Why So Fast?
Rapid Class Differentiation in
Upland Sulawesi

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Introduction
When I first hiked into a remote corner of the Sulawesi hills in 1990, the indigenous highlanders all had access to ancestral land on which they grew rice and corn as food, together with tobacco or shallots for cash. By 2009, the land was covered in cacao and clove trees, and few people were growing any food at all. In a very short period, some farmers had accumulated large areas of land, while many of their neighbours and kin had become landless—and jobless, too, as there was little demand for their labour. As I tracked these changes through repeat visits over 20 years, I was struck by the extent and rapidity of the transition, but struck also that the emergence of agrarian classes, with differential access to the means of production, had occurred with so little debate. It was not entirely smooth: there were vigorous struggles over who was entitled to enclose which piece of land, and some cacao planted on contested land went up in smoke. But there was no Polanyi-style “countermovement” contesting the justice or wisdom of making land into private individual property, nor did anyone question the legitimacy of its accumulation in a few farmers’ hands. The people who lost out in the transition did not make claims on their more successful kin in terms of the latter’s obligation to share land, work or food as some kind of subsistence guarantee. For the most part, they struggled to maintain their own families as best they could, and blamed themselves for being left behind while others prospered. There was petty thieving of cacao pods that disappeared mysteriously at night, but stealing...
cacao was not linked to a critique that suggested owning large fields of cacao, or using chemical herbicides instead of hiring workers, was illegitimate.

When I compare the situation in the Sulawesi highlands with that in the Kedah plain famously described by James Scott in *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), where landless people did engage in a class-based critique, I am struck by the acute difference in these two conjunctures in terms of their timing. In Kedah the land frontier had closed long before, and unequal access to the means of production had been entrenched for several generations. In the Sulawesi highlands, in contrast, the very rapidity of transformation helps to account for why the change occurred so smoothly. Highlanders had no previous experience with a situation in which some of their number were without access to agricultural land, hence they had no mechanisms to prevent the accumulation of land in a few hands, claim a right to work, or spread the profits. Taking advantage of the 20-year span of my study, 1990–2010, this chapter explains why the transition occurred so quickly, and how the highlanders handled the increasingly unequal social world their actions created.

The main actors in this transformation—the highland farmers—had good reason, in 1990, to want to change their lives. Far from living in a state of primitive affluence, they felt radically insecure due to periodic drought, famine and lack of access to health care. Further, they were ashamed of living in unchanging poverty from one generation to the next, especially when they were aware that the lives of people living on the coast, 2–12 hours' hike away, were changing rapidly as communications improved. The coastal road was paved around 1993, and electricity and TV followed—but in 2009 much of the highlands remained accessible only on foot. If these were the highlanders' initial motivations, vectors of change originating outside the highlands also shaped the transition, notably the world price of cacao and the willingness of traders to advance credit, drawing some farmers into a downward spiral of debt and land loss while enabling others to expand their landholdings.

By 2009, highlanders who did well out of the tree crop transition began to enjoy significantly improved living conditions: better houses, food, consumer goods, and the potential to educate their children by sending them to school on the coast (Illustration 11.1). Those who joined in the transition but failed to develop stable enterprises were in a more precarious condition than they had been when I first encountered them in 1990, and their relative poverty was especially stark. Yet they had no obvious villain to blame: no big bad development project or corporation had forced them to plant tree crops. They had been drawn in by the promise of riches presented by cacao—riches that their neighbours had indeed come to enjoy, and in which they still hoped to partake despite the difficulty of acquiring new land.
A key feature of this transition—the link to a boom crop—is far from unique to this location. Colonial officials routinely reported rapid class differentiation on Southeast Asia's forest frontiers, when people started to plant cash crops and became indebted to co-villagers and traders. They were often alarmed at the enthusiasm of highlanders for the latest boom crop and the latter's neglect of food production. Stable mixes of food and cash crop production did emerge in some areas, especially where land was abundant; but where land was scarce, class differentiation could be steep and rapid. The current conjuncture in Central Sulawesi echoes that in northern Sumatra in the 1920s when smallholders caught “coffee fever”. Those who failed in their first attempt at coffee production and lost their land could not retreat to the forest to try again, because their own coffee-driven enclosures from below coincided with enclosure from above, as colonial authorities allocated large areas to plantation corporations and placed the remainder in the hands of the forest department. The outcome, in that instance, was strong support for the Communist Party, as it took up their cause and protested the expansion of plantations (see Schrieke 1955; Geertz 1963: 120–3). In Central Sulawesi today, it is the NGO movement that supports farmers in protesting
against large-scale enclosures related to the expansion of oil palm and the enforcement of forest boundaries that keep smallholders out of potentially arable land (see Sangaji 2001, Li 2007). Like the Communist Party in the 1920s, their main focus is on state and corporate actors. They pay relatively little attention to the process of class differentiation that can emerge among indigenous upland farmers and is especially acute when they are blocked from the forest frontier, which has so often provided an avenue of escape. This process is my focus here.

