



BRILL

BIJDRAGEN TOT DE TAAL-, LAND- EN  
VOLKENKUNDE 172 (2016) 91–106



brill.com/bki

## Debate

**Tania Murray Li**

*Land's end: Capitalist relations on an indigenous frontier.* Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2014, 256 pp.

*Land's end* is an impressive piece of anthropology: painstaking, eloquent, thought-provoking, humane, unsentimental. Although partly an ethnography of a remote people of upland Sulawesi, the Lauje, it contains—to borrow from Li's account of the disappointment felt by outsiders visiting remote Lauje settlements—'no paint and feathers, no carvings, costumes, music, or dance, no scary savages or noble ones, just a lot of poor people leading hard lives' (p. 45). In place of tribal curiosities, the book offers a grim cautionary tale of how Lauje swidden cultivators, by planting cacao trees, inadvertently enclosed their common land, and in doing so created among themselves new extremes of wealth and poverty. Landlessness and dependence on wage labour, in this meticulously documented yet highly readable story, creep up on the unsuspecting Lauje not through the actions of the state or any other external force, but as a result of their own desire to make some money by growing cacao on their abandoned swiddens instead of allowing it to lie fallow, thereby establishing private ownership rights to what in the past was effectively common land. Soon the supply of unclaimed common land runs out—hence the title of the book. Those who have been clever, lucky, or ruthless enough to acquire plenty of it go on to achieve previously unknown levels of prosperity. But others, now unable to grow food for themselves in the traditional way, fall into debt, have to sell whatever land they possess, and find themselves eking out a precarious living from scarce wage labour:

In these highlands [...] capitalist relations emerged by stealth. No rapacious agribusiness corporation grabbed land from highlanders or obliged them to plant cacao. No government department evicted them. Nor was there a misguided development scheme that disrupted their old way of life. The non-commoditized social relations through which they previously accessed land, labor, and food were not destroyed by 'capitalism',

envisaged as a force that arrives from the outside. They eroded piecemeal, in a manner that was unexpected and unplanned.

p. 9

This transformation took place not only in the absence of external political pressure, but also without any perceived breakdown of traditional practices with respect to land, profit, or social solidarity. The Lauje had always been rather individualistic in their economic behaviour, and the establishment of private rights to land through labour investment—for instance, the planting of tree crops—was entirely in accordance with established custom. The book ends with a plea for redistributive measures to help the losers in the Lauje ‘development’ process, and with some (not very optimistic) speculation on what social and political forces might conceivably favour such redistribution.

This is a compelling narrative, the more so for Li’s refusal here to portray the state as the kind of *diabolus ex machina* it sometimes threatened to become in her previous book, *The will to improve: Governmentality, development, and the practice of politics* (2007). Finding something in *Land’s end* to take issue with is not easy. We might question whether ‘Indonesia’s impressive growth in the past few decades has been virtually jobless’ (p. 3)—although from the vantage point of Central Sulawesi, anyone could be forgiven for having that impression. Li’s insistence that labour investment is the foundation of Lauje land ownership also strikes me as open to question. If labour was really the key, then one would expect ownership rights to lapse with the end of any ongoing harvest or other delayed return on invested work. But there is little sense of this in Li’s account of the enclosure process, according to which land, once cleared and farmed for the first time, was inherited down the generations and straightforward precedence of occupation, often by relatives in the quite distant past, often seems to have been the deciding factor in disputes over who is entitled to plant cocoa on what land.

What I do rather miss in this excellent book is any substantial comparative dimension. The cultivation of commercial tree crops on a large scale by swidden cultivators is nothing new in Indonesia. In Central Sulawesi itself, as Li observes in passing, the copra boom of the early twentieth century already led to the planting of extensive permanent coconut stands in lowland areas—and to landlessness and poverty among those who missed out on the windfall. In Kalimantan, the conversion of swidden farmers into smallholder arboriculturalists has been celebrated by some academic authors not only as a step forward in economic terms, but also as a form of ‘ethnoconservation’, whereby indigenous people ‘recreate the forest’. More comparison of the processes and

outcomes described by Li with similar and contrasting cases elsewhere would help reveal to what extent the fate of the Lauje represents a universal story, and to what extent it reflects locally specific factors, such as the markedly individualistic tendencies which Li describes as characteristic of Lauje economic behaviour even before the cacao era.

