

## ARTICLE

# A generational perspective on rural livelihood change

Jessica N. Clendenning 

Post-Doctoral Researcher at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, LMU Munich, Munich, Germany

## Correspondence

Jessica N. Clendenning, Post-Doctoral Researcher at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, LMU Munich, Leopoldstra. 11a, D-80802 Munich, Germany.  
Email: [jessica.clendenning@u.nus.edu](mailto:jessica.clendenning@u.nus.edu)

## Funding information

Volkswagen Foundation

## Abstract

As rural places and people are increasingly intertwined between cities, markets and mobility, broader perspectives are needed to examine the multiple changes occurring between rural and urban spaces, and between families and generations. This article discusses how a generational perspective can study ‘more-than-rural’ change in a contemporaneous manner. Drawing on field examples from a village on Flores Island, Indonesia, I show how intergenerational views, gathered through household surveys and in-depth interviews, gave further depth to younger generations’ changing relationships to land. Why, despite greater numbers of young people leaving the village for greater work and study opportunities elsewhere, were many parents sure their children would return one day? Using intergenerational and life-course views to answer this question revealed how many villagers encountered livelihood limitations elsewhere. Furthermore, I show how generational data give fuller explanations to household dynamics, such as how age and gender play a role in the pursuit of migration between family members, and how rural land and households are managed over time and space. I conclude by discussing the strengths and challenges of building a generational perspective to study ‘more-than-rural’ livelihood change.

## KEYWORDS

agrarian change, household survey, Indonesia, migration, qualitative interview, young people

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Wherever they go they will surely return home [*pasti pulang*]. It is impossible for them to remain forever in the land of others.

– Mama K, her three (male) children work in Makassar and Bali.

It's better to go move to another place [outside of Flores] ... because I've been in the village almost a year and I can't get a job.

– Rik, college graduate, age 24.

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

The information, practices and views in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG).

© 2024 The Authors. *Area* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers).

The above quotes reflect an irony I was studying in a rural village on Flores Island in East Indonesia. While an increasing number of young adults were leaving the village for further education and off-farm work opportunities in cities (Clendenning, 2022, 2023), many parents remained sure their children would return one day. This article discusses how I came to understand these contrasting trends in the village, and what they meant for young people's connections to land.

Drawing on ethnographic research in Flores, Indonesia, I show how an (inter)generational perspective towards rural change can, as Hopkins and Pain describe, serve as a 'tool' to study societal change: 'We see intergenerationality as both a descriptive tool, and part of broader apparatus for explaining social and cultural phenomena' (2008, p. 289). Such a perspective is important to study the 'more-than-rural' (Rigg, 2019) practices present in smallholding families and young people's movements to 'urban' spaces (Clendenning, 2022, 2023); and because more analyses are needed from the 'rural side' to examine 'ruralisation' processes (i.e., social reproduction practices in 'rural' spaces, 'socially rural' processes in urban spaces, and rural returns) (Gillen et al., 2022, pp. 187–188). Furthermore, I will show how the views of multiple generations allow the study of rural change in a contemporaneous manner, or at the same time. In doing so, this paper adds to understandings of how 'ruralisation' processes occur, and how social factors, such as ethnicity, age and gender shape 'access to and experiences of places' and the relations which constitute them (Hopkins & Pain, 2007, p. 288). In that sense, I use a generational perspective to show why it was inevitable young people would leave the village for greater opportunities, but why, at the same time, many parents thought it was impossible for them to stay away (Clendenning, 2020).

This article begins with a basic description of the research village and the methods used to gather data from several generations of 80 smallholder families. I then review how 'generation' is used in different conceptual and methodological ways in the agrarian change, youth and trans-local literatures to illustrate how a generational perspective can study those relations that extend beyond the village, and in-situ societal change, contemporaneously (rather than longitudinally). I end by discussing how a generational perspective strengthens data triangulation yet presents challenges for researchers' time and resources.