I begin with a brief orientation to the people and the landscape and proceed to describe the motivations of the highlanders for going into cacao; the struggles that erupted over the enclosure of land; the mechanisms of land concentration; the ways the highlanders handled emerging inequalities; and the new forms of household and community that emerged.

**Orientation**

My geographic focus in this study is what I call the Lauje area, 13 administrative units (desas) straddling the sub-districts of Tinombo and Tomini on the northern shore of the Bay of Tomini, in the province of Central Sulawesi (see Map 0.1). In the period 1990–2009, the area was home to about 40,000 people whose native language is Lauje, a language not mutually intelligible with Indonesian. The coastal strip is narrow, and about 70 per cent of the population lived in the hilly interior, which was quite isolated: there were no roads linking the hills to the coast, and the desa authorities, based on the coast, had limited reach (Illustration 11.2). The weekly rotating markets were on the coast, and schools were also concentrated there. Beginning around 2000 a few small schools were built to begin to service the hill population, but the teachers’ presence was erratic and the standard of education low. Of the few who graduated, most still could not read or speak Indonesian, and they were unable to transfer successfully to middle schools on the coast. Health care was also centred on the coast, and outreach into the hills was abysmal. Few children were vaccinated, and the rate of infant and child mortality was about 30 per cent: one child died for every two who survived to adulthood. Repeated attempts to resettle hill people to the coast had failed due to the lack of available farmland or other livelihood options. A historically embedded and culturally coded social hierarchy stigmatized hill people as backward, and placed the Christian/animist Lauje who lived in the inner hills farthest from the coast on the lowest rung. Most of my discussion is focused on the Muslim Lauje of the middle hills, two to four hours’ hike from the coast,
some of whom were able to advance up the social hierarchy as they prospered through cacao.

**Motivations for the Tree Crop Transition**

Although desa authorities encouraged middle hill farmers to plant tree crops, arguing that they would be more stable and less destructive than swidden, the hill farmers had their own reasons for converting their fields. These were three-fold. First was their feeling that growing rice, corn and cassava under swidden agriculture involved hard work for uncertain returns, especially in view of the periodic droughts. They imagined an old age in which they could pluck the cacao pods and get money—a "pension", as they put it. The second reason was the decline in their incomes during the 1980s, as their main cash crop, shallots, succumbed to fungal disease, and the income men could make from hauling rattan hardly met their own costs while in the forest. And third, there was the desire to shake off the social stigma attached to them as hill people and to emulate coastal styles of consumption, signalled by better clothing and refined foods such as rice, fish, coffee and sugar. These desires later expanded to
education for their children, more substantial wooden houses and, eventually, a brick house on the coast, equal to that of the coastal elite.

Hill farmers witnessed these benefits already being enjoyed in neighbouring districts where cacao was in production, and they began to buy seedlings wherever they could. Some seedlings were supplied by a donor-funded development scheme intended to improve highland livelihoods, but cacao would not have taken off without farmer interest. The main attraction was that cacao was a perennial. Although they had long produced tobacco and shallots for the market, as long as hill farmers used the swidden system, desa officials viewed them as hopelessly backward. As soon as they planted cacao, desa officials began to treat them with more respect, as “real farmers” building up a long-term investment. The prestige system within the hills also shifted: before cacao, most adult men engaged in seasonal wage labour on coastal farms or in forest product collection to earn much-needed cash for their families. After cacao, men’s migrant labour was redefined as wasteful: why work for others when you could build up a secure future by developing a productive cacao garden at home? Women, who had suffered reduced economic independence as their shallot incomes declined, and who also bore the brunt of swidden labour, concurred that cacao was the way to go: they could use the money to buy coastal foods, rice and fish, which they appreciated but could not afford. These were the conditions that made cacao a compelling project for Lauje hill farmers, although they did not anticipate the social transformation that would ensue.

