil 2004: 32-33). On top of that, crop loans and other government assistance, such as irrigation and road-to-market projects, were channeled largely to Christian settler communities (McKenna 1998: 117).

Subsequent Philippine governments did – for a long time – little to rectify these historical injustices. Instead, they maintained U.S. land laws and systems of land administration and scaled up support for resettlement programmes. During the 1950s and 1960s, there was a massive inflow of Christian Filipino migrants to Mindanao. Previous majority groups soon found

themselves minorities in their own lands. By 1970, Christian settlers and their descendants were the majority in all but five provinces in the Southern Philippines (Eder and McKenna 2008: 70). Inequality in access to land and government resources had at this time produced a deep economic gap between Christian settlers and the indigenous populations. Violent conflicts broke out. President Marcos' military campaigns to solve the conflicts in the South resulted in all-out war against Moro armed secessionists and, when Martial Law was imposed on the nation in 1972, considerable recruitment to the communist insurgency.

In the years after the People Power Revolution that toppled the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, progressive NGOs and other civil society groups successfully pressured the Corazon Aquino government to implement a Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program and provided territorially-based ethnic minority groups some level of regional autonomy (Borras and Franco 2005). With the passage of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act in 1997, legal support for traditional land rights was considerably strengthened (Pulhin and Dizon 2006). However, the state remains hesitant or unable to fully implement these programmes. In several instances, in different parts of the country, the new programmes, policies and legislation aimed at strengthening the land rights and livelihoods of the rural poor have ended up serving the interests of better-off locals and urban-based native elites (Eder and McKenna 2008: 79; Sajor 1999: 312). Studies also show that decentralization and devolution policies, designed to strengthen local democratic governance, have in many instances encouraged the formation of powerful local "clans" and warlords, triggered violent conflicts over political office, and further eroded initiatives for inclusive growth and equitable development (Verbrugge 2014; Vellema et al 2011: 304).

A broader trans-regional and global political-economic context is needed to fully understand ongoing and new conflicts over land, both in the Philippines and elsewhere in the rural south. In recent decades, a new wave of global investors and land-hungry corporations have had considerable success in buying, leasing, grabbing, or in other ways taking control over vast tracts of land (Fairbairn et al. 2014; Borras and Franco 2013; Wolford et al 2013). New actors and crops have entered the scene, creating new "frontiers" and altering the mechanisms of land control (Peluso and Lund 2011). In Mindanao, in addition to the traditional export crops of abaca, pineapple and banana, private firms from the Philippines and multinational companies

have scaled up investments in palm oil, rubber, cacao and physic nuts (*jatropha curcus*) (Huesca 2016). These investments are increasingly encroaching into the uplands where they pose serious threats to the livelihoods of indigenous peoples and other small-scale farmers who live in these areas. As long as the underlying structural inequalities in access to land, livelihoods and political power remain in place, and governing elites continue to promote plantation agriculture as the main strategy of rural development, the future of smallholder farming looks bleak, and the problems of landlessness, poverty and violent conflict are likely to intensify further (Lara 2014).

While very useful, there is in much of this literature limited data on the everyday realities of land tenure, livelihood and community relations in smallholder settings. Due to ongoing conflict and high levels of insecurity in many areas, it has been difficult for scholars to conduct systematic and detailed ethnographic fieldwork into these issues over the last fifty years. As a result, familiar assumptions in the patron-client and elite rule literature continue to dominate the debate on agrarian relations and smallholder farming in the Southern Philippines. The case study presented below begins the work of detailing the different kinds of relationships that mixed swidden and fixed field farmers in Mindanao use to access land, secure tenure and improve livelihoods.

The theoretical framework builds on Rutten et al's (2017) relational approach. It highlights the different kinds of relationships smallholders use to enhance their bargaining power in land deals. It foregrounds smallholder perspectives on these relationships. In efforts to strengthen their land tenure and livelihood situation, or reap benefits from large-scale land deals, members of smallholder communities commonly form tactical relationships with supportive government officials and NGOs, and sometimes with rebel groups. If conditions are suitable, smallholders also capitalise on relations of interdependency with land investors, some of whom may be particularly vulnerable to sabotage, protest, or a bad reputational image. Importantly, smallholders enhance their bargaining power by forming 'solidarity ties with other smallholders' (Rutten et al 2017: 6). "Horizontal" ties of this kind may take many forms, such as formally organised peasant or indigenous organisations and informal kinship or neighbourhood groups. The latter receives considerable attention in this article: smallholders who mobilise and forge bargaining entities through local social networks 'grounded in kin-based land claims and forms of land governance, and in shared identities linked to the land' (Rutten et al. 2017: 12-13).

Where many agrarian political economy scholars are quick to point out that such "rooted" networks of smallholders are 'extremely vulnerable to fragmentation, elite capture or co-optation' (Rutten et al 2017: 13), I find it useful to take a closer look at the social relations upland farmers in northern Mindanao are part of. Instead of fragmentation and proletarianisation, the article details a process of local kin group formation in the midst of rapid agrarian change. If this social formation is not a descent group or clan, what is it? Anthropological literature on kinship, land tenure and place provides good answers.