## 2 | RESEARCH CONTEXT

Desa Dedang (a pseudonym) is a farming village located in Manggarai regency (*kabupaten*) of Flores Island in East Nusa Tenggara (*Nusa Tenggara Timor*, NTT) province. Like most of Manggarai regency, the village has mountainous, steep terrain, where smallholding families rely on a mix of subsistence (rice, corn) and cash-crop (coffee, clove, candlenut) agriculture. Migration for off-farm work, especially among youth and middle-aged men, is common and done to supplement household income as many families have small farmlands, declining yields and/or have yet to inherit land. What is new in the village is the increasing rates of youth migration (male and female) to cities such as Denpasar, Bali and Makassar, Sulawesi, for employment or upper-level education (Clendenning, 2022, 2023). Since travelling to cities from the village is far and expensive, many youth and middle-aged men were away for years at a time. How did these greater ties to cities for work and education affect younger generations' connections to land and farming?

As I studied these trends through a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, I found that interviewing several generations helped me in several ways: it let me picture the scale and types of livelihood changes between past and present; it enabled me, as a Western researcher, to better understand young people's decision-making contexts by knowing their household situations and their personal interests; and it let me see the remaining significance of natal land for younger generations despite modernity's promises.

## 3 | 'GENERATION' IN YOUTH, AGRARIAN CHANGE AND TRANS-LOCAL RESEARCH

Across Southeast Asia, scholars note the 'more than rural' links and 'ruralisation' processes present in the social reproduction of farming households and villages, and their ties to urban spaces (Gillen et al., 2022; Rigg, 2019). Although these links and processes vary in scale and extent across the region, commonalities are in how greater economic diversification has meant changing demographics and new gendered divisions of labour and land use patterns in rural areas (Katz, 2004; Portilla, 2015); and differences in household wealth, education levels and living locations between generations (Rigg et al., 2012; White, 2012b). For rural young people, many of these changes have created more structural constraints in exclusion from farmland through market price or generational succession; the need for greater resources or capital to access land; and variable commodity prices, especially for those located far from markets (Hall et al., 2011; White, 2020).

Consequently, rather than work as farmers, many rural youth aspire to have ‘modern’ urban jobs, and increasingly migrate to cities for further opportunities (Clendenning, 2022; Peou, 2016; White, 2012a). These are some reasons why scholars find that new methodological approaches are needed from the ‘rural side’ to study how ‘ruralisation’ is reshaping urban spaces and ‘human engagements with rural land, livelihoods, and lifestyles’ (Gillen et al., 2022, pp. 187–188); and similarly, how urbanisation is reshaping ‘rural’ living (Thompson, 2020). This paper offers one way to study these transformations through young people and migration.

In youth and agrarian literatures, ‘generation’ is often engaged in three conceptual and methodological ways: through an age grouping or generational cohort; as family relations through kinship descent; and as a life phase. Each approach focuses on differing ways the society and the economy, or family and age, affect rural young people through differing forms of power, access to resources and identity formation (Ansell, 2016). I briefly review how generation is used in agrarian and youth studies to show how a generational perspective complements these approaches but differs in temporal and spatial ways.

Grouped by chronological age, generational cohorts analyse how young people’s identities, cultures and movements – relative to older generations – are influenced by major historical, political and or socio-economic trends (Mannheim, 1952 [1928]). Longitudinal studies on agrarian change often use generational age groupings to track how rural households, and their successive generations, adapt to societal change. For example, using household surveys and interviews, Rigg et al. (2012) followed 77 households over 25 years in North East Thailand. They found generational differences in rural families’ spatial ways of living, largely influenced by Thailand’s expanding ‘urban’ opportunities alongside declines in rural wages. They also found that younger generations (male and female) were less likely to be working as full-time farmers (like their parents) and more likely to be mobile for non-farm work. Similarly, in youth studies, White (2012b) has used generational cohorts to examine how the experience of childhood and farming changed in a Javanese village over 70 years. Through historical ethnography and observational records of time-use among several generations of families, White found that more time in school and less time farming was altering younger generations’ relationships to land.