**Struggles over Enclosure**

According to customary understandings, the man who first cleared a patch of forestland established individual ownership rights and was free to sell the land to another who compensated him for the labour expended. But descendants did not divide up the land they inherited from the land pioneer, so it gradually became a collective resource in which many people had an interest. They used it in a loose rotation according to their needs, and lent it freely to neighbours and kin for seasonal use. Whether a swidden was used for food or cash crops made no difference to this cycle. Fruit and other useful trees were seldom planted in the swiddens and were generally sparse, because the land was reused and re-burned too frequently for trees to mature. Yet the short cycle of Sulawesi swiddens is not a sign of recent decline. It was observed by colonial officials as early as 1820: two to three years cropping with rice, corn and root crops followed by a four- to eight-year fallow (see Henley 2005: 516–21). The introduction of tree crops into the Lauje hills broke the swidden cycle and broke the system of land circulation among kin.
The first stage of the transformation involved the privatization of land by the exclusion of co-heirs. The mechanism was concrete: planting tree crops on a swidden had the effect of enclosing it and withdrawing it from the inherited swidden pool in a manner that was locally understood to be permanent. People argued that the investment of labour in tree planting was equivalent to the labour invested by the ancestors in the initial land clearing, and like all labour investments, it secured private rights. There was no talk of reasserting common ownership after the end of the tree crop cycle. Since everyone recognized that trees established individual ownership, the struggle focused on the question of who was entitled to plant trees on which plot of land. Highlanders began to argue that only descendants of the original land pioneer were entitled to plant trees. Non-descendants were merely borrowers, only permitted to plant annual crops. Yet the elaboration of this rule, and to some extent even the distinction between descendants and borrowers, was quite novel. Although in other parts of Southeast Asia a distinction between the "founding" family and latecomers or borrowers is important and ritually marked, in these hills it was muted for four reasons: although the swidden cycle was short, land was still perceived to be abundant, so detailed rules were not elaborated; a bilateral kinship system and a high rate of kindred and hamlet endogamy meant that everyone was closely related, and it was this feature—"we are all kin here"—that was emphasized over distinct ancestral lines; there was a sense in which everyone was "borrowing" the land of the ancestors who had done the initial work of clearing; and in the case of land that had been cleared several generations ago, no one really knew who had cleared which patch of land, or who was descended from which ancestor, muting the claims that might have been made in these terms (see also Li 1996b). The etiquette for accessing swidden land had been very simple: ask the person who cleared the plot in question, if he was still alive, or ask the person who used it last, especially if residual crops such as bananas were growing there.

In the initial rush to plant trees, farmers with more capital, labour and genealogical knowledge about where their ancestors had cleared land were able to consolidate their hold over large areas. People who were slower to get started, and those without ancestral claims, lost out. There was some randomness to this process: a person who happened to have sold a healthy crop of shallots at a good price was able to buy seedlings and hire labour to plant cacao, thereby expanding the area of land under his or her control. But there were also systematic features: senior men who had themselves pioneered land in their youth, or who claimed to know the location and boundaries of a particular ancestor's plot, were able to make their claims prevail over those of younger men, people who had been orphaned, or those who had moved in from
another hamlet. Initially, women also lost out, because they were dependent on their husbands to operationalize their claims to inherited land by clearing it for cacao, regarded as a male task. Later, they devised ways of inserting their labour into the cacao cultivation process, thereby establishing ownership rights either alone, or jointly with their husbands (see Li 1998).

