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Land's end: capitalist relations on an indigenous frontier, by Tania Murray Li

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choose to do in regions with important natural resources), conflict over land is more likely to be fought through mass political movements, forcing a response from the highest levels of the state apparatus. Boone's research design in this section is particularly well-crafted, deploying a set of detailed within-case counterfactuals to address rival arguments.

Finally, Part 4 examines the conditions under which land competition is drawn into electoral politics. Under a statist land tenure regime, existing property rights are highly vulnerable to changes in government. During competitive multiparty elections, therefore, those who benefit under the status quo will typically mobilise in support of the incumbent government, while those who do not will support its rivals. As a result, national political parties have a strong incentive to cater to rural interests, either by enforcing or promising to undermine existing property rights. On the other hand, land competition is less likely to affect electoral politics under neocustomary land tenure regimes, since these tend to block rural conflict from scaling up to the national level. This has important consequences for countries undergoing a transition from authoritarian rule, as incumbent elites may have an incentive to manipulate land tenure regimes as a way of mobilising rural support.

In developing her argument, Boone draws on data from 32 district- and province-level case studies, encompassing a time frame from around the 1950s to the present. Specialists may disagree with how certain cases are categorised; for example, the distinction between ethnic "insiders" and "outsiders" is rarely clear in practice. But Boone is well aware of these complexities and takes great pains to acknowledge both the limitations and potential of her statist–neocustomary, insider–outsider typology.

Potentially more problematic, however, is the way she conceptualises land tenure regimes as an independent variable, one through which the exogenous shock of land competition is filtered and refracted. This is because rising land competition, as Boone herself seems to acknowledge, can *itself* transform the prevailing land tenure regime. In parts of Côte d'Ivoire, for example, Boone claims that rising land competition led to the erosion of neocustomary authority and its replacement by statist land regimes (134). If that is the case, then it is unclear how independent the land tenure variable actually is, perhaps requiring a more finely grained model of how land competition and property rights interact than she offers here.

Regardless, *Property and Political Order in Africa* offers a clear and theoretically compelling analysis of land politics in Africa. At a time when population growth, climate change and ambitious development schemes are all placing rural land access and use under enormous strain, Boone's analysis will be relevant to a wide audience of political scientists, development scholars and policymakers. It is also admirably forthright about its assumptions and methodology, and provides a useful model for how comparative institutional research should be designed.

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Land's end: capitalist relations on an indigenous frontier, by Tania Murray Li, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2014, 256 pp., ISBN 0822357054 (paperback)

Tania Li has already produced a rich body of scholarship on the Indonesian peasantry and her latest book is no exception. Based on years of ethnographic fieldwork among Lauje highlanders in Indonesia, this work traces how capitalist social relations emerged within indigenous highland communities not through violent forms of primitive accumulation but in more insidious and

mundane ways as highlanders sought to improve their livelihoods. Rather than protecting communal land tenure, highlanders dismantled shared land access to plant cash crops on individual land, which generated inequality between neighbours and family members.

The first chapter explores the historical conditions that led the highlanders to plant cacao as a cash crop. Colonial and national elites considered the Lauje to be backwards, but it was difficult to compel the highlanders to adopt "modern" agricultural methods given their access to a seemingly limitless land frontier. Subject to the boom and bust of markets as well as pests trampling their fields, the Lauje opted to plant cacao trees in the early 1990s to improve their livelihoods. The second chapter offers a fascinating exploration of work and care across highlander households and how these dynamics informed concepts of property ownership and access. For the Lauje, customary rights to land were conferred through work. But this labour was not atomised, as the capacity for work and the fruits of individual labour were shared across households and generations. Nevertheless, this system of labor-conferred property rights became crucial after the introduction of cacao, explored in Chapter 3. After the introduction of cacao, land among the Lauje became *lokasi*, an English derivative denoting a location detached from the history of the landscape. Prior to this, virgin forest, or *do'at*, could be converted to *ulat* through work (then owned by the pioneer who first cleared it or his descendants). Due to the longevity of cacao trees, these individual claims to property became permanent, as highlanders attempted to use family genealogies to accumulate *ulat.* The result was an increasing concentration of land ownership, as those with greater knowledge, access to credit or family labour power were able to acquire more land. While Li saw this enclosure of the land frontier as a significant point of rupture, the Lauje saw it as consistent with their customary practices, which emphasised ownership rights through hard work. In Chapter 4, we learn how the end of this frontier generated new forms of inequality between highlanders as well as "awkward relations" as forms of wage labour and indebtedness reconfigured social bonds. These changes brought about significant changes in Lauje livelihoods, and yet, despite concentrations in land ownership, rising inequality and food insecurity, only one overt protest occurred. In Chapter 5, Li grapples with political responses, or lack thereof, suggesting that highlanders have adopted a range of responses including tolerance of inequality, limited mobilisation against corrupt state officials or migration to cities or other rural areas. In the conclusion, the author points to the failure of social movement theory to understand the complex changes experienced by the Lauje.