Common ties between these studies are how generational cohorts’ livelihood practices are linked to broader changes occurring in the society and economy, ‘generationing’ development for families (Huijsmans, 2016). While these generational groupings capture major shifts between age groups, weaknesses are in how these age-frames can assume differences for certain cohorts based on chronological age and miss how other factors – such as how gender or age-position within a family – can also shape young people’s choices (Punch, 2015).

Alternatively, frames of kinship descent and parent–youth relations better examine how gender or age influence youth and intergenerational relations. Such views recognise how households may contain differing interests and power relations (Folbre, 1986), rather than assume they are smooth, functioning units for utility (Lauby & Stark, 1988). This approach also recognises that rural young people, especially in the majority world, may feel interdependent (rather than dependent) ties to the family, with shifting responsibilities to siblings and parents (Punch, 2015). Studies such as these examine how social factors, such as one’s generation, intersect with gender, age and class, using a mix of participant observation, in-depth and semi-structured interview methods. Utrata’s (2011) work in Russia, for example, examines how single mothers negotiate care for their children with their (grand)mothers. Left without state pensions in a neo-liberalising Russia, many grandmothers felt obligated to perform ‘gendered age’ through unpaid help in cooking, cleaning and caring for their grandchildren. Their daughters, meanwhile, felt a ‘youth privilege’ in that this behaviour was ‘normal’ and ‘expected’ of their mothers, underlining how generation and age relations shape gender and class performances. In youth studies, Huijsmans’ (2014) work in rural Laos finds that seeing ‘age’ in relation to gender and birth order, rather than chronologically, better explains how rural families and youth negotiate decisions and responsibilities around migration and, furthermore, shows the field of the household as ‘in flux’ rather than as a decisive unit. This approach therefore offers in-depth views of power and intimate relationships but can lack broader analyses on the socio-economic processes that inform these relations.

‘Generation’ as a life phase examines relations to social institutions, such as young people’s ties to school and work. This approach studies how young people’s ‘transitions’ to school, employment and other life stages must be understood alongside other socio-cultural, geographical and temporal contexts. In agrarian and youth studies, related trends are the ‘prolongation of youthhood’ as many young people, including women, stay in school longer, leading to longer financial dependence on parents, later marriages and delayed access to farmland (Robinson, 2016; White, 2012b). In Java, Indonesia, for example, Koning (2005) found that young women struggled to make an ‘impossible return’ to a rural village after working and living in Jakarta. This approach shows how a young person can feel mixed between rural life’s ties to family and tradition, and city life’s possibilities in education, employment and independence (Clendenning, 2022; Koning, 2005). What is useful is how this approach can study a phase in youth lives which often contains many changes

in school, work and relationships; less useful, however, is how this perspective can assume linear types of Western transitions for young people (e.g., World Bank, 2006) in rural Asia and across the majority world (Morrow, 2013).

For my study, these three approaches underscore the importance of studying rural youth in relation to their peers, families and wider socio-economic contexts, but often miss important temporal and spatial analyses. Additional concepts which help add critical meanings to age and gender over time, space and place include intergenerationality, intersectionality and the life course (Hopkins & Pain, 2008). Intergenerational relations, for instance, can help explain how ambivalent feelings develop between generations through different expectations and experiences of places (Robinson, 2016). Likewise, the intersections of gender, family and social class can problematise notions of 'adulthood' for rural young women in India (Morrow, 2013), and life course approaches can show how migration for off-farm work has become a 'normal' part of growing up for rural youth in Cambodia (Peou, 2016). These concepts are important because they question linear or age-based frames for young people in rural areas of the Global South and, instead, show how inequality and poverty can make young lives inherently unstable.