Kinship, land tenure and place

Kinship used to be a central topic in peasant studies. More explicitly than many other authors in the 1950s, Eric R. Wolf (1955, 1957) argued that peasant communities were created in response to colonial occupation and capitalist expansion. He acknowledged considerable complexity and variability in local community dynamics and described a wide range of responses among rural people to the changes taking place. The closed peasant community was only one response to the new conditions (Kearney 1996: 123). When anthropologists more or less gave up on the project of arriving at a common understanding of "kinship" during the 1970s (Marshall 1977; Schneider 1972), and peasant studies took a greater interest in global political economy perspectives in the 1980s and 1990s, the debate on kinship in peasant studies did not always keep up with the debates that unfolded in anthropology.

Anthropologists have long criticized the colonial image of "native society" in genealogical terms, where the principle of unilineal descent generates lineages, clans and tribes (Filer 2007; Barnes 1966; Leach 1954). This anthropological critique has, however, not travelled very far. Political scientists, historians, sociologists and other scholars who write about politics and agrarian relations in the Southern Philippines frequently use the term "clan," referring to some kind of political or extended family (Kreuzer 2005; Gutierrez et al 1992).[2] Conflicts between families are said to be "clan feuds" (Torres 2010). The term "tribe" is also widely used, both in civil society and state discourse on "indigenous peoples" (Frake 2014). Upland farmers, too, will sometimes say they belong to a tribe (or *tribo*). They use the term to emphasise that they

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[2] In anthropology, unlike in common use, a clan refers to unilineal descent groups associated with mythical ancestors.

are the customary owners of a territory, and to seek compensation benefits from mining, logging or plantation companies. Since the passage of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) in 1997, many farmer groups in Mindanao have applied for native title (Ancestral Domain Title or Ancestral Land Title). As part of the application process, they typically form state-approved "Tribal Councils." The terms "tribe" and "indigenous people" suggest that people designated as such belong to distinct cultural groups with a traditional way of life. When land investors, government officials and NGOs approach upland communities to gain access to resources or implement policies and projects in a locality, they seem to expect or hope that the leader they are introduced to represents a unified, cohesive "clan" or "tribal" institution. If they are unable to find such a leader, they may try to prop one of them up with big-man status, for example by helping someone win the election for *barangay* captainship, or by organising an enthronement ceremony for a new *sultan* (leader of Muslims) or *datu* (traditional leader). While external interventions of this kind affect power-dynamics within and between groups, broad ethnolinguistic and religious categories and *sultan* and *datu* titles say very little (if anything) about actual social relationships, organisational forms, institutions of leadership and land tenure practices in Mindanao. These categories and titles need to be interrogated in each instance to find out if, when, how and for whom they become socially salient and effective instruments for establishing rights in land (Eder 2010; Dressler and Turner 2008; Abinales 2000).

Corporate village structures are uncommon in much of island Southeast Asia (Janowski 2007: 96). While there are important exceptions, most peoples in the region trace ancestry through both their mother's and father's line. Both sides offer possibilities for inheritance, place of residence, and emotional, social and economic support. Such kinship systems are usually termed "bilateral" or "cognatic." Instead of mutually exclusive lineages with a corporate descent group type of social structure, bilateral kinship systems produce ego-oriented, overlapping kindreds (Freeman 1961). These are basically extended families. With no clear rule defining the boundaries for membership, many scholars describe bilateral societies, communities and groups as 'loosely structured' (Cannell 1999: 49).

In studies of the effects of capitalist and state-led agrarian change on peasant communities in Southeast Asia, it has been fashion for some time to assume that the bilateral

kindred has limited capacity for cooperation, protection and security (Scott 1972: 103). Moreover, this assumption of "looseness" serves as a key element in the argument for why patron-client ties, factional politics and elite family rule is so prevalent in the region. In the introductory chapter of an influential book on state and family in the Philippines, Alfred McCoy says: 'Instead of learning the principle of family loyalty by revering distant male ancestors, Filipinos act as principals in ever-extending bilateral networks of real and fictive kin' (1994: 9). Elite families use the flexibility in kinship ties to build up large coalitions (based on blood, marriage and ritual relations) to win elections, capture state resources and dominate political-economic relations in their electoral districts. While elite families are portrayed as masters of exploiting the flexibility inherent in the kindred to form large political networks, ordinary Filipinos tend to be portrayed as clients or captives of elites. Even if descent principles play a very limited role in social organisation, might not ordinary Filipinos also have the capacity to use kinship and place relations to form robust solidarity groups beyond the household?