*David Henley*

Leiden University

*d.e.f.henley@hum.leidenuniv.nl*

### **Introduction**

In *Land's end* Tania Li provides a careful analysis of agrarian transformation among the Lauje highlanders, grounded in over twenty years of fieldwork. This is a critical engagement that few anthropologists have achieved and one that allows Li to tease out the many elements, processes, relationships, and historical contingencies that result in the enclosure and consolidation of land among the Lauje highlanders. Importantly, she draws our attention to processes of agrarian change that do not fit neatly into preconceived notions about indigenous peoples, their struggles for land rights, and the development of capitalists relations.

I want to reflect on Li's analytical approach, not in terms of her findings, but rather in terms of two major points of contradistinction that she draws upon to highlight the mundane, almost invisible process of land dispossession. These two points of contradistinction are her depiction of social movements and indigenous property relations. By only sketching the barest outlines of existing scholarship on these two points, Li's characteristically textured and nuanced analytics of conjuncture are notably absent.

### **Social Movements**

Li argues that social movements for indigenous peoples' land rights focus on 'spectacular episodes of dispossession by corporations, [...] the monopolistic practices of transnational agribusiness corporations, or the attempts by rural people to defend culturally rich and environmentally sustainable ways of life against external threats' (p. 9). Further, Li states that social-movement activists seek out indigenous people who are securely attached to their land, committed to holding onto customary land, conserving forest, and living 'tranquilly in

harmony with nature and with each other, eager to pursue development “alternatives” (p. 15).

This broad-brush characterization glosses over the tremendously long and complex histories of social movements around the world. It overlooks instances where reification of indigenous identity, environmental knowledge, and a land ethic are more rhetorical strategies used to combat histories of marginalization and achieve political recognition than a reflection of daily life. I do not mean to suggest that there is no truth in indigenous peoples’ claims about their environmental knowledge and affinity with long-term stewardship of the environment, but rather I want to acknowledge that, at times, these claims are exaggerated and deployed as a wider strategy to reclaim land rights after centuries of marginalization and dispossession.

The well-known *Movimento Dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST, Movement of Rural Landless Workers in Brazil) is an illustrative example of the complex nature of social-movement formation. The oppositional class character of the MST, in which the leaders of the movement argue that smallholders in rural Brazil are exploited by large landowners, politicians, and corporations, is not necessarily based in the everyday conditions of farmers who collectivized to fight for their rights. Rather, through documents and rituals that draw on over 500 years of inequitable and contested land distribution, the MST leaders have ‘carefully embedded the class nature of the movement’s imagined community in historical structures and experiences’ (Wolford 2003:507). Notably, the majority of the leadership of the MST has already won access to land and is able to maintain momentum in the movement because they have access to financial and political resources.

### Indigenous Property Relations

Many studies of property relations among indigenous people, Li argues, ‘refer to the notion of “customary law,” envisaged as an institutionalized body of rules and practices [...] that sometimes receives official recognition in formal legal codes. Studies of common property regimes similarly emphasize the importance of institutions, minimally a clearly bounded territory, a bounded social group that holds rights in this territory, a system for managing common land supported by an authority with recognized jurisdiction, and a capacity for enforcement. These models don’t fit well in the Lauje highlands, because highlanders didn’t live in “communities” with clear territorial boundaries’ (p. 85). I include this quote in length because it encapsulates Li’s treatment of customary law, arguing that the institution of customary law is not present among the

highlanders, and therefore cannot be mobilized to protect them from the land dispossession.

This description of customary law is in part a fiction, an ideal type, not an accurate representation of scholarship on native customary land rights. The relationship between customary law, statutory law, and everyday *de facto* practices is a complicated one, with no predictable or universal outcome. In different times and places colonial statutory law has criminalized native rights, selectively codified aspects of native rights or even 'invented' customary law to serve the colonial agenda. And often both customary law and statutory law are reinterpreted and inscribed in the landscape through people's daily words and actions, in ways that often diverge from the perceived 'rules' (Doolittle 2005). In other words, at times customary law as we have come to recognize it is not a remnant of strong communities with intact indigenous identities, but rather is a construction, strategically used for political reasons.