Trans-local research helps understand the importance of studying relationships of care across space. One example is Mazzucato's (2009) study of how funerals are conducted between families in the Netherlands and Ghana. Using simultaneous matched samples within the same social network, they found that meeting multiple family members painted a more realistic picture of migrants' lives and contexts. Mazzucato found, for instance, that migrants were more dependent on financial support from home during certain phases of their migration, and that it was important not to solely rely on 'what people say ... [as it] does not necessarily correspond with what people actually do' (Mazzucato, 2009, p. 224). Although my respondents were not studied simultaneously, I did find that meeting family members in cities gave me a better picture of life there. For instance, in Makassar and Denpasar, I saw how many of Desa Dedang's youth navigated similar pathways for finding work and educational opportunities (Clendenning, 2022). Similarly, the middle generations I met all had rental homes and were only able to live in the city as long as they could work (Clendenning, 2023). These first-hand views made the difficulties experienced by villagers in Indonesian cities more relatable to me (as a Western researcher) and clarified why many had to return to the village over time.

## 4 | THE 'HOW' OF A GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Here I describe the methods used to construct a generational perspective. My aim is not to argue that they are unique or exclusive to other methodological combinations, but rather to show how I used multiple generations to gather data and study young people's relationships to land. All surveys and interviews sought verbal consent and no personal details from interviews were shared with family members or peers across sites. Likewise, all interviews in the village, and the majority done elsewhere, were conducted with the help of a local (Manggarai) female research assistant.

For the purposes of organisation, I grouped generations by chronological age. Young generations were between the approximate ages of 18–35; middle generations between the ages of 36–55; and older generations were aged 56 and above. 'Young generations' held a broader age frame to recognise the 'prolongation of youthhood' across the region (Robinson, 2016; White, 2012b), and to follow research ethics, which only allowed me to interview young people aged 18 and over. Moreover, since I was interested in young people's relations to natal land, my questions targeted young adults and their experiences in employment and tertiary education. I also wanted to recognise how other understandings of age, such as relative and social age, affected young people's lives. Relative age relates to birth order and helps see how differing responsibilities fall across members of the family (Huijsmans, 2014), whereas social age relates to how gender and power relations construct specific age attributes within the household and society (Clark-Kazak, 2016). Both understandings of age relate to kinship descent and help study young people's livelihood opportunities and responsibilities to family.

I collected data over two phases. The first phase used purposive sampling through surveys and semi-structured interviews with 80 families in the village to study the household. The survey and semi-structured interview questions centred on family demographics, education and migration histories, and livelihood and farming activities. Mostly working adult(s) of the household were interviewed, and if other generations were present, we (myself and my research assistant) often asked them to join. All surveys and interviews were conducted in a mix of Manggarai and Indonesian (which I speak) languages.

The second phase used this family information to target youth (and some middle and older) generations for in-depth interviews, including those who worked or studied elsewhere (e.g. Denpasar, Bali; Makassar, Sulawesi, Labuan Bajo, Flores). In-depth interviews included oral histories with older generations to learn about past land uses and labour practices, and changes seen in infrastructure and mobility. These interviews highlighted how changes in road access,



schooling and paid work influenced younger generations' attitudes towards farming or off-farm opportunities. Further in-depth interviews were carried out with villagers who had migrated. For middle generations, the interviews focused on how land was managed during migration, hopes for their children, and how migration or upper-level schooling was supported. For young people, the interviews explored a person's migration pathway in school or work, their aspirations and their experiences in living away from the village. Questions here also sought to understand the factors that influenced their migration or return, and how their networks, families or economic standing affected their choices. Overall, I found that iterative use of these methods gave a clearer picture of young people's contexts and the socio-economic factors that contributed to their agency, mobility and relationships to home.

## 5 | THE 'WHAT' OF A GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

This section uses survey and interview data to demonstrate how intergenerational perspectives capture important age and gender dynamics within the family, and life course and relational factors that affect young and middle generations' lives elsewhere.

### 5.1 | Household survey and semi-structured interviews

By village standards, Pak and Mama S were a middle-income family with five fields of land, some small livestock, and a mixed cement and wood house. At the time of the survey (2018), only Pak S, Mama S and one of their five children, Lina, were living in Desa Dedang (Table 1). The other four children were either working in a Flores' town (one child) or working and studying in Bali (three children). Although Pak and Mama S had little education or migration, all five of their children had achieved higher levels of schooling and had migrated outside of Flores. Similarly, migration for women during Mama S's generation was extremely uncommon; however, both of her female children had migrated to Bali for education and work.