Methodologically, the author draws on a rich tradition of Marxist scholarship that seeks to understand the processes of capital accumulation through a focus on agency, contradiction and struggle. The author visited Lauje highlanders nine times between 1990 and 2009, spending a year in total in the area. In addition to exploring the economic factors that led highlanders to plant cacao, Li explores an array of elements that changed social configurations, including rainfall, soil and topography, the character of crops and their meanings, the values that people attribute to certain ways of living, the shifts within customary tenure regimes, and the "unseen spirits that enabled or interfered with human plans" (16).

This text makes three significant theoretical and empirical contributions to a diverse body of scholarship. The first is to Marxist theory broadly. In Marx's own work the emergence of the capitalist mode of production entails an alteration in the relations of production, as peasants and other remnants of the feudal past are separated, often violently, from their own means of production. Inspired by Marx's vivid descriptions of this process, David Harvey (2003), among others, has insisted that this process of primitive accumulation is integral to the ongoing reproduction of capitalism resulting in new rounds of enclosure. What Li demonstrates is that contemporary forms of primitive accumulation do not always take place through state violence or multinational coercion. In doing so, she complicates Marxist theorising on primitive accumulation by demonstrating how capitalist social relations can emerge not through structures of dominance but

through a range of interlinked and conjunctural elements. Herein lies her second contribution. World system theorists have been criticised for suggesting that the reach of the market itself suggests that global capitalism has penetrated into the fissures of communities the world over. As Li demonstrates, Lauje highlanders had long been exposed to global markets, yet this exposure had little impact on their social relations. The opportunities for accumulation presented by markets must therefore be distinguished from the compulsion to participate in markets through labour and commodity exchange. It was only once highlanders had enclosed their own land that they faced a future in which they were forced to engage in market competition or risk losing access to their land entirely.

The third and, in my mind, most valuable contribution is Li's challenge to post-development theory. Post-development theorists foreground the role of subaltern agency in the formulation of alternative development approaches that challenge the Eurocentrism of mainstream development. And yet Li demonstrates that indigenous communities can and do act in ways that do not correspond to social movement expectations of subaltern agency. In this particular case, highlanders were not nostalgic for a pristine past, or particularly interested in alternative development frameworks. Their isolation and unwillingness to abandon pre-capitalist agriculture made them largely invisible to the state, while their self-enclosure of commonages and adoption of capitalist social relations made them unrecognisable to social movements.

There is a sense, however, that the experiences of Lauje highlanders are the exception to the rule. As Li admits, the limited reach of the state in this region is unusual for Indonesia and South East Asia. In other parts of the world indigenous people have certainly experienced primitive accumulation in a far more Marxian sense, involving mass displacement and violence. There is also the danger that this text can be read as evidence for the existence of capitalist relations within indigenous cultures. This is, of course, not at all the case, as highlanders worked hard to maintain their autonomy from market compulsion for centuries.

This text adds deep and valuable ethnographic insight to existing narratives of the emergence of capitalist relations in indigenous societies. It rightfully challenges structuralist accounts of primitive accumulation using detailed ethnographic data. As such, it should be read, and likely will be, beyond the borders of development studies and anthropology. Development scholars, particularly those who work within a post-development framework, would do well to interrogate their assumptions by engaging with Li's work in productive ways.

Reference

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