The practice of classifying entire societies as having either a bilateral or a corporate descent group type of kinship system is problematic (Leach 1961: 3-4). People within any society may be found to use different types of filiation and descent (patrilineal, matrilineal, cognatic, etc.), stressing different models in different contexts and for different purposes (Holy 1996: 101). In recent decades, a more flexible definition of kinship has emerged (Schweitzer 1999). Instead of being pre-occupied with the formal features of a particular kinship system, anthropologists studying social organisation in Southeast Asia have produced new insights by highlighting how farmers, fishers and migrant workers actually relate to their families and communities (Carsten 1997; Helbling 1989). While life-cycle rituals are important, 'relatedness' is significantly formed in everyday life, through ordinary practices such as 'sharing a meal, building a house, remitting funds…and caring for someone's child' (Aguilar 2013: 351). The notion of house-based societies (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Waterson 1995) has proven useful, both in the analysis of relatedness among the more stratified societies of Eastern Indonesia and among more egalitarian or kindred-based groups. In this approach, the main organising principle of kinship is not descent or lineage, but the 'house' or the 'hearth-group' (Janowski 2007). "Houses" refer here to more than physical structures. They include the people who claim membership in them, and the relationships that are produced in and through them. In

processes of house group and local community formation, ancestors and places of origin are in some contexts more or less ignored (Dumont 1981; Carsten 1995). In other settings, ancestors and places of origin take on particular kinds of significance, for example in stories of the founding of settlements and houses (Fox 2009; Waterson 2009; Fox and Sather 1996). Building on these insights, I will show how upland farmers in Mindanao form solidarity groups beyond the household. I highlight the importance of co-residence, ongoing use of land, siblingship and bilateral inheritance in the formation of cooperative house groups in a post-frontier agrarian setting. Although weakly incorporated, flexible and seemingly "loose" in their structures, the kin-based house groups and wider neighbourhood cluster are shown to have important institutional features that mediate their members' access to and rights in land.

Smallholders in Southeast Asia tend to draw on a wide set of social relations to secure access to land (Ribot and Peluso 2003). To explore land tenure in upland Mindanao beyond the inflexible and limited realm of state-defined property law, the notion of customary land tenure (despite its colonial heritage) is useful. In many upland areas of the Philippines, actual land use and local understandings of ownership correlate poorly with legal definitions and classifications. In Pirandangan, the majority of the land is formally classified as Forest Land due to its steepness. By law, such lands are part of the public domain and cannot be issued private title. Yet local people claim to own such lands and grow all kinds of food and cash crops in hilly and steep terrain. In this context, it is useful to focus on how people establish themselves in a territory, mix labour with the land, and create links between particular groups of people and specific areas of the land (Ingold 1987; Rodman 1987). Through livelihood activities such as clearing, cultivation and harvesting, and through naming practices and story-telling, people come to know appropriate and develop intimate relationships with the land (Weiner 2002: 21).

External demand for and pressure on land affect the kinds of (hi)stories local people tell about their relationship with land. In ancestral domain claim processes, smallholders frequently exaggerate their "rootedness" to land. People's ability to define themselves to land through such "customary" means varies. Among many smallholders in upland Mindanao, a person's definitional power in relation to land is very much linked to who his or her parents are, and the relative strength of their kin network in the locality. At the same time, the role of extra-local

relationships, state power and politics in such place-making efforts cannot be ignored. Customary land tenure arrangements are not static, but change in response to population pressure, ecological conditions, new technologies, market demand, and government policies and practices (Cotula 2007: 12; Gatmaytan 2001; Peluso 1996). The effect that these pressures and opportunities have on the land tenure and livelihood situation of specific farmers, and on the cohesiveness and bargaining power of smallholder groups, is more difficult to predict than what dominant linear models of agrarian change suggests (Cramb et al. 2009: 332). The case study brings out these points in more detail.

History of settlement, livelihoods and land tenure in Pirandangan

According to my sources, the first couple to settle and raise a family in Pirandangan was Malulo and her husband Makatindog, most likely in the 1930s. Makatindog was from Kapai, Lanao del Sur. His family had for generations walked and used horses to transport goods between Kapai and Iligan. Iligan was, and still is, an important trading centre for the Maranao. In fact, the term "Maranao" is an exonym meaning "people from the lake" (Tawagon 1987). In the past, they traded forest products, coffee and rice for salt, cloth, metal and various marine products (Mednick 1965: 34). On their way from Kapai to Iligan, they tended to get hungry and tired when they got to the Pirandangan area, so they stopped to eat and rest before embarking on the last part of the trip. It was while resting up in Pirandangan that Makatindog met Malulo. Malulo inherited the land from her parents when she married Makatindog. At that time, swidden cultivation was their primary mode of production, and they likely shifted residence within a wider but designated area. In addition, they would fish in the river, hunt wild game and forage for forest products.

In June 2016, there were 42 households in Pirandangan. Nearly 85 per cent of the residents were linked to Malulo and Makatindog through blood or marriage. About half of the resident population were linked to two of their sons, Rakal and Aguiral (see Figure 1). Their children constituted in many ways the 'relational core' (Sather 1997: 167) of the main settlement of Pirandangan. The children of Aguiral, in particular, had formed a large, cooperative sibling group in the village.
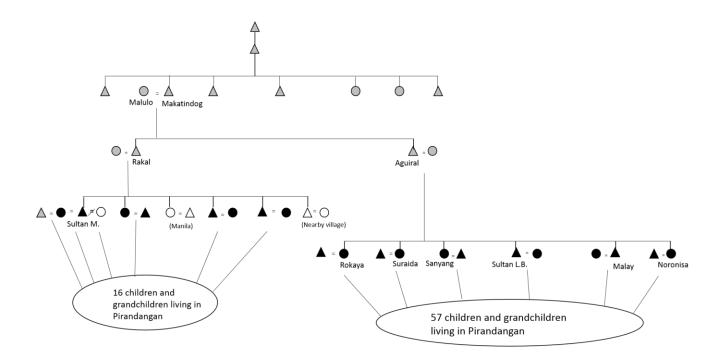
Figure 2 Genealogy chart of the main kin group in Pirandangan.
Black triangles (male) and circles (female) refer to the descendants of Malulo and Makatindog who lived in Pirandangan in June 2016. White figures refer to people who lived elsewhere. Grey were deceased.