Table 1 illustrates how the household survey captured the generational differences occurring between family members' livelihood pursuits. In broad terms, these generational differences reflect how socio-economic change influenced greater mobility and education for younger generations, and particularly for women. Hard to see from this data, however, is how age position or gender informed certain siblings' 'success' over others, all of which require more ethnographic detail.

### 5.2 | In-depth interviews

I met Rosafina, Pak and Mama S's oldest child, at her apartment near Denpasar, Bali, where she lives with her husband and two children (Figure 1). Rosafina ran a small laundry business out of their rented apartment while her husband, from Sumba, NTT (an island south of Flores), drove a truck. Rosafina shared that in the past she wanted to continue her university schooling, but, while crying explained:

TABLE 1 Pak and Mama S's family.

Name	Gender	Location	Education level	Occupation	Migration (ever)
Pak S, 70s	Male	Wako	Elementary school	Farmer	Flores-bound mobility
Mama S, 70s	Female	Wako	Elementary school	Farmer, weaver	None
<i>5 children in birth order</i>					
1. Rosafina, 34	Female	Bali	Senior high school	Laundry business	Intra-Indonesia
2. Albertus, 32	Male	Flores (town)	Teaching university	Teacher	Flores-bound mobility
3. Lina, 29	Female	Wako	Junior high school	Weaver, farmer	Intra-Indonesia
4. Marcus, 25	Male	Bali	University (ongoing)	University student	Intra-Indonesia
5. Ferdi, 21	Male	Bali	Senior high school	Furniture worker	Intra-Indonesia

Source: Survey and ethnographic interview data, January through May 2018.

[After three months of university in Bali] I stopped because my brother [Albertus] was also in college and needed more money. I wanted to focus on working and helping my brother [Albertus] who is now a teacher ... as a daughter I have to relent to my younger brother, because I believe that there are people who will take care of me [her husband], while the boy is responsible for taking care of the parents and family.

[Middle generation, #127]

This arrangement of working to support (male) siblings is expected in Manggarai custom and is also seen between other siblings in the family. Lina, for example, explained:

I returned to Bali several times to earn money to be able to help my family and my brothers. It was my choice to come back, to take care of my parents because all of my brothers wanted to migrate. I am the only hope to pay attention to my parents.

[Young generation, #150]

Marcus also commented on the situation of Lina:

Actually, I feel bad. Because in Manggarai custom it should be the boy who is fully responsible for taking care of the parents. But I'm sure she understands and supports her brother's success.

[Young generation, #124]

The youngest child, Ferdi, also decided to migrate to Bali 'because my brother is here ... [and to] earn money to help my brother [Marcus] go to college'. He was quite clear that his stay in Bali would be temporary because 'I as the youngest child have the responsibility to take care of the parents' [Young generation, #117].

These ethnographic accounts show a glimpse of why Desa Dedang's youth were attracted to cities such as Denpasar for work and education opportunities; how young people desired to be among their peers but also felt obligations to family; and how gender and age position created differing opportunities between siblings. For Rosafina and Lina, relative and social age created feelings of obligation towards supporting their brothers through school, even though this diminished their own ability to pursue further education or migration. Ferdi likewise expressed his duty to care for the parents as the family's youngest son.

While interviews with family members revealed how decisions were negotiated in the household for managing migration, family and land, intergenerational perspectives in different places revealed why there seemed to be an inevitable return to the village over time. As mentioned earlier, as I met younger generations living in cities, I saw that many shared similar jobs, degree programs and living spaces with village kin (Clendenning, 2022). For instance, Jon, who was studying in Makassar and living with his uncle, Dean (introduced below), said that Flores men usually 'work in building projects, bars, hotels, shops. Women work as domestic helpers' [#102]. Lea, who worked and studied in Bali said she got 'information from my school friends' to work as a babysitter. But, she explained, 'my parents also help [pay school fees]



**FIGURE 1** Rosafina, her husband and two children pictured with Ney, my research assistant, in 2018. Photo: the author.

because my salary is not enough ... [it] is used for meals only' [#120]. Similarly, Nan, a male youth in Makassar, worked 12 h shifts at a clothing hanger factory but still said, 'I find it hard to stay here [Makassar] because it is difficult to earn money' [#110]. Even youth who had relatively well-paid jobs, such as Randi who worked as a construction foreman in Labuan Bajo, Flores, said:

I stay here just to find work. But someday we [his wife and child] will return to the village and live there ...  
Because we own no land to live on [*kita tidak memiliki tanah*].