Charles Zerner (1994) has argued that much of Indonesian *adat*, or customary law, as it is recognized in contemporary law, is a myth. Focusing on *sasi*, a generic name for institutions and ritual practices that regulate access to resources among Maluku Islanders, Zerner provides an excellent example of the invention of customary law. Zerner shows how the Dutch bolstered *sasi* as a creative way to rule indirectly, invoking and inventing local traditions as a means to control valuable commodities. More recently Indonesian environmental NGOs have reinterpreted *sasi* in a counter-political movement, framing *sasi* as a community-based natural resource management regime, an alternative to centralized government control. It follows, therefore, that social movement activists concerned with land rights are not only drawn to communities with a strong collective identity and attachment to the land, as Li suggests, but at times must work to *create* a collective identity and explicate customary laws.

### Conclusion

Social movements for indigenous peoples' land rights and scholarship on indigenous property relations are not the focus of Li's research. Thus, it may seem unwarranted to focus on these topics. But important implications flow from these simplified characterizations. In my mind, it is not surprising that there is no well-articulated body of customary law or indigenous identity among the Lauje highlanders. These are people who have significant experiences of marginalization. Achieving the promises of modernity and the improvement of their livelihoods depends, in part, on distancing themselves from an indigenous land ethic and customary laws that mark them as backwards. Perhaps a

carefully crafted notion of customary rights and indigenous identity still lies in the future for the Lauje highlanders. In generations to come perhaps the people who have already won access to land, the landed, will fight for the landless highlanders. Perhaps an NGO will promote or create customary laws to support alternative development paths for landless Lauje. I am suggesting that, in some cases, the so-called conditions of indigeneity are not characteristics of pre-capitalists societies striving to protect a traditional lifestyle, but rather are characteristics that follow the formation of inequitable capitalist relations as communities struggle to turn back the processes of inequitable land accumulation and find innovative ways to survive in new and emerging markets.

*Amity Doolittle*

Yale University

*Amity.Doolittle@yale.edu*

## References

- Doolittle, A. (2005). *Property and politics in Sabah, Malaysia (North Borneo): A century of native struggles over land rights, 1881–1996*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Wolford, Wendy (2003). 'Producing community: The MST and land reform settlements in Brazil', *Journal of Agrarian Change* 3–4:500–20.
- Zerner, Charles (1994). 'Through a green lens: The construction of customary environmental law and community in Indonesia's Maluku Islands', *Law and Society Review* 28–5:1079–1122.

## 'No Villain to Blame' (?)

This book describes and analyses a tragedy of the commons in the twenty-first century in the tropical world. In less than 25 years, the span of a single generation, the introduction of a commercial tree-crop, cocoa, led to a desperate situation for a majority of families who had been living for decades in the highlands of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. How to explain this self-destructive process?

The Lauje highlanders in Central Sulawesi were not faced with an identifiable villain, such as a giant company ready to swallow their land, completely destroy the forest, and transform them into miserably paid workers. The pro-

cess at work is much more insidious. But how should this process be defined? Are the Lauje people responsible for their own social curse? 'No villain to blame'—this expression, found on page 16, could have been an alternative title for this book, but I would have added a question mark.

At least at the beginning of the book, the reader may believe that Li wants to demonstrate that the process of intrusion of capitalism is so insidious that the drivers of the destructive process of the highlanders' society are mainly internal. The Lauje highlanders face a universal factor, shared by all autochthonous 'forest people' in Asia and Africa when a tree crop is inserted into their shifting cultivation system. This was the beginning of the disappearance of the commons and its shared resources, but the forest looked so abundant that it was difficult for the highlanders to anticipate this. Their intense desire to obtain access to modern items of daily life, such as a motorcycle, a zinc roof, or a television set, precipitates strategic mistakes.