In the process of incorporation, to form house groups and establish rights in land, residents have had very little need for tracing genealogically remote ancestors. While recent generations of ancestors were crucial for how people thought of themselves as belonging to the same family and for accessing land, in a community-wide mapping exercise in 2012, I found that lines of descent were fragmentarily remembered. Even the main community leader (who carried the title Sultan) needed assistance to link his family more than three generations back. The most important relationships in each cluster of houses were those based on parent-child and sibling ties. This entity is what I call a kin-based house group (Knudsen 2013). Membership is established through marriage, bilateral filiation and co-residence. Each kin-based house group consists of smaller units, typically a household, or those who share 'one sleeping place' (*isaka iga-an*). While each *isaka iga-an* is an important social entity, and it is the goal of many families to help make newly formed households self-sufficient, the concept of "family farm" or "household" in much of the agrarian transition literature fails to capture the crucial role of adult sibling sets and kin-based house groups as important intermediary political and economic entities at the village level.

Within each co-residing adult sibling group, the oldest male member was often expected to take on a leadership role and represent the group in village affairs. In some contexts, he was referred to as *pangulo* (head man), *datu* or sultan. In Pirandangan, two men held the title sultan, Sultan M. and Sultan L.B. (see Figure 2). Both of them were the oldest males in their respective sibling group, and both were descendants of the first couple believed to have cleared the land and settled in Pirandangan. Sultan L.B. was also an elected *barangay* councillor (*kagawad*). His eldest sister, Rokaya, held the title *bai'a labi*, female leader and daughter of sultan. Their positions did not depend on descent as such, but on their senior generational status, personal abilities and position among their housemates.

That small-scale farmers carry the title sultan is not unusual among the Maranao. In the Lanao provinces of Mindanao, there may be nearly a thousand men who claim the title (Tawagon 1987). The explanation for why there are so many men with this title in this part of Mindanao is the topic of a separate paper. Here I will just point out that such a "fragmented" nature of local leadership looks to be common among hunter-gatherers, swidden agriculturalists and geographically mobile groups of small-scale fishers in Southeast Asia (Gibson and Sillander 2011; Scott 2009; Sather 1997). In these settings, personal autonomy, egalitarianism, and inclusive forms of social solidarity tend to be important. In Pirandangan, too, an egalitarian ethos was reflected in much day-to-day interaction, and class distinctions were unimportant. While some individuals owned more land than others, and some households had twice (and occasionally thrice) the monthly income of other households, they lived in houses of similar size and standard. The clothes they wore, the nicknames they used, the food they ate and who they shared meals with all contributed to upholding an egalitarian ethos in village social life. At the same time, relationships will not be unequivocally egalitarian. There was a hierarchy based on birth order, where younger siblings paid respect to older siblings. In addition, as in Edmund Leach's (1954) study of *Political Systems in Highland Burma*, and in Clifford Sather's (1996) account of the Iban on Borneo, Pirandangan farmers contextually articulated both egalitarian and hierarchical values (see also King 1991). They commonly boosted the status of a local male leader in an effort to strengthen his power in negotiations with external parties, for example by introducing him as Sultan. In some contexts, they invoked egalitarian values as a way of distinguishing themselves from more hierarchical neighbouring societies. In other contexts, a

precedence discourse stressing the prior rights of the descendants of the first couple to establish themselves in the area filtered into debates on land tenure and local leadership.

The residents of Pirandangan had developed a highly diverse pattern of land use. Table 1 gives a summary of the main agricultural activities. Most households grew some corn. One hectare of plowable land near the main settlement would, under normal conditions, produce about one ton of corn per harvest (20 sacks of 50 kg.), translating to an economic value of about 40,000 pesos annually (US$ 833). Around half of the households in the village continued to engage in swidden cultivation (*kaingin*), clearing and burning part of the hilly sections of their lands. The fallow period was relatively short, with less than five years of regrowth before the next cycle of cutting, burning and planting began. Swidden and fallow areas planted with rice and corn were intercropped with trees and vegetables. As observed elsewhere in the region, 'swidden cultivation has become a component activity in diversified livelihood systems…' (Mertz et al 2009: 260). Women had the main responsibility for gardening, growing beans, squash, sweet potato, eggplant and onion. Many households owned coconut trees. The trees were harvested four times per year. The income of copra from 100 fruit-bearing trees was about 10,000 pesos per harvest. Most households also owned fruit trees, such as durian, rambutan, mango, papaya and lanzone (*lansium parasiticum*). All households owned some livestock, mostly chickens and goats. Some owned cattle, water buffalos and horses.