[#101]

Middle generations who had spent years living and working in the city shared similar livelihood difficulties. Dean, who had left the village in 1998 and met his wife, had four children and had lived in Makassar for over 20 years, reflected that his job at a laundry service for nearly two decades did not meet his goals: 'my current job never fits with what I expected to do. I do this just to survive'. Despite completing two years of university, Dean's job offered little savings and no pension past retirement. For the future, Dean reflected that 'migration (*merantau*) is just for the experience and one day I have to go back' [#103]. Like others I met, Dean's family could only stay in the city as long as he was able to work (Clendenning, 2023).

Over time, intergenerational perspectives helped me see why two very different places – the village and the city – were often viewed as 'the same' for people from Desa Dedang. Pak B, a father of three, including Lea from above, thought:

I think that here and there (East Malaysia) is not very different, that is to get money ... I compare when I worked in Malaysia, where if for 10 days I did not go to work, then I did not get any money. I think work in the village is the same too.

[#149]

Likewise, Nik, a 37-year-old, said that:

When it is viewed from employment opportunities, there are more opportunities in a place like Bali. But the cost of living is quite high, so if compared, it is the same [to life in the village].

[#44]

Many villagers had to return to the village because land was their social safety net if they became ill, old or could no longer afford the city.

## 6 | WHAT A GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE DOES

A generational perspective helped me examine the livelihood changes occurring among families and generations in a contemporaneous manner. Put another way, through the eyes of several generations, I was able to study the temporal changes in migration, education and farming practices that were occurring between generations; how differing opportunities and obligations fell on and between family members; and the spatial dimensions of household social reproduction that went beyond the 'rural'. In that sense, a generational perspective allowed me see why many young people would leave the village, and why, despite the greater opportunities cities offered, many would return one day.

There are other methodological, conceptual and empirical points worth discussing about a generational perspective. Methodologically and more personally, meeting several generations within a family, and particularly their relatives living elsewhere, made me a more approachable researcher through the time and effort involved, and has made lasting social connections until today (Figure 2). These connections in the village, however, took time to build. As an educated Western woman, I was seen as rich (*orang kaya*) and therefore powerful. To adjust this perception, I was open, eager and accepting of differences in daily social interactions, relying on my personality to inform people's reception of me rather than my relative 'power' (Moser, 2008). A challenge for many researchers, then, is the time and resources required for meeting several generations. The research presented here was during my doctorate study when I had more time available for fieldwork, which is less often the case later in one's career.

A second methodological point is around interviewing young people. Initially, interviewing youth in the village had some uncomfortable moments: many seemed embarrassed to share their thoughts with family and peers around. These difficulties piqued my interest in meeting youth outside the village and led to me requesting private interviews



**FIGURE 2** The author visiting with Mama S, Lina and Marcus (and their respective children) in 2023. Marcus returned to the village during the Covid pandemic. Photo: the author.

with some young people. Interviewing youth elsewhere proved more successful. This was perhaps because privacy was more easily found, and perhaps, as Valentine (1999) reflected, meeting youth in their spaces was a way of recognising their independence and valuing their stories. Although a trans-local view is not a requirement of a generational perspective, it was helpful in my case for seeing the reality of young and middle generations' livelihood pathways.