While the initiative to enclose land came largely from below, highlanders struggling over land enclosure did not operate in isolation. They defended their actions by invoking a blend of customary and “official” legal frameworks that involved different actors, and worked across different scales. Within the hills, the customary principle of recognizing that land pioneers and their descendants had the strongest claims did not resolve matters. Disputes revolved around the control and credibility of information about local histories of land clearing (who first cleared where, when); over subsequent transactions (gifts, purchases, devolution *in absentia*); and over the rights that derived from subsequent labour investments by men or women, including the labour of establishing cacao. Although there are “customary” dispute resolution procedures within hillside hamlets, these were seldom invoked during the scramble over enclosure, on the grounds that land was the concern of “the government”. When *desa* headmen were asked to adjudicate, they drew on their own understandings of “customary practice”, mediated through the prism of disputed knowledge, intimidation and bribery. Other powers were also brought into play by protagonists in land disputes: the threat of using magic to cause illness or death to family members; and arson, as a protagonist would awake to find newly planted cacao seedlings scorched to the ground. In the later stages of the process, the preferred method of dispute resolution was cash. A person eyeing a patch of secondary forest for conversion to cacao would pay off co-inheritors to confirm the private enclosure of the land and make it final. Soon thereafter, people started to use cash payments to privatize fallow land, separating it from the ancestral pool even without the investment of labour in planting trees. In local understanding, a cash payment has the power to subsume tangled histories of labour investment and family ties, so treating land as a commodity was an effective way to establish private rights. Kin who had been paid for the land could not later make a claim, when the cacao started to yield.

**Mechanisms of Land Concentration**

Immediately after land had been privatized, it could be sold to another party, a transaction highlanders understood to be permanent. Many farmers facing immediate cash needs sold their newly planted cacao groves, one parcel at a time, to their more fortunate neighbours. Some then found themselves working
as wage labourers on land that used to be their own. One man who had sold some land early in the transition told me he closed his eyes whenever he walked by his former plot, which was producing a fine crop of cloves and making his brother-in-law, who had bought the land, rich. Yet it was, he said, his own fault for selling up. His brother-in-law had paid for the land and was fully entitled to enjoy his profits.

Gambling was a significant cause of land loss, especially for men. A large number of tree plots changed hands during the 1997 El Niño-Southern Oscillation drought, when farmers with cash in hand were able to buy land at distress-sale prices. Weddings and prolonged illness also resulted in land sales. Farmers unable to produce enough food after converting most of their land to cacao started to borrow money for food while waiting for their first harvest, or when the price of cacao was low relative to the cost of food, entering a downward spiral. This is the classic "squeeze" encountered by small-scale farmers who can no longer withdraw from market involvement—in this case, because they had committed their land to cacao—even though the proceeds from the sale of cacao, minus interest on their debt, left them without the means to sustain themselves (see Wood 2002, Bernstein 2010). In one hamlet where I kept records of land transactions from the time of initial enclosure around 1992, 50 of the 98 farm plots had changed hands through purchase by 2006. Some households had very little land left, and the men were away working outside the desa while the women and children stayed behind in their tiny huts, eating very little.

The enclosure of land made debt a new and potent mechanism of land loss. Previously, the main way highlanders could obtain credit was by pledging their labour, most often by taking an advance for their work hauling rattan or timber out from the interior, or by pledging their annual crops, especially tobacco. For more than a century (1820-1950), Lauje highlanders who produced tobacco for the local market and for export around the archipelago were chronically indebted to tobacco traders. But so long as their land was held collectively in the swidden pool, the most an individual could lose for failure to repay a debt was their crop. The land was still there to use again, in the next season. Since land became individual property, a creditor could lay claim to it, making the consequences of debt irreversible.

In 1998, the most common credit mechanism was an informal agreement in which a trader advanced cash in return for monopoly over the cacao product at close-to-market prices. Traders complained, however, that dishonest farmers sold their crop elsewhere, breaking the monopoly agreement. By 2006 other credit mechanisms had emerged. One was mortgage of the trees for a period of time, usually an arrangement among close kin or neighbours who were in a
position to monitor production. The other was mortgage of the crop, as traders extended loans against a fixed quantity of cacao, priced 30–50 per cent below the market rate. The debt was cleared when the agreed quantity of product was handed over. This arrangement freed traders from the need to monitor production, as a farmer was free to sell part of the crop elsewhere at market price, so long as the mortgaged portion was handed over as agreed. Successful hill farmers who doubled as traders and moneylenders also extended loans in cash or in rice to kin and neighbours under the crop mortgage system. Farmers with heavy debts received little or no cash at harvest time, obliging them to borrow again or to sell trees to clear their debts.