But if they sold the land, and there are not any villains in the story, who were the buyers? A few autochthons made some purchases, but the main buyers were a particular type of migrant: the highlanders' Lauje cousins living in the coastal villages. We now start perceiving more external aspects of the insidious penetration of capitalism in the highlanders' society.

Just like other migrants in most cocoa/perennial-crop stories, these 'Lauje cousins' cannot be considered capitalist entrepreneurs, but neither are they among the poorest coastal villagers.

This point may not have been stressed enough by the author: These migrants are certainly not 'capitalists' but they do contribute some capital to fund their transportation, possibly pay some *ganti rugi* (compensation) to an autochthon family, and certainly pay for the services of an influential autochthon. The latter uses his clout to play the key role of broker, helps migrants obtain land, and acquires the bulk of the *ganti rugi*. When multiplied by the hundreds of migrants in this position, enough capital is produced to accelerate the process of the commoditization of land, labour, and credit, leading to bad debts and the subsequent process of rapid social differentiation and exclusion.

This is really the universal and key insidious process of the insertion of capitalism through tree crop smallholders and family agriculture. Without the migrants, the process would never have gone so far.

More than just a conjuncture, this process of the marginalization of autochthons in most cocoa stories is structural. It is extremely difficult for them to resist the demographic and social pressures of migrants, who are better informed, usually better organized, and who have the advantage of starting with a small amount of capital. The role of the broker is also structural and universal in these cocoa-motivated migrant stories.

The 'Canadian cacao' project, launched in 1991, is much more than an additional conjuncture. The interactions of such official projects reflect a universal and structural process: despite usually good intentions, including helping the poor, and a professed egalitarian ideal, most projects launched by bilateral or multilateral aid programmes become a component of the 'intrusion of insidious capitalism', which leads to the exclusion of many autochthonous families.

In this project, all the ingredients of a truly classical story were present. Firstly, the appropriation of plant material and inputs by just a few influential people are classical themes in 'development' stories. Secondly, also present is the developers' 'ideal' of ensuring that the farmers have a title to the land in order to guarantee the sustainability of their tree crop agriculture, an aspect that also frequently leads to contradictory effects. One of the reasons for this is that politically connected people are always better placed to make use of official documents. Thus the insidious intrusion of capitalism also comes from local officials.

At the beginning of the book, Li tells us that there is no rapacious agribusiness corporation in the story. But the term 'rapacious' returns in a more affirmative way in the last chapter. Some officials, such as the sub-district and district chiefs and the senior staff of the agricultural and forestry services, play a determining role. To a certain extent, it cannot be denied that they indirectly help small migrants obtain access to land but, of course, they enrich themselves at the same time and threaten the very existence of the autochthons. Some of these officials and brokers are not typical or the easiest villains to identify, but they do represent a structural component in the insidious intrusion of capitalism.

Another point Li could have explored a little further in her analysis is the issue of natural disasters. At the beginning of the book, Li writes, 'no apocalypse, no famine, no natural disaster'. However, in Sulawesi, the cocoa pod borer outbreak, which accounted for a fall in yields of 75% and may partly be considered a natural disaster, was also the result of deforestation and cocoa monoculture, human interventions which reinforced the pest's ecological and economic impact.

Pest and disease outbreaks are part of cocoa's story, part of the 'cocoa cycle'. After a certain period of pest-free and disease-free cultivation, farmers suffer the consequences of the re-internalized externalities of deforestation and monoculture. To a certain extent, it is a kind of structural cocoa betrayal and trap.

When cocoa farmers face this unavoidable recessionary phase and their farms lose efficiency, the state and the cocoa/chocolate industry wake up to

the realization that cocoa cultivation is not sustainable. As the supply of the raw material is compromised, both parties try to intercede to see how they can help 'farming communities' to keep producing cocoa. But these communities are basically only one section of the migrant population—those who can afford to reinvest. To a certain extent, one cannot blame the chocolate industry for deciding not to work with the native peoples, who produce just a few bags of cocoa and live in remote hills. One must acknowledge the difficulties inherent in helping native peoples adapt to a capitalist world. However, the fact remains that the millions of dollars invested worldwide by cocoa/chocolate companies in sustainable cocoa programmes do not include them. Moreover, the industry does not want to know what happens to the excluded people and certainly does not want its consumers to know. While the chocolate industry and its allied international NGOs cannot be blamed as the direct villains, they *are* responsible for cheating consumers through the lie—at least of omission—that is mass certification.