Falcata	4500 trees		Corn	23.5 ha
Hemp	3500 trees		Rice	8.5 ha
Coconut	549 trees		Banana	8.5 ha
Turmeric	500 trees		Eggplant	5.3 ha
Rambutan	508 trees		Beans	3.5 ha
Durian	409 trees		Fishponds	1.8 ha

Table 1: Important crops in Pirandangan (number of trees and hectares), November 2015. Source: NGO.

Farmers also had their own niches. One farmer planted peanuts on a commercial scale. Two men were the main producers of charcoal. When clearing land for swiddening, some logs would be set aside for this activity. Another farmer was regularly planting more rice than other farmers. In 2012, with the assistance of a local NGO which obtained funding from a government

agency, he established the first wet-rice field in the village. As elsewhere in the Philippines, the NGO and government sectors encourage farmers to take up fixed field agriculture, with the hope that this will discourage swiddening and decrease the rate of forest clearance (Dressler et al. 2017; Eder 2006: 154; McDermott 2000: 359-361). In 2016, four farmers had established small double-cropped paddies. As of December 2016, it remained a marginal activity in terms of land use, covering less than two per cent of all land in the village.

Many farmers had planted falcata (*paraserianthes falcataria*), a fast-growing tree ready for harvest seven or eight years after planting. Being in high demand from the wood processing industry in Mindanao, it was a lucrative tree to grow for the Pirandangan farmers. Falcata was planted on higher grounds, some also in a contested boundary area. They planted up to 500 trees per hectare. In 2015, falcata had been planted on about 10 percent of the land in Pirandangan. During the first year and a half after planting, weeding around the young falcata plant is an important activity. At this stage, the tree is commonly intercropped with cassava, sweet potato, rice, corn or other short-term crops. When the falcata plants are older, they are typically intercropped with coffee, banana, abaca or taro. Both men and women were involved in many of these activities. Men did logging and transportation of logs. When farmers in Pirandangan had logs ready for the market, they floated them to a pick-up station closer to the city. They ordered a ten-wheeler truck with a loading capacity of 35 cubic meters to pick up the logs, 30 to 40 logs per truck. In June 2016, the income from 35 cubic meters of falcata was 140,000 pesos (US$2,979). The cost of the truck was 25,000 pesos. In addition, the seller had to pay the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) 15,000 pesos. Labour cost was estimated to about 9,500 pesos. They also paid 5,000 pesos to the police, known as Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). The net income from one truck load was thus estimated to 85,500 pesos (US$1,819). The taxes the farmers paid for the trees gave legitimacy to the activity, as well as to their land ownership claims. It goes beyond the scope of this article to consider the longer-term ecological and socio-economic effects of expanding falcata plantations, but one obvious effect of expansion of commercial tree crops is a reduction in land available for swidden. Whatever the future holds, for now falcata served as a significant source of saving for the farmers who had planted them. Note also that commercial tree crops have a long history in Pirandangan. Residents have been part of the copra trade since the 1950s.

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Additional sources of food and income came from fishing, gold panning, transportation, government employment, and the government's conditional cash transfer programme. Several men fished in the river. Through the support of a local NGO, five households had established fishponds. One pond could room up to 1,000 tilapia. The fish was mostly for own consumption. Two men owned motorbikes and delivered important transportation services for the villagers. The main community leader, L.B., received an honorarium of 7000 pesos per month for his job as *barangay* councillor. His wife was a *barangay* health care worker, receiving an honorarium of 3000 pesos per month. The majority of the households in Pirandangan received financial and other support through the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Progam* (4Ps), a conditional cash transfer programme aiming to reduce poverty by helping poor families keep their children healthy and in school. L.B. had played a role in justifying the classification of many Pirandangan households as "poor enough" to qualify for the programme.

With all the produce Pirandangan farmers cultivated for the markets, transportation had become a crucial issue for them. In 2012, it took about two hours to travel between the village and the city, the last hour on foot. While any healthy and strong person could carry produce to a pickup place about 4 kilometers away, horses were needed for heavier loads. They lobbied the government for an improved access road. In 2015, it became possible to ride a motorbike (*habalhabal*) all the way to the village, the last bit on a narrow, steep and winding path. Funding for an improved path through the jungle, with cement in critical places, was secured through their local NGO partner. Still, on days of heavy rain, it was difficult to access the village on a bike. On my last visit in 2016, a new hanging bridge and access road was under construction by the Department of Works and Highways (DPWH). The bridge was designed to be strong and wide enough to carry motorbikes.

