

primarily related to legitimization practices of a group within society (elites, dynasties, rising chiefs, etc.). However, in other cases, it is proposed that processes such as the conformation of social identities can influence the patterns of use of obsidian in the past.

Finally, William Parry carries out in his closing chapter a clear integration and examination of what is known about the ancient meanings of obsidian according to different fields of analysis: ethnographic and ethnohistorical sources, uses, and contexts of deposition. As he moves forward, the author goes back and discusses what he finds relevant in each chapter, adding his own research to ongoing debates on the participation of obsidian artifacts in funerary rituals in Teotihuacan.

Obsidian Reflections can be seen as an outstanding drive toward knowledge of symbolism and ancient ideologies related to obsidian in Mesoamerica, with approaches relevant beyond this region. What partially underlies the entire work is an approach to materiality inclined toward segmenting objects according to their performance in different domains of social action (domestic–ritual, symbolic–decorative–functional, and so forth), which can hinder the understanding of the object as a unit. Going back to the initial weave metaphor, the unit is made up at the knots, which are points of a network in which multiple layers of meaning converge and thicken. The challenge of trying ways to overcome segmentation in search of the whole must always continue.

Land's End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier by Tania Murray Li.

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Tania Murray Li's recent book, *Land's End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier*, represents a mature intervention into the fate of rural Indonesians in the wake of twenty-some years of relentless global integration. I have no specific axe to grind with the ontologists that have come to dominate discussions of indigenous difference in recent anthropology—other than voicing that I don't share their enthusiasm or like the philosophical impoverishment it usually implies. Li's book is refreshingly not part of the trend. In fact, it is proof of what deep ethnography has always offered the anthropological enterprise and evidence of how fundamental political economy is to understanding the predicament in which Sulawesi highlanders now find themselves. After decades of engagement with the state, agribusiness developers, and coastal merchants—in their own active pursuit of a forever-receding horizon of “modernity”—most of their lives are simply far worse than they used to be.

As Li states in the Introduction,

The surprising finding of this book is that indigenous highlanders, people who are imagined by activists of the global indigenous and peasant movements to be securely attached to their land and communities, joined the ranks of people unable to sustain themselves . . . More surprisingly still, the process that dislodged them from their land wasn't initiated by land-grabbing corporations or state agencies. There was no “primitive accumulation” of the kind Marx described . . . The process through which they lost control over their collectively owned land was far less dramatic, even mundane. [p. 3]

The book goes on to tell a literal and figurative tale of land loss over the last couple of decades—a slow but sure process of dispossession and the steady redefinition of these highlanders' lives in terms of private property, profit, and new paradigms of material inequality.

The fact that this was as much or more the product of the highlanders' own pursuits of the false promises of modernity as it was any explicit bullying by more powerful outside development actors, and that a few decades later they ended up lumped together with the rest of the world's landless and poor, isn't necessarily that surprising. I also think Li simplifies a bit by deciding to articulate the argument as contrary to the idealized imaginations of rural social movements and indigenous activists. Such actors do of course trade in strategic essentialisms and romantic resistance stories, all while the populations for which they speak get absorbed by global capital. However, judging from personal experience and from many scholarly treatments with a more nuanced view of social movements, many are also well versed in logics of self-criticism, critical reflection, and even outright cynicism at times. I'm not sure it really works to lump all activists together in the way that the book does at times. Contemporary activists can also represent interlocutors equally self-conscious about how they too are wrapped up in the problem, even willing to concede they are part of it, rather than the only ones fighting for a “real” solution.

Despite this one disagreement, I find Li's book a fascinating account and necessary analytical take on two major counts. The first is methodological. *Land's End* is a wonderful lesson in the benefits of long-term engagement in a particular locale with the same collaborators; it could and should be read as a significant ethnographic statement in that

respect. Her work with Sulawesi highlanders over a 20-year span creates the necessary space for serious reflection on long-term dynamics. The critique of ethnography as too place based (hence, the frequent compulsion among current graduate students in anthropology to claim everything they do is “multisited ethnography”) and anthropology as too human centered (hence, the drive toward Latourian frameworks and posthumanist meanderings) are both beginning to reveal their limitations and revel in certain analytical clichés. Li’s book reminds us that ethnography of the particularly committed sort is not so much “tradition” as it is necessary, particularly if one considers how little other disciplines (much less lawmakers or business executives) actually care about direct engagement with radically impoverished people or the marginal spaces they inhabit.

Finally, *Land’s End* operates at a compelling theoretical interspace very much needed in contemporary accounts of globalization. As interpretive ethnography, she looks for a master metaphor—“my study concerns land’s end as a dead end,” Li (p. 180) says in the conclusion—in order to express something about how the highlanders’ comprehend their contemporary reality. As analyst of a brutal material outcome, one still historically emergent but showing no signs of relief, she pieces together a nuanced political-economic argument. It refuses to champion the hopeful or utopian when there are simply no real signs for such. It also moves past Polanyi-inspired expectations that rural peoples’ institutions might somehow sustain themselves in the face of capital’s expansion while simultaneously questioning traditional Marxist presumptions about the directionality and drivers of uneven development. In short, it’s really good anthropology.

Muslim Societies in Africa: A Historical Anthropology by Roman Loimeier.

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By writing this book, Roman Loimeier undertook a courageous task that does not have any precedent. Loimeier resents all the major geographical areas within an African historical context and from a “southern perspective”—though because based on secondary sources, this seems somewhat contradictory. While reading how Islam became the common denominator for many Africans, it again comes to the fore that their society’s history has at times been as prosperous, but additionally as turbulent and violent, as the history in other parts of the world. Also, all along the centuries, the various regions of the continent have been part of a global(izing) world mainly through trade and efforts to control trade routes. According to the author, it is mainly by these routes that Islam as a religion gained confidence and rooted in many societies.

At a dazzling speed, we pass by empires, kingdoms, and wars and holy wars (*jihads*), the latter of which often led to general processes of Islamization for many groups within the continent. We learn about rebellions using the Islamic religion to give voice to their discontent and to counterforce existing political systems (but also systems of slavery) while realizing that various present-day Islamic–Islamists movements are a continuum just taking place in our contemporaneous political context.

Starting with the question of whether there is an “African Islam,” Loimeier engages in a long-lasting debate and again shows that Islam in the Middle East has been influenced by African scholars as much as vice versa. In the Middle Ages, Timbuktu was an acknowledged center of Islamic learning. African Muslim societies, often considered as marginally Islamic, have been core areas of the Islamic world all through history.

Loimeier thereafter describes various regions, starting with the Maghreb, labeling the Sahel as a connective space due to its trade routes, and continuing on with West Africa, Egyptian colonization, and the influence of the Ottoman Empires and East Africa (Nubia and Funj). The latter contains a very interesting chapter on the interaction of Muslims and Christians in Ethiopian societies, whereby, in some instances, the inhabitants of Christian empires forced Muslims to convert to Christianity or have their heads chopped off. The author finally passes by the East African coast further south to Muslims on the Cape, the region where they never became a political force. The last chapter deals with Muslims under colonial rule.

Despite this astonishing enterprise, some critical remarks can be made. At first, while covering various regions, I felt a desperate need to consult some maps. Far too few have been included. Secondly, the reader can find some moments of rest in the boxes throughout the chapters (though not in a balanced way) that deal with specific topics. As the author claims to write a historical anthropology, it would have been nice to find out more about how individuals decided to come to terms with daily life and the requirements of Islam.