This Lauje story shows a dramatic, specific story, but also a structural and repeating pattern, the local application of a model that has been repeating itself for centuries. The immense merit of this book is that it draws our attention to the process of the insidious intrusion of capitalism—without capitalists, through smallholders. The intrusion of capitalism through smallholders who do not have much capital to deploy is a noteworthy achievement of capitalism. Li clearly identifies and demonstrates the mechanisms of this de-structuration of a society. A particularly interesting aspect is how she starts from the marginalized autochthons and shows that part of the process is internal.

Last but not least, as far as methodological aspects are concerned, this book is a splendid demonstration of the necessity of conducting research operations over the span of a generation. Cross-sectional surveys can never offer such a rich analysis and understanding of the real stakes involved.

*François Ruf*

CIRAD (French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development)

*francois.ruf@cirad.fr*

### ***Land's End Revisited***

Thank you to the three reviewers for their comments, compliments, and provocations. In my response I will clarify some apparent misunderstandings, and further develop three key ideas. First, I address the issue of customary land

rights and their transformation; second, the question of social movements and their strategies; and third, the uses of comparison and conjunctural analysis.

### *Customary Property Relations and Their Transformations*

Lauje highlanders definitely had a customary property regime, both before and after they enclosed much of their common land to create private individual property. If not, they would have lived under an open-access system in which there are no rules, and anything goes—the scenario mistakenly labelled the ‘tragedy of the commons’. My point was not that highlanders lacked customary law concerning land and resources, but rather that their law was lightly institutionalized (pp. 10, 89). It did not have the features of spatial and social boundedness highlighted by scholars of common property, due to two factors: the open land frontier, and the loose structure of kin and neighbourhood groups. Light institutionalization was also the result of an absent state. Colonial and subsequent governments paid little attention to highlanders’ affairs, and until the 1990s neither state officials nor NGOs made any attempt to investigate the highlanders’ land tenure system or situate it in relation to state-land law. Hence Lauje highlanders were not ‘distancing themselves from an indigenous land ethic and customary laws that mark them as backward’, as Amity Doolittle suggests—they simply had no exposure to outsiders’ perspectives on their land system. I quite agree with Doolittle that the more explicit and systematic iterations of ‘customary law’ we find in Southeast Asia are usually the product of encounters with state legal systems or advocacy initiatives (see also Li 2001, 2000). They may also emerge as indigenous responses to land scarcity, conflict with neighbouring groups, or rising inequality (Li 2010; Cramb 2007).

What, then, was the Lauje highlanders’ customary property system, and how did it change? In the period of swidden farming, highlanders recognized the rights of individuals to land they pioneered; they recognized two types of commons: the primary forest and the secondary forest, which they inherited collectively from the ancestors; and they had rules for who could clear and farm where, and sanctions for breach (pp. 85–9). These rules were sufficient to enable highlanders to go about their work without getting in each other’s way, and recognize investments of labour, which was the scarce factor of production.

David Henley questions the centrality of labour in establishing property rights, asking why highlanders continued to recognize labour investments that had been made in the distant past. I often queried highlanders about this, and received different responses. Some highlanders argued that very old secondary forest eventually became primary again, in the dual sense that there was little or no trace that labour had ever been invested, and the original pioneer would be on thin ground if he tried to assert ownership. Others argued, however, that

old-growth secondary forest vegetation is different from primary forest, and the rights established by the pioneer never lapse. To make sense of this debate, I had to alert to the context. In the 1990s land enclosure was in process, hence a statement about 'how we do things around here' could not be interpreted as agreed and stable custom. It was, rather, 'an expression of a custom-information, tentatively legitimized by reference to the past' (p. 89). My goal was not to uncover fixed truths of highland custom, but to explore how different principles drawn from past and current practices were expressed in words and deeds, and how they were used to legitimate the enclosure of land. There was no single deciding factor, nor was there anything straightforward about it: in the early days, every act of enclosure was an experiment, and enclosers waited to see whether or not their claims would hold.