By 2006 some highlanders had acquired up to ten farm plots from their kin and neighbours, using capital obtained in several ways: (1) from their own production efforts growing cacao, cloves or shallots (Illustration 11.3); (2) by becoming moneylenders; (3) by becoming traders, or agents for the major traders who lived on the coast; or (4) by borrowing money from the major cacao traders not for consumption, the path to ruin, but as capital to invest. This fourth practice began sometime after 1998, as the major traders argued that they could no longer extend credit to the weaker farmers, who never repaid

Illustration 11.3 Highland clove trees
their debts and were proving incapable of developing stable cacao farms with a significant volume of production. The traders did not want to foreclose on these farmers or buy their land, because they had no capacity to manage cacao groves scattered in the hills. Cacao needs continuous maintenance, and the pods, which need to be harvested weekly, are easily plucked and vulnerable to theft. Hence the traders opted to support the process of land concentration that was already taking place by advancing capital to the more reliable farmers to enable them to buy out the weaker ones, thereby reducing both their risk and their transaction costs.

The Social (Re)Production of Class

The processes of enclosure and concentration I have described in the last two sections did not unfold on autopilot. They involved the agency of individuals who had to negotiate new relations with kin and neighbours and who had to reorganize households and communities on new terms. Yet the people who lost out in this transformation did not argue that it was illegitimate. There are several reasons for this.

First, and most broadly, a process of class formation that was cumulative and permanent, and based on differential access to land, was not something that had arisen in these hills before. Hence the highlanders had no institutionalized means to prevent it, nor even a moral discourse on the evils of accumulation. As I noted earlier, land had been sufficiently abundant to maintain the highlanders' short-fallow swidden system for multiple generations, and to enable everyone who wanted to farm to gain access to land through inheritance or by borrowing. There was also the possibility for new generations to expand their holdings by clearing new land on the forest frontiers. This situation changed quickly as land was taken out of the swidden system and put under tree crops, and highlanders rushed to enclose the remaining frontier land while they could.

Second, there was a cultural affinity between swidden farming and entrepreneurship. The highlanders had always respected individual enterprise and hard work, and rewarded the strenuous labour of land pioneering by recognizing the private property rights it created. Although highlanders valued solidarity among kin and neighbours, they emphasized an individual's responsibility for their own fate: when somebody failed to prosper, they explained this in terms of moral deficiencies such as laziness or the inability to plan ahead. However, tree crops had introduced a crucial difference into the highland economy: swidden farmers with access to land could prosper through their own efforts; but after the introduction of cacao, unequal access to the means of production made the emphasis on individual responsibility
ideological—its purpose was to justify inequalities. Land privatization meant that some people's success in accumulating land and trees foreclosed opportunities for their kin and neighbours to work and prosper. The valuation of the virtues of enterprise was increasingly out of touch with the situation on the ground. By 2009, landowners still maintained that anybody wanting to work could surely find land. The landless, for their part, wanted to work hard establishing cacao—if only they had land. The difference between these two positions was not a conflict over values. As noted earlier, highlanders generally concurred that land enclosure was legitimate, and limited their struggles to the details of who was entitled to enclose which piece of land. For the new class of land-poor highlanders, the problem was not that others had enclosed and accumulated land; it was that they themselves did not have access to sufficient land to enable them to follow the example. The dream of landless households was not to take back land from their kin and neighbours, who they thought were entitled to their rewards; it was to acquire land on a new frontier.

Third, the transformation of land use from swidden to cacao was widely supported. No one opted to retain the swidden regime as a matter of preference or principle. At the outset farmers planned to set aside some of their farm plots to grow corn for home consumption, but the lure of cacao and the market calculus won out: with the profits from cacao, they reasoned, they could buy rice. Growing food was uneconomical, and it signalled a failure to invest in the future. Hence everyone planted cacao in their swidden fields together with corn, a practice they continued until all their fields were converted and there was no more space for corn. In 2006, when the price of cacao was low and the price of rice high, daily living was very difficult, and highlanders lamented the fact that they no longer had cassava or corn to eke out their purchased rice. A glance in the kitchens confirmed that families had very limited stocks of food. Nevertheless, there was no counter-discourse suggesting that the conversion had been a mistake. The emphasis was on finding a way to plant more cacao.

