

Book Reviews

Land's End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier, Tania Murray Li, *Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2014, 240 pp., \$23.95 (p/b), ISBN 978-0-8223-5705-6, \$84.95 (h/b), ISBN 978-0-8223-5694-3*

In *Land's End*, Tania Murray Li investigates a socio-ecological puzzle encountered in the highlands of Sulawesi, Indonesia: the indigenous Lauje people enclosed their common lands and the frontier of available land by converting a mixed forest-rice landscape to private cacao plantations, exacerbating inequalities in land and wealth between neighbours and kin. Li examines how this happened using an analytic of conjuncture: how multiple, dynamic processes and actors interact over time in place to produce particular outcomes. Highlanders themselves instigated the transition from subsistence, leading to the piecemeal emergence of private property and capitalist relations. In search of a better life, they enclosed commons lands by planting permanent cacao trees, which were incorporated with their mixed land tenure system of collective and private lands. Li seeks to productively disrupt assumptions about indigenous identity, the development of agrarian capitalism and the politics of social movements by demonstrating how indigenous peoples implicate themselves in modern commodity production, unequal capitalist relations develop insidiously and political mobilisation is limited by peoples' perceptions of their own predicament.

Li's book is powerful in its ability to confront and challenge essentialist conceptions of the relationships between indigenous peoples and nature, the root causes of the development of rural capitalist relations, and the types of political consciousness and resistance that might emerge. She identifies the conjuncture of multidimensional social, political, economic

and ecological forces that engendered the indigenous development of capitalist relations. Her long-term, ethnographic approach enables a painstaking demonstration of how these changes took hold, step-by-step. She includes the perspectives and voices of her research participants as part of the explanation for the fateful decisions the highlanders made, but is careful to distinguish between her research participants' understandings of the changes surrounding them and her own academic analysis. The book provides the reader with a comprehensive, detailed understanding of the factors and processes that led Lauje highlanders to enclose their land frontier and develop unequal relations of agricultural production.

Despite the strength of Li's analytic, there remains a key weakness: it creates the impression that the transition from subsistence to commoditised production resulted from the inevitable force of capitalist relations of production, and thus removes the agency of the actors involved. The development of cacao production and capitalist relations is presented as if it were a force of its own, although it is possible to identify particular actors, processes and relations as imperative – the external influence of a globalised cacao market, the unequal power relations between villagers prior to the cacao boom or the small-scale land grabs made by powerful village actors. There is an underlying functionalism to the argument that once capitalist relations are introduced – intended or not – they necessarily expand and engulf peasants' relations with one another and the land. The empirical material could be read differently to argue that inequalities developed not only due to the compulsion of the market but also the agency of powerful rural actors who sought to acquire wealth and social status in the absence of a counter-movement against such actions.

The titular claim of the book that land has reached its 'end' is similarly fatalistic. Li frames the concept of land via the highlanders' use of the Indonesian neologism *lokasi*, or location. Prior to the cacao boom, highlanders did not have a word for land, only forest, earth and their spirits. Once trees were in the ground they began to talk about *lokasi*, land as a permanent location that could be commoditised and freely traded. Thus, land-as-*lokasi* did not end with the enclosure of the common lands, but had only just begun as a social relation. Second, arguing that land 'ended' due to the elimination of available terrain is to claim that private

property relations had become permanent and unchanging. Property, however, is a social relation that can constantly evolve. Land's End concludes by discussing the spread of a disease that kills cacao trees, which could potentially disrupt the property relations of the uplands, albeit not necessarily in egalitarian ways. This event is a reminder of the ways in which property regimes can change, and that as long as land is an essential element of nature-society relations, its future is always open.

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The Durable Slum: Dharavi and the Right to Stay Put in Globalizing Mumbai, Liza Weinstein, Minneapolis and London, *University of Minnesota Press*, 2014, 256 pp., \$25.00 (p/b), ISBN 978-0-8166-8310-9, \$75.00 (h/b), ISBN 978-0-8166-8309-3

At the centre of Mumbai lies Dharavi, a 535-acre slum whose very existence is incredible given the pressures exercised by global investors to develop this prime real estate. In *The Durable Slum*, Liza Weinstein asks how those living in Dharavi have managed to 'stay put' for so long, especially with rising land prices and a constant stream of redevelopment plans. She moves away from arguments that place the totalising consequences of neoliberal globalisation at the fore of land redevelopment analyses as well as those that argue for a primary focus on local politics. For her, the ability to 'stay put' is determined by actions (and interactions) on a multi-scalar level between global property investors, the central Planning Commission, state political party coalitions and the slum-dwellers themselves (15).

The 'right to stay put', as Weinstein

clarifies, is distinct from the sweeping, revolutionary claims made in Lefebvre's 'right to the city' – this is not to say that the former does not impart a sense of political power to an individual or community, but that the ever-present threat of displacement has muted aspirations for such wide-reaching change. Instead, the 'right to stay put', a concept Weinstein borrows from Chester Hartman, very much includes both empowerment and exploitation, something encapsulated by the following quote of one of Weinstein's interlocutors, Aneesh Shankar, on the Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP): 'There will be give-and-take. If they accept our proposals, we will accept theirs' (20). This is a pragmatic decision that does not necessarily entail true security, as both local administrators and residents resist making infrastructural improvements out of fear of displacement.

Weinstein argues that Dharavi is not marginal to the political and economic life of Mumbai; the slum in fact emerged through 'supportive neglect' (27) on the part of the local state, given that its development was an easy solution to the worker housing shortage

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