The highlanders' system of land tenure after enclosure was still a customary one, in the sense that it was enacted and enforced by highlanders themselves. It continued to be supported by their own processes for dispute resolution, and involved no documents or state benediction (pp. 86, 104, 109–13). Individual land ownership emerged and was supported not because of the weakness of highlanders' customary institutions, as Doolittle suggests, but because of their strength: highlanders agreed that land planted with productive tree crops was individual property. They conceded to their exclusion from the secondary-forest commons to which they previously had shared access. Disputes among kin were not over the legitimacy of enclosure as such, but over who exactly had the right to plant trees where. Once the new arrangements were made, kin and neighbours recognized and upheld them. Disputes were more protracted where migrants from the coast were involved. It was in these sites, with their more acute 'us versus them' logic, that I witnessed an emergent awareness among highlanders that they might need a stronger set of rules to keep outsiders from buying land (p. 176). As of 2009, I encountered no discussions of the need for new provisions for land-sharing to counteract landlessness, and was unable to provoke highlanders to debate the topic, although I tried (pp. 107, 152). Like Doolittle, I suggested that new arrangements will emerge, drawing on elements from past and present practice, but I cannot predict the form they will take (pp. 89–90, 175–6).

### *Social-Movement Strategies and Failures of Recognition*

There has been an important debate in anthropology and related disciplines over whether or not exaggerated portrayals of the ecological virtues of indigenous practices are sound political strategy. As Doolittle argues, images of green goodness can be useful in reversing dominant accounts that portray highlanders as forest destroyers, and help to 'combat histories of marginalization

and achieve political recognition'. But as other scholars have argued, exaggerated images can backfire, when enemies or would-be allies find that the realities do not match the descriptions (Conklin and Graham 1995; Ellen 1986; Li 2007). My study points to a further, unintended effect. Inevitably, activists seeking to support indigenous land claims focus their limited resources on promising sites where campaign goals can be clarified, and not on sites where the message seems too complex, or the protagonists do not fit the bill. In the case of Lauje highlanders, the lack of fit intensified their marginalization. They had no allies. They could not gain recognition on their own terms (pp. 164–6).

These are important times to pay attention to failures of fit, because the Indonesian government is finally moving towards more legal recognition of customary land rights, raising the question of who will qualify for these rights, and who will be excluded. AMAN (Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara, Indonesia's Indigenous Peoples' Alliance) achieved an important victory when the constitutional court agreed to excise customary forests from the state-claimed forest estate. But what is a customary forest, and who can lay claim to it? For the Badan Pertanahan Nasional (National Land Bureau) and the Departemen Kehutanan (Forest Department), the indicators include the presence of a formal *adat* institution with recognized authority, a clearly defined territory, a body of customary laws which are still acknowledged and obeyed, and the dependence of people upon the collection of forest products to meet their daily subsistence needs (Li 2001:663). To broaden the scope of who could qualify as indigenous or customary communities (*masyarakat adat*), AMAN proposed the principle adopted by the UN: self-definition as indigenous people. But the court rejected this approach, re-stating the principle that the state has the right to determine whether or not a customary community exists. The court ruling mentions criteria drawn from early-twentieth-century anthropology, which defined societies according to types, aligned in evolutionary sequence: customary communities have mechanical solidarity; limited division of labour; togetherness and uniformity; no strong leaders; self-sufficiency; and low literacy. The ruling also notes that such a community would cease to exist when, under the influence of science and technology, people change and are no longer distinct from the general population (Government of Indonesia 2013).

Lauje highlanders who dismantled their commons to plant cacao would probably fail to qualify as a customary community under the court's definition, nor could they satisfy the criteria of the Forest Department. Their situation is far from unique. The great majority of Indonesia's rural population, and a significant portion of urban dwellers, access their land through informal or customary arrangements (Colombijn 2012). Only 20% of Indonesia's landholders possessed formal titles as of 1998–1999 (Fitzpatrick 2007:139). Accelerated

titling programs are underway, but hardly keep pace with the generation of new parcels. Customary institutions are diverse, and often recognize combinations of individual and group rights. Customary law is a 'living law' that adapts with the times. But it still serves the people: it regulates the allocation and use of land, and provides principles and procedures for conflict resolution that are attuned to the local milieu. Communities that manage their land in this way—tens of millions of Indonesians, by some estimates—deserve to be recognized on their own terms.