A fourth set of factors was also to do with timing, here on an intimate scale. Because the process of land concentration was recent and ongoing, the protagonists in each transaction remained close to the contingency of particular events—illness, drought, a gambling debt, the high cost of rice—that led to a family's slide. They were also close enough to their neighbours and kin to acknowledge differences in diligence and skill, and admire families that were able to pull together to support each other with loans of food or cash when needed, enabling their members to avoid land sales or high-interest credit. The piecemeal nature of land concentration was also relevant. No one sold all their land at once. It happened over a period of years. Further, the uneven quality
of the land meant that farmers desperate to establish a few trees could still find some very steep plots, or areas of *Imperata cylindrica* (blady grass) that had been passed over as unsuitable in the enclosure phase. Although these tiny, infertile plots did not offer a realistic prospect of producing enough cacao to support a family or of producing food, highlanders who tried to develop them could still consider themselves to be farmers and hold out hope for the future. In this way they could postpone the moment at which they would have to recognize that they had become a distinct class whose trajectory would be quite different from that of the landowners—they would be deteriorating, while others would be accumulating.

The fifth set of factors had to do with displacement. The new practices of labour and consumption associated with the tree crop transition did not entail rejecting old ways of relating to neighbours and kin; they simply made them irrelevant. Under the swidden system, there were large, collective and somewhat festive work parties to clear swidden fields and arrangements for reciprocal labour exchange. These practices disappeared together with the swidden fields. Women’s opportunities for wage labour weeding the large shallot fields also disappeared. Cacao farmers seldom required workers, eliminating an arena in which confrontation over wage rates might have arisen. As a result of these changes in the labour process, the emergent classes seldom encountered each other. The main new occasions for meeting were Friday prayers at the small mosques that began to be built in hillside hamlets around 1995: arenas of formal equality among men, in which discussions about the difficulty some were having securing a livelihood had no place. For women and children, the new occasions for gathering were the nightly sessions for watching TV or video at the houses of rich neighbours—not a good arena for discussion of any kind. In the sphere of consumption, another displacement occurred. In the past, a farmer who harvested a field of fresh corn expected to give away up to a third of it to neighbours and kin, and could anticipate return gifts on future occasions. To be clear, this was never a system of generalized food distribution—the expectation was one of balance, and freeloading was despised. Nevertheless, it did help to smooth out bumps in food production and reduced the need for loans between harvests. When no more corn was grown, and all food had to be purchased at market price, there was nothing to circulate. Without debate, the whole practice of reciprocal food exchange went into abeyance.

Sixth, social awkwardness around the emerging class divide tended to be handled by avoidance rather than confrontation. Poorer households complained about the meanness of rich relatives who were not willing to help out with loans, but not about the practices of tree planting, land acquisition and
moneylending that had made these people rich. They had no overall moral critique of these practices, because they wanted to participate in them. At the same time, increasingly marked differences in the standard of housing, clothing, food and future prospects made poorer households ashamed, and they kept their distance (Illustration 11.4). Richer farmers, for their part, feared the envy of neighbours that could lead to witchcraft attacks, and some of them endeavoured to keep their wealth hidden until the temptation to show off with a fine new house became too strong (Illustration 11.5). They were also concerned about fending off requests for loans from kin that would sap their savings, a concern they balanced against the prestige, and the pleasure, associated with helping others. Since the neediness of their poorer kin was potentially infinite, they tried to avoid meeting these people too often. In practice, this meant that the homes of the richer families became more private domains, and there was less casual visiting. The moral critique noted above also came into play here, as landowners developed a narrative about their neighbours' moral deficiencies, emphasizing gambling, laziness and a preference for wage work over long-term investment. As noted earlier, gambling was indeed a problem, and many farm plots were sold to cover gambling debts.
Illustration 11.5 A new house in the Lauje hills, 2009

Illustration 11.6 Desa elite homes along the coast
Laziness was less obvious: women in poor households took every opportunity to do wage work when it was available, and the men were “lazy” at home but visibly exhausted and often injured from their extremely strenuous wage work outside the desa hauling rattan and timber out of the forest. Nevertheless, this moral narrative justified the landowners’ emerging sense that they really were different from the people around them and that they should keep their distance. Notably, the narrative of the rich about the moral failings of the poor was far more elaborate than the one in the other direction.6

Finally, as land became scarce, landowners adapted to the new conditions by planning ahead for the intergenerational reproduction of their class position. Indeed, the desire to set up each of their children with a viable landholding on marriage was one of their justifications for continuing to acquire more land. Although some of them invested in education, sending their children down to the coast for school, they fully expected that tree crop farming would continue to be the main source of wealth for the next generation. Given the lack of economic opportunities on the coast—or in the province more widely—this was an accurate assessment. Yet the idea that parents were responsible for their children’s future was a new idea in the hills. In the past, the sign of successful parenthood was to raise a child who was autonomous and could take care of himself or herself. Further, under the swidden system, young people engaged in multiple forms of labour exchange through which they developed their own individual relationships with neighbours and kin.7 After cacao, parents with land encouraged children to stay home to plant trees and build up capital, instead of working for others. The result was to concentrate social and economic ties within the nuclear family household, which became the key site in which an individual’s class position was reproduced and social identity formed.