Conceptually and empirically, a generational perspective strengthened my ability to study the socio-cultural and economic dimensions that affect young people's life choices.<sup>1</sup> Multiple interviews with Pak S's family members let me better understand how relative and social age intersected with decisions for migration and education, and the feelings of regret shared by Rosafina, Lina and Marcus. In other ways, life-course perspectives from older villagers (who had migrated) helped me examine young people's migration trends through the lens of social class, such as the reflections by Pak B or Nik. A generational perspective also gave room to analyse why, during one interview, the son said that if he ever got a job in town (Ruteng), then he'd bring his parents to live with them. In reply, his father laughed and said he would 'never leave the village' (Field notes, April 2018). A generational perspective pays attention to *why* inherent values differ between the old and young due to their relative histories and socio-economic influences.

Lastly, a generational perspective allowed me to visualise the social and physical links that supported life in the village and life elsewhere. While only one household example was shown here, these data at the village level showed generational trends in mobility and education, and pointed towards who was likely to stay behind to manage land and home.

## 7 | CONCLUSION

A generational perspective offers one way to study rural change through the eyes of several generations. In presenting these case examples from Flores, I have shown how I utilised household surveys and interviews across three generations to capture the de-localised nature of young people's rural and urban living; some of the factors within the field of the household that affect young people's decision making; and why land remained significant to families despite trends in youth migration for off-farm work and upper-level education. My aim is not to argue that past generations' actions are predictive of the present, but rather to argue that gathering intergenerational views revealed common pathways and challenges affecting a rural village and young people's lives, at present and for the likely future.

What is new and important about a generational perspective is that it offers a way to study the contemporaneous changes that are occurring in rural and urban areas as people and places are increasingly interconnected. For studies in human geography, anthropology and cognate fields, it is a useful approach from the 'rural side' that examines 'ruralisation' processes (Gillen et al., 2022). Such a perspective is important as younger generations continue to move beyond the village in greater numbers but maintain strong connections to family and land. By building on past studies that examined in-situ rural change and the social factors that inform differing opportunities between genders and generations (Huijsmans, 2014; Rigg et al., 2012; White, 2012b among others), this perspective helps study the minutiae of individuals'



and families' decisions, the temporal and spatial realities affecting rural–urban livelihoods, and the socio-economic factors shaping young people's relationships to home.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The families of Desa Dedang and a fantastic research assistant made this research and perspective possible. Thanks to several colleagues – Prof. Tracey Skelton, Assoc. Prof. Alessandro Rippa and Dr. Syeda Jenifa Zahan – who commented on earlier drafts. Finally, thanks to the critical and constructive peer reviewers whose comments helped me improve the clarity of argument. All remaining errors are mine. Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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

## ORCID

Jessica N. Clendenning  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5972-3308>

## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> To be clear, I focused on these dimensions because of the village context and my research experience, but other dimensions, such as young people's identity constructions, could have also been studied.