### *Conjunctural Analysis and the Uses of Comparison*

Henley is concerned to evaluate 'to what extent the fate of the Lauje highlanders represents a universal story, and to what extent it reflects locally specific factors, such as the markedly individualistic tendencies [...] characteristic of Lauje economic behaviour even before the cacao era'. François Ruf goes further by offering a reading of the highlanders' fate as a slight variant on a 'truly classical story': one in which a familiar set of causes, namely the arrival of migrants, the betrayals of cacao, and misguided development projects led all too predictably to land loss and impoverishment. The questions posed by these reviewers are methodological. To respond to them, I need to further elaborate on the 'analytic of conjuncture' I proposed. To analyse is to tease apart. Hence to analyse the conjuncture I encountered in the Lauje highlands in the period 1990–2009 I teased apart the set of social, cultural, economic, ecological, and political relations that gave this time, place, and set of people a particular form.

One merit of the focus on conjunctures is that it avoids the artificial bounding of a research site, and with it the separation Ruf makes between internal and external causes. If, as I argued, Lauje highlanders' identities and practices have always been formed through processes and powers of diverse provenance, there is no 'inside'. Hence I suggested that the 'individualistic tendencies' Henley notes were formed, in part, by the abundance of land which placed an emphasis on individually embodied labour—a person's sweat and exhaustion—in concepts of property (pp. 86–7); they were also formed through highlanders' longstanding practice of trade in the staple foods rice and corn, which gave individuals, especially women, an incentive to plant and tend large fields, and claim the product as their own (p. 64).

I fully agree with Henley that comparison is a useful tool for analysing which processes and powers are shared across different conjunctures, and which are distinct, enabling us to ask: why here? why now? why in this form and not another? (pp. 20, 195n68). In *Land's end*, I focused mainly on comparison across sites within the highlands (pp. 24, 113, 158–60), and limited my discussion of

other times and places (p. 20, 55, 134, 183). The methodological point is that an analytic of conjuncture embraces the specificity of every site: it works against Henley's proposed division of the world into places, people, and events that embody 'universals' and others that are 'locally specific'. It also works against the idea that ethnographic work can only generate 'case studies' to be read as minor variations on general processes of which the key exemplars and prototypes are located elsewhere (Lund 2014; Hart 2004).

Ruf's multi-decade research on migrant smallholders, crop disease, and cacao cycles has illuminated a very important component of Sulawesi's cacao boom. His reading of *Land's end* as a migrant story accurately captures the dynamic at one of my highland research sites, Pelalang (pp. 26, 110–3, 158–64). At this site, Lauje from the coast backed by the *desa* headman and enabled by a broker grabbed and purchased land from highlanders, precipitating their descent into landlessness. Road-building further enabled government officials to grab land or profit from it, as Ruf observes. But in the two sites that form the main focus of the book, Sibogo and Sipil, there were no migrants at all: the people present in 2009 were the same people who were present in 1990, all of them highlanders living on, or close to, their ancestors' land. Other highland sites where I followed the trajectory over two decades followed these two patterns: in some, Lauje migrants from the coast were a factor; in others, migrants were completely absent. In the sites without migrants, the process of land enclosure was an intimate one, involving siblings and cousins who excluded each other from their common land, with no brokers involved.

The story of the Canadian cacao project must also be put in its place. Highlanders in a dozen sites I surveyed in 1991 had already started to plant cacao before the project arrived. The project supplied at most 20% of the seedlings that were planted in the 1990s, with the remaining 80% purchased by highlanders using their own funds (p. 107). Uneven distribution of seedlings did give some highlanders an advantage, but capital generated by highlanders themselves was more significant. In contrast to the tobacco era, in which all the surplus was extracted by merchants based on the coast, some highlanders in Sibogo and Sipil were able to retain a portion of the surplus they generated from cacao, and invest it in buying up their neighbours' land. It was not until around 2005 that merchants based on the coast began to stimulate accumulation among highlanders by advancing investment funds to strong farmers, enabling them to buy out their struggling kin (pp. 138–9).

