



Land's End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier

By Tania Murray Li



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Drawing on two decades of ethnographic research in Sulawesi, Indonesia, Tania Murray Li offers an intimate account of the emergence of capitalist relations among indigenous highlanders who privatized their common land to plant a boom crop, cacao. Spurred by the hope of ending their poverty and isolation, some prospered, while others lost their land and struggled to sustain their families. Yet the winners and losers in this transition were not strangers—they were kin and neighbors. Li's richly peopled account takes the reader into the highlanders' world, exploring the dilemmas they faced as sharp inequalities emerged among them.

The book challenges complacent, modernization narratives promoted by development agencies that assume inefficient farmers who lose out in the shift to high-value export crops can find jobs elsewhere. Decades of uneven and often jobless growth in Indonesia meant that for newly landless highlanders, land's end was a dead end. The book also has implications for social movement activists, who seldom attend to instances where enclosure is initiated by farmers rather than coerced by the state or agribusiness corporations. Li's attention to the historical, cultural, and ecological dimensions of this conjuncture demonstrates the power of the ethnographic method and its relevance to theory and practice today.



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Editorial Review

Review

"For anyone interested in ongoing dispossession and enduring inequalities, this powerful and compelling book is essential. Tania Murray Li shows how access to land, labor, and food eroded gradually and insidiously for many people, in a manner that undermined oppositional movements."

(Gillian Hart, author of *Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony* 2014-03-06)

"Tania Murray Li, one of the foremost scholars of the native peoples, economies, and ecologies of Southeast Asia, here tells the subtle and challenging story of the Lauje, a group who defy clichés of indigeneity and whose destructive involvement in commodity production was willingly embraced. Her analysis complicates our understanding of rural agrarian transformation and the expansion of global capitalism, by showing how this adoption of export tree crops—unlike a century ago in Indonesia's outer islands—is leading to a literal 'land's end.' The value and power of this volume, based on twenty years of fieldwork, lies in its telling a difficult, nuanced story of the millions who do not fit into easy, pre-existing categories and narratives of modern rural transformation."

(Michael R. Dove, editor of *Beyond the Sacred Forest: Complicating Conservation in Southeast Asia* 2014-03-06)

"This is a wonderful book. It may have the biggest general impact of a book centered on Southeast Asian rural social dynamics since James Scott's seminal *Weapons of the Weak*. With unusual clarity and great persuasiveness, Tania Murray Li explores theoretical and methodological issues through vivid depictions of people's lives."

(Henry Bernstein, Professor Emeritus of Development Studies, University of London)

"Despite the depressing story that it has to tell, *Land's End* is a real pleasure to read, a tour de force without a trace of bombast, a model of ethnographic writing for new generations of students and agrarian researchers to follow."

(Ben White *Development and Change* 2015-06-01)

"Every so often we have the privilege of reading a book that, like Tania Li's *Land's End*, radically realigns our thinking on pressing problems. Li combines a nuanced analysis of long-term ethnographic data and a straightforward, yet sophisticated, theoretical framework to prod us to reexamine an issue that is hardly unique to Indonesia: how have landless rural people been left behind in the march toward capitalist agricultural production and market expansion?"

(Sarah Lyon *Anthropological Quarterly* 2015-06-01)

"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."

(Christopher Webb *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 2015-06-11)

"*Land's End* is book of delicate power, almost a laboratory account of how capital seizes hold and transforms the latticework of social relations through an almost banal process of 'erosion', where the bearers

of capital, unrecognized, participate in the re-invention of their own 'subject' position. ... Aided by artful ethnography, *Land's End* crafts a strange yet deeply familiar world. Many sedimentary views are felled along the way, gently but firmly. Notions of indigeneity, frontier, custom, moral economy, primitive accumulation, transition, development, and citizenship, all come in for scrutiny and are left rattled." (Vinay Gidwani *Antipode* 2015-07-01)

"The combination of the ethnographic longevity of her work with the theoretical sophistication of her analysis results in a provocative account of growing inequality and dynamic capitalist relations. The case studies and stories Li relates bring these elements to life, but the implications stretch far beyond the Lauje highlands." (Susan M. Darlington *American Ethnologist* 2016-02-01)

"*Land's End* is a very fine book indeed. Tania Murray Li has written one of those studies—all too few in number—which, while empirically focused, builds an argument that will resonate with scholars working across widely differing contexts." (Jonathan Rigg *Pacific Affairs* 2016-06-01)

"*Land's End* operates at a compelling theoretical interspace very much needed in contemporary accounts of globalization. . . . In short, it's really good anthropology." (Shane Greene *American Anthropologist* 2015-12-01)

About the Author

Tania Murray Li is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Toronto, where she holds the Canada Research Chair in the Political-Economy and Culture of Asia. She is the author of *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*, also published by Duke University Press; coauthor of *Powers of Exclusion: Land Dilemmas in Southeast Asia*; and editor of *Transforming the Indonesian Uplands: Marginality, Power and Production*.

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