The notion of ancestral land (*kawali*) that was meaningful in Pirandangan went back to the founding couple who first cleared the land and settled in the area. Individual histories of land use covered the landscape. A grave site and some old mango and durian trees provided physical evidence of common ancestors. Smallholders activated their individual claims to portions of the land through kinship, residence and ongoing use of the land. Of the 150 hectares of land in Pirandangan, the 26 households in the main settlement, most of whom belonged to the extended

family group in Figure 1, had successfully claimed about 100 hectares (see figure 3). The average land per household was 3.85 hectare in 2016.
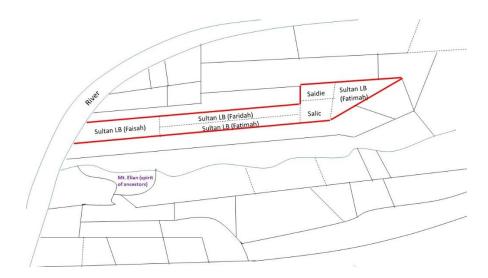

Figure 3: Map of landownership in Pirandangan (June 2016, covering about 100 hectares. Map not drawn to scale).

The land is mostly flat close to the river, but the rest of the terrain is hilly and steep. Initially, all subdivided lots stretched from the river to the top of the highest hills within their territory, about 100 meters in altitude above the river. That meant that those who inherited land had access to some flat land near the river and some land with different soil and growth conditions at higher altitudes. The land that sultan L.B. had inherited from his father is highlighted in Figure 3. The pieces of land on both sides of this lot was owned by his siblings. L.B.'s piece of land was initially about 8.5 hectares in size. His oldest son and daughter had recently married and been given ownership of two smaller pieces of land (Saidie and Salic). The rest of the land was reserved for his other children. All siblings, male and female, inherited a near equal share of their parents' land. There had been no consolidation of lots into larger units, for example where better-off households buy the land of poorer neighbours (Scott 1985; Li 2014). The 'ethic of access' (Peluso 1996: 515) that dominated in Pirandangan had some similarities with the subsistence ethic articulated by James C. Scott (1976), characterised by an emphasis on subsistence rights, but it was also different in that it gave precedence to the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the first couple to clear the land and establish themselves in the area.

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In June 2016, only two of the 26 households in the main settlement did not own land in Pirandangan, both of them Christian settlers. The daughter of one of the Christian settler couples had recently married into the pioneer family group and obtained a piece of land as bride price. This land was managed mostly by her father. By working some of the lands of their neighbours, individual farmers gained access to agricultural produce even if their own crops failed, or if they owned little or no land in the village. As far as I was able to assess, the sharing arrangements were not perceived as exploitative, but long-term ethnographic fieldwork is needed to get a good grasp of the intricacies and distributional effects of everyday politics between individuals, households and families in a village setting (Kerkvliet 1990).

Almost all the land in the village was considered individually owned. Individuals had considerable autonomy in deciding on the uses of their land. Two lots were "owned" with tax declarations, meaning that two persons had registered their lands with the Assessor's Office in Iligan. These lots, covering a combined area of 30 hectares, were located near the river, on plowable land. As the "owners" of the two registered lots were no longer alive, and both lots had been subdivided without updating government records, the land had in effect reverted back to its previous status: individual customary ownership. Apart from the two lots registered with the Assessor's Office, Pirandangan residents had not applied for state-defined tenure products, such as private (Torrens) title, Community-Based Forest Management Agreement, Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title and Certificate of Ancestral Land Title. They would, of course, have liked to have formal recognition as land owners, but they also did not want to get bogged down in the highly complex, costly and tedious process of obtaining such recognition.

Note that the practice of land tenure is much more complex than the simple map of individual landownership suggests. While Pirandangan residents had no concept of communal land tenure, the whole area was understood to be "owned" by their ancestors, and ultimately by God. The ancestors were believed to reside in Mt. Elian (see Figure 3), a small mountain near the main settlement where farming was prohibited. Old mango and durian trees were typically considered common property. The land on which the old trees were located was considered the individual landholding of a descendant of the person who first cleared the land, but other bilateral kin of the same "source" (po-onan) were allowed to harvest fruits for own consumption from these trees. The river was considered an open access space where also non-community

members could float timber, but outsiders would typically seek the assistance from local men in exchange for some compensation. Fishing in the river was open to the members of the communities on both sides of the river. Rules regarding housing was different from rules regulating agricultural lands. The 26 houses in the main settlement were mainly clustered on two of the lots in Figure 3.

Since village exogamy was common, and children inherited land from both their mother's and father's side, many residents owned some land outside their village of residence. Additional research is needed to find out how Pirandangan residents access and own land located elsewhere. Based on my initial observations, an acknowledged owner of a piece of land who lives elsewhere commonly lends it, or a part of it, to a relative. Such lending typically involves an expectation that the borrower shares some of the produce or income from the land with the owner. If the borrower ends up using the land for a long time and outlives the customary owner, he or she can become the recognised owner of the land. The increased use of certain tree crops may reflect a deliberate strategy of ensuring ownership without co-residence, but such "absentee ownership" seemed difficult to enforce without the use of close family ties. In any case, claims to land and full community membership have to be asserted and agreed to. Bilateral inheritance and marriage are not sufficient to ensure rights in land. Co-residence and ongoing use of land are important. Absentee family members may or may not be considered full members of the house group they were born into. Some maintain such ties by being on frequent visits to their place of origin and continue to plant some crops there. Others do not. "Forgotten" members of a house group do not inherit any land at all, while adopted children can obtain full rights. So while bilateral inheritance is an important means of obtaining access to land, given how much attention is directed toward siblingship and shared place, the concept of bilateral descent gives an inaccurate depiction of local social dynamics and property relations in Pirandangan.