Given my emphasis on the multiple elements that form a conjuncture I do not present highlanders in Sibogo and Sipil as isolated. Clearly, the demonstration effect of the new prosperity that highlanders observed when they travelled along the coast, the availability of cacao seedlings, the inevitable eruption of

cacao diseases, and the global price of cacao mediated through the rupiah were part of the transformation I studied. But much of what happened in the highlands cannot be accounted for in terms of migrants, projects, and external grabs. Descriptions of smallholder crop booms in other highland areas—coffee in Sumatra in the 1920s, rubber in Sumatra and Kalimantan (pp. 134–5)—also point to a significant process of accumulation among indigenous highlanders *in situ* (Li 2013). A critical difference—and here we see the strength of comparing across conjunctures—was that in those booms, land continued to be abundant, so the accumulation of some farmers did not squeeze others out. Research I have undertaken with colleagues indicates that the land frontier is currently closing down across the Southeast Asian region, through a combination of large-scale enclosures from above, and small-scale enclosures from below (Hall, Hirsch, and Li 2011). In the latter cases, indigenous farmers are sometimes bamboozled and outcompeted by savvy migrants, as Ruf observes, but they can also bring about transformations on their own initiative. The indigenous smallholder as entrepreneur, what I have called ‘involution’s dynamic other’, a figure noted by Geertz (1963) but not really examined, must have a place in our understanding of agrarian relations in the region.

*Tania Murray Li*

University of Toronto

*tania.li@utoronto.ca*

## References

- Colombijn, Freek (2012). ‘Solid as a rock, or a handful of dust? The security of land tenure in Indonesian cities from 1930–1960’, in: E. Bogaerts and R. Raben (eds), *Beyond empire and nation: Decolonizing societies in Africa and Asia, 1930s–1970*, pp. 213–39. Leiden: KITLV Press.
- Conklin, Beth, and Laura Graham (1995). ‘The shifting middle ground: Amazonian Indians and eco-politics’, *American Anthropologist* 97–4:695–710.
- Cramb, R.A. (2007). *Land and longhouse: Agrarian transformation in the uplands of Sarawak*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Ellen, Roy F. (1986). ‘What Black Elk left unsaid: On the illusory images of green primitivism’, *Anthropology Today* 2–6:8–12.
- Fitzpatrick, Daniel (2007). ‘Land, custom and the state in post-Suharto Indonesia: A foreign lawyer’s perspective’, in: J.S. Davidson and D. Henley (eds), *The revival of tradition in Indonesian politics: The deployment of adat from colonialism to indigenism*, pp. 130–148. London: Routledge.

- Geertz, Clifford (1963). *Agricultural involution: The processes of ecological change in Indonesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Government of Indonesia (2013). Constitutional Court Ruling 35/PUU-X/2012, 16 May 2013.
- Hall, Derek, Philip Hirsch, and Tania Murray Li (2011). *Powers of exclusion: Land dilemmas in Southeast Asia*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.
- Hart, Gillian (2004). 'Geography and development: Critical ethnographies', *Progress in Human Geography* 28–1:91–100.
- Li, Tania Murray (2000). 'Articulating indigenous identity in Indonesia: Resource politics and the tribal slot', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42–1:149–79.
- Li, Tania Murray (2001). *Masyarakat adat*, difference, and the limits of recognition in Indonesia's forest zone, *Modern Asian Studies* 35–3:645–76.
- Li, Tania Murray (2007). *The will to improve: Governmentality, development, and the practice of politics*. Durham NC: Duke.
- Li, Tania Murray (2010). 'Indigeneity, capitalism, and the management of dispossession', *Current Anthropology* 51–3:385–414.
- Li, Tania Murray (2013). 'Involution's dynamic others', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 20–2:276–92.
- Lund, Christian (2014). 'Of what is this a case?: Analytical movements in qualitative social science research', *Human Organization* 73–3:224–34.