Conclusion
In the Sulawesi case I have described, the radical changes that occurred between 1990 and 2009 were not imposed upon highlanders by state-backed corporations grabbing their land, or by the imposition of new crops and technologies. Instead stigma, isolation, insecurity and a desire to join in the march towards “modern” forms of production and consumption motivated highlanders to convert their swiddens to monocropped cacao. The consequence—not one they had anticipated—was a transformation in almost every aspect of their social relations, and the emergence of a class division between those who owned land and capital, the key means of production, and those who had only their labour to sell. If the boom crop had been a new annual, like the tobacco
or shallots the highlanders previously planted as their source of cash, the old form of shared access to ancestral land might well have been sustained. The lure of a boom crop, combined with its perennial format, created the conditions for the rapid emergence of agrarian classes among highland farmers who had no previous experience with this phenomenon, and no mechanisms to manage it. A well-established tradition of respect for individual enterprise made them treat accumulation as a legitimate outcome of work and investment. Even as the frontier closed and landlessness emerged, accumulation did not become the focus of a moral critique.

As others have argued, the emphasis on shared poverty in other parts of Southeast Asia has been exaggerated, and in some cases seriously misplaced. My suspicion is that where a moral discourse on the obligation to share food or land or work arises, it is elaborated precisely because it is often breached. It is not a description of how social life is lived, but an element of class struggle in which the people who lack access to the means of production make moral claims as part of their effort to negotiate better terms. The case study I have presented here allows me to go further, and to argue that it is more likely to follow class differentiation than it is to precede it. Indigenous highlanders on a forest frontier lack mechanisms to prevent the enclosure and accumulation of land either because they have not encountered the problem before, as in this case, or because they have so much land (as in parts of Borneo) that the enclosure and accumulation of land by some people does not diminish the opportunity for others to continue to farm, or, indeed, to prosper. Hence there is no need to regulate it. It may take a few decades, or generations, for people who were once independent smallholders to recognize that their prospects for re-establishing farms are definitely blocked, and to begin to think in class terms, questioning unequal access to the means of production, together with the processes through which that inequality is produced.

In the case of boom crops eagerly adopted by highlanders who have had relatively open access to land, class differentiation proceeds far too rapidly for protective countermeasures or moral arguments against differentiation to emerge. If the new-landless are blocked from expansion into a forest frontier—a predicament that is becoming more common across the Southeast Asian region due to the rapid pace of enclosures from above and below—their situation is dire. In Central Sulawesi, it is compounded by the relative lack of labour-absorbing development: there is virtually no industry, except a massive expansion of oil palm, a crop that requires only one worker per 10 hectares of land. A full analysis of agrarian class differentiation needs to put the micro-processes I have described in the hills into this broader regional context.
Notes

1. On great transformations and countermovements, see Polanyi (1944); on the emergence of agrarian capitalism, see Wood (2002).
2. For a long historical view of subsistence insecurity, drought and disease in northern Sulawesi, see Henley (2005).
4. I treat these social dynamics and place them in the context of regional histories of trade and extraction in Li 2001.
5. On founder's cults, see Lehman (2003).
6. This is a common finding in class-divided societies. See Abercrombie and Turner (1978).
7. See my account of previous household dynamics in Li 1996a.
8. See, for example, the critiques of C. Geertz's notions of shared poverty in rural Java (Alexander and Alexander 1982, White 1983).
9. This case has been made convincingly by J. Pincus (1996) in his remarkable comparative study of three adjacent villages in Java. He showed that moral claims did have some effect on landowners' hiring practices, but the main factor affecting how the gains from green revolution agriculture were distributed was the capacity of workers to organize collectively.
11. I develop this argument from a historical and comparative perspective in Li 2010.