Selling of land was nearly impossible in Pirandangan. In the one case that I am aware of, the seller of a piece of land had been in conflict with one of his brothers and had moved out of the village. As his wife owned land on the other side of the valley, he was still able to farm. I do not know the exact source of conflict, but his decision to sell the land came as a response to a perceived wrong done to him. His *maratabat* (pride, self-esteem) had been insulted. As he was a member of an influential sibling group in the village, and a split between siblings was considered

a serious matter, much effort was put into solving the dispute. After a year of trying to farm the land, the buyer, a more distant relative from a nearby village, gave up on asserting ownership. He was gradually squeezed out, but also compensated for giving up on the land. Reconciliation efforts were reaching their conclusion on my last field trip, and it looked like the brothers were going to settle their differences.

This episode underscores what other scholars in the region have observed: the sibling group "must" be cohesive and strong (Gibson 1995; Waterson 1995; McKinley 1981). The notion of coming from the same womb (*isa ka tiyan*) means a form of indivisibility or unity that also represents the ideal of moral solidarity (Aguilar 2013: 357). When conflicts arise, splits are more likely to take place and remain unresolved between cousins and more distant relatives than between a group of siblings (Helbling 1989: 138). While patronage politics and alliance strategies may accentuate splits between different sibling groups, villagers counteract such fragmentation pressure by, among other things, using an extended notion of siblingship in everyday interaction. The practice of Islam within the village also contributed to producing commonality among the Maranao-Muslim residents. In 2014, they built a new village mosque with external support. As long as the majority of the residents of Pirandangan continue to broadly share similar interest in land and livelihood, the capacity of residents to overcome differences and consolidate relationships into larger, cooperative networks will likely remain strong. Under such conditions, the ideology of an extended notion of siblingship ("we are all related", "we all come from the same womb") and the practice of Islam in village life will continue to aid in the (re)production of a cohesive group of smallholders that has the potential of serving as an effective bargaining entity vis-à-vis diverse others.

As the expansion of economic activities has largely been through the markets of Iligan, the Pirandangan residents' social and political relations have mostly expanded in that direction too. The culture of broadening relationships through friendship, brotherhood or alliance (*kanggiginawa-i)* for security and support is an ancient one among the Maranao (Tawagon 1987: 152). In the early 2000s, they established what was going to become an important relationship with an Iligan-based NGO. By the time of my fieldwork, the relationship had developed to cover numerous projects and activities, mostly in the area of organic farming methods and market

access. The NGO promoted an agro-ecological framework based on low external inputs, organic fertilizer, crop and income diversification, and local knowledge of soils, cropping seasons and water supply. The NGO provided important inputs, such as seeds and seedlings, milk fish fry for aquaculture, and irrigation equipment for small wet-rice fields. While the NGO also introduced new ideas and methods, the framework is not meant to be a ready-made package or set of techniques delivered top-down. The NGO has played a key role in mobilising resources for the local community, having good connections both to government officials and national and international NGOs. The mobilising success of the NGO was a result of increasing availability of resources for alternative livelihood projects in recent years.

One reason for this increased support is the widespread belief, common among development and conflict specialists, NGO activists, government officials, and the elders of the Pirandangan community, that when young people see a future for themselves in agriculture, they are less likely to join extremist militant groups. Another reason is that the "legitimate" branches of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), whose leaders are involved in ongoing peace negotiations with the national government, seek to include much of the territory of Iligan into a new and enlarged *Bangsamoro* sub-state entity. The MILF seeks to include about 80 percent of the territory of Iligan into this entity.[3] Christian populist politicians in Iligan are actively trying to prevent this from happening. This broader contestation over territory and sovereignty filters into the initiatives of Iligan-based NGOs who are courting and providing services to Muslim majority villages. The Pirandangan residents were able to leverage this situation, nurturing links with both parties. This larger-scale dispute may not be solved anytime soon. Meanwhile, upland farmers go on with their lives and control and own land in mostly "customary" ways, and by nurturing relationships with external parties who can be of help to them in efforts to secure tenure and improve livelihoods and standard of living.

The members of the Pirandangan community were linked to multiple external parties, many of whom had very different motives and interests for forging relationships with them. They included: local and transnational NGOs seeking to defend the rights of marginalised sectors of society, protect the environment and create alternative rural futures; small and large-scale traders

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[3] Personal communication with Rudy Rodil, historian and former member of the government peace panel.

of various agricultural and timber products seeking to make a good deal; government officials and political families in Iligan City seeking to win elections and implement government policies and projects at the local level; and Moro liberation movements seeking to expand the territory and strengthen the political autonomy of Muslims in Mindanao. The capacity of smallholders to deal with these parties in ways that do not lead to divisions and violent conflict in local kin and community groups will vary from place to place and over time. In Pirandangan, the cohesiveness of the main family group remained strong. L.B. and other senior leaders were able to come together to mobilise the wider community at times when this was required, turning the village into an effective bargaining entity vis-à-vis external parties.