## REFERENCES

- Ansell, N. (2016) Age and generation in the service of development? In: Huijsmans, R. (Ed.) *Generationing development: A relational approach to children, youth and development*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 315–330. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55623-3>
- Clark-Kazak, C. (2016) Mainstreaming social age in the sustainable development goals: Progress, pitfalls, and prospects. In: Huijsmans, R. (Ed.) *Generationing development: A relational approach to children, youth and development*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 103–124. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55623-3>
- Clendenning, J.N. (2020) *The inevitability of leaving and the impossibility of staying away: Rural youth migration and agrarian change in Flores, Indonesia* (unpublished PhD thesis). National University of Singapore, Singapore.
- Clendenning, J.N. (2022) Between the village and the city: The in-betweenness of rural young people in East Indonesia. *International Development Planning Review*, 45(1), 19–40. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.3828/idpr.2022.3>
- Clendenning, J.N. (2023) Mobile immobility in Flores, Indonesia. The meaning of being left behind. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 104, 103165. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2023.103165>
- Folbre, N. (Ed.). (1986) *The economics of the family*. Brookfield, VT: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Gillen, J., Bunnell, T. & Rigg, J. (2022) Geographies of ruralization. *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 12, 186–203. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/20438206221075818>
- Hall, D., Hirsch, P. & Li, T.M. (2011) Powers of exclusion: Land dilemmas in Southeast Asia. In: *Challenges of the agrarian transition in Southeast Asia (ChATSEA)*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Hopkins, P. & Pain, R. (2007) Geographies of age: Thinking relationally. *Area*, 39, 287–294. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2007.00750.x>
- Hopkins, P. & Pain, R. (2008) Is there more to life? Relationalities in here and out there: A reply to Horton and Kraftl. *Area*, 40(2), 289–292. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40346124>
- Huijsmans, R. (2014) Becoming a young migrant or stayer seen through the lens of 'householding': Households 'in flux' and the intersection of relations of gender and seniority. *Geoforum*, 51, 294–304. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2012.11.007>
- Huijsmans, R. (Ed.). (2016) *Generationing development: A relational approach to children, youth and development*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55623-3>
- Katz, C. (2004) *Growing up global: Economic restructuring and children's everyday lives*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Koning, J. (2005) The impossible return? The post-migration narratives of young women in rural Java. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 33(2), 165–185.
- Lauby, J. & Stark, O. (1988) Individual migration as a family strategy: Young women in the Philippines. *Population Studies*, 42(3), 473–486.
- Mannheim, K. (1952) The problem of generations. In: Kecsekemeti, P. (Ed.) *Karl Mannheim: Essays on the sociology of knowledge*. London, UK: Routledge, pp. 276–320.
- Mazzucato, V. (2009) Bridging boundaries with a transnational research approach: A simultaneous matched sample methodology. In: Falzon, M.-A. (Ed.) *Multi-sited ethnography: Theory, praxis and locality in contemporary research*. London, UK: Routledge, pp. 215–232.
- Morrow, V. (2013) Troubling transitions? Young people's experiences of growing up in poverty in rural Andhra Pradesh, India. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 16(1), 86–100. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2012.704986>

- Moser, S. (2008) Personality: A new positionality? *Area*, 40(3), 383–392. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2008.00815.x>
- Peou, C. (2016) Negotiating rural-urban transformation and life course fluidity: Rural young people and urban sojourn in contemporary Cambodia. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 44, 177–186. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2016.02.002>
- Portilla, G.S. (2015) *Land concession and rural youth in southern Laos*. BRICS Initiatives for Critical Agrarian Studies, Conference Paper No. 9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1396450>
- Punch, S. (2015) Youth transitions and migration: Negotiated and constrained interdependencies within and across generations. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18(2), 262–276. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2014.944118>
- Rigg, J. (2019) *More than rural: Textures of Thailand's agrarian transformation*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824877743>
- Rigg, J., Salamanca, A. & Parnwell, M. (2012) Joining the dots of agrarian change in Asia: A 25 year view from Thailand. *World Development*, 40, 1469–1481. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.03.001>
- Robinson, K. (2016) Educational aspirations and inter-generational relations in Sorowako. In: Robinson, K.M. (Ed.) *Youth identities and social transformations in modern Indonesia*. Boston: Brill, pp. 69–90.
- Thompson, E.C. (2020) Urban annexation of the rural: *Kebun* culture in Malaysia. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 41, 136–153. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjtg.12301>
- Utrata, J. (2011) Youth privilege: Doing age and gender in Russia's single mother families. *Gender and Society*, 25(5), 616–641. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243211421781>
- Valentine, G. (1999) Doing household research: Interviewing couples together and apart. *Area*, 31(1), 67–74. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.1999.tb00172.x>
- White, B. (2012a) Agriculture and the generation problem: Rural youth, employment and the future of farming. *IDS Bulletin*, 43(6), 9–19. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2012.00375.x>
- White, B. (2012b) Changing childhoods: Javanese village children in three generations. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 12(1), 81–97. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0366.2011.00338.x>
- White, B. (2020) *Agriculture and the generation problem*. Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing.
- World Bank. (2006) *World development report 2007: Development and the next generation*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

**How to cite this article:** Clendenning, J.N. (2024) A generational perspective on rural livelihood change. *Area*, 56, e12937. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12937>