What now?

The Pirandangan smallholders have so far achieved an improved standard of living through on-farm diversification and intensification, expansion of trade in local markets, and increased government and NGO support. Much of this support has been of a kind and delivered in a way that have been beneficial for the vast majority residents. The main kin-based house groups of the village have played a key mediating role in this process. Compared with documented cases of relatively successful agrarian transition elsewhere in the Philippines (Eder 2006, 1999; Hayama 2003; Kummer et al. 2003) and the wider region (Walker 2012; Rigg 2006; Padoch et al. 1998), diversification into off-farm work and remittances from work elsewhere were negligible in Pirandangan. Investments in post-secondary education was non-existent. If the population growth of the village continues to increase at the pace of the last two decades, further improvements in living standards through on-farm livelihood strategies may soon become difficult. For agrarian transition to continue to be a success for the majority of the residents, many households may have to diversify into off-farm work and invest in education and labour migration for some of their members (Eder 2011). One of the daughters of L.B., a final year high school student, told me that she wanted to become a nurse. If her wish is fulfilled, she might set a precedence for other young women in the village. They will delay marriage and child bearing and invest in education, seek out opportunities of urban employment and remit money to help their families in Pirandangan.

Such a path may lead to growing disparity in wealth and income, and will likely alter the way some people relate to each other and to the place. The capacity of local leaders to

consolidate differences and mobilise the wider community to solve common problems may weaken. Better-off farmers may ignore customary land tenure practices and seek to buy or take control of the land of poorer farmers, using property law, the ideology of kinship, clientelistic practices and intimidation to get their way. Another scenario is that L.B. and the relational core of his extended family group start to stress, gradually and subtly, the relevance of ancestry and "original people of the place" settler status to regulate who has what rights in land, and instead of simple fragmentation, the households most closely linked to L.B.'s group may be able to consolidate power in village-level institutions. The openness that has so far characterised the process of house group formation will then change. Conflict between the kin-based house group of sultan L.B. and sultan M. is also possible, for example if they link up with competing candidates for higher-office electoral positions. In any one of these scenarios, it is advantageous to know who-is-who in terms of their membership in different kin-based house groups. Analysis of these social organisational entities, of how they form, adapt and evolve in response to changing pressures and opportunities, add valuable insights to ongoing debates on swidden transformation and community dynamics in upland Southeast Asia.

CONCLUSION

Political economy and social history scholars remind us of the agrarian roots of many of the conflicts that haunt Mindanao. A key strength of this literature is its focus on how relations of power involving local and regional elites and external interests interact with and shape the livelihood opportunities of ordinary farmers. Discriminatory land laws, policies and practices, and unscrupulous governing elite support for large-scale logging, export agriculture and mining projects, have produced great wealth for some and poverty and dispossession for many. While this is an important perspective that needs continued attention, comprehensive bottom-up studies of the livelihoods and land tenure arrangements of ordinary farmers are in short supply.

Moving beyond the focus on elite families' competition for and control over land and other political-economic resources, and paying more attention to the livelihoods, social organisation and land tenure arrangements among upland farmers in north-central Mindanao, the article has shown how a group of Muslim-Maranao smallholders have organized amongst themselves to navigate agrarian transition and ensure broad-based livelihood success. The power

that underlies this success stems to a significant extent from smallholders' ability to establish "horizontal" ties of solidarity with other smallholders, and from the tactical and supportive relationships they maintain with external parties.

To better understand patterns of unity and solidarity, the article has shown the usefulness of the concept of a kin-based house group. While this is not a corporate descent group or clan in an anthropological sense, it is a social formation that frequently takes on institutional features in village affairs. Multiple groupings of this kind can easily combine, for example in efforts to increase their members' bargaining power vis-à-vis governing elites, large-scale traders, neighboring communities, or land investors. The capacity of smallholders to deal with such parties in ways that do not lead to divisions in local kin and community groups will vary from place to place and over time, depending on the specific factors, relationships and forces that come together in each case. In Pirandangan, the cohesiveness of the main family group remained strong. L.B. and other senior leaders were able to come together to mobilize the wider community at times when this was required.

I am not suggesting that all or even most smallholders in north-central Mindanao are members of strong and resourceful "horizontal" networks of the kind I have described here, but some clearly are. Despite the many "internal" and "external" factors that encourage fragmentation of local smallholder groups (bilateral kinship, rising competition for land, patronage and factional politics, social differentiation in terms of class, gender and ethnicity), in several upland farming communities in the north-central Mindanao, large kin-based house groups have taken shape recently. In the past, they tended to be members of smaller and more fluid groups. The fragmentation pressures have clearly been offset by other kinds of pressures, stemming from the advantages of unity and solidarity. The additional resources that have been made available for "alternative" upland farming systems, and the resourcefulness, knowledge and commitment of some of the local NGOs, have made a difference. At the same time, without resourceful and cohesive smallholder groups, the outcome of external support may have been very different.

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