Kasar was the last person I stopped to visit as I hiked down from the Sulawesi highlands in 2006. He was in terrible shape. His bamboo house was rickety and in danger of collapse. The condition of his son, aged about twelve, was even more alarming. Terribly thin and visibly exhausted, the boy was moving heavy sacks of kapok, the tree crop his father had planted on the hot, dry land he previously used for tobacco. “I tried to plant cacao,” Kasar said, “but this land is not good for cacao and it is the only land I have. Kapok grows OK, but the price is too low.” Even if he cut down his kapok trees, he didn’t have enough land to revert to food production and he couldn’t borrow land for food, as he had in the past, as everyone’s land was full of trees. He planted new crops with the hope of improving his family’s situation, but ended up with this one barren plot.

Kasar was painfully aware that he had no way out, no way back, and no future for his children. He was also embarrassed by my visit. He knew that I had already visited some of his neighbors who had attained wealth and security in the two decades since we first met. He was in his midforties but looked much older. He was so physically worn out that he could no longer do the strenuous work of hauling rattan vines out from the forest on piece rate, his occasional source of income in previous years. Wage work locally was scarce, as the new tree crops needed little labor. I feared that the boy lifting the sacks might not survive.¹ Their house was in the foothills only about a one-hour hike from the nearest school on the coast, but unlike his father who hiked up and down to school in the 1970s the boy was so ashamed of his ragged
clothing he dropped out at grade three. He spoke only the local language, Lauje (pronounced Laujay), hardly a word of Indonesian.

Land's End is about the attempt made by indigenous highlanders to join the march of progress promised in modernization narratives, only to encounter the polarizing effect of the capitalist relations that soon emerged among them. Farmers able to accumulate land and capital prospered, and those who could not compete were squeezed out. My title plays on several meanings of land’s end: the changed use of land, the end of a customary system of land sharing, and the end of the primary forest that had served as highlanders’ land frontier, the place in which they could expand when need or opportunity presented. It also flags their sense of bewilderment—coming to a dead end, the end of a peninsula surrounded by sea, without a raft or a sense of direction. This was the predicament of Kasar and others like him, who could no longer sustain their families on the old terms, but had no viable alternative.

Modernization theories recognize that some people lose out when agriculture intensifies and becomes more competitive, but they assume that ex-farmers will become workers who survive by selling their labor. Yet jobs in the province of Central Sulawesi are hard to find. The commercial tree crops that increasingly blanket the countryside—cacao, oil palm, clove, coconut—need few workers. Alternatives are scarce: in 2009 only 5 percent of the labor force found work in mining and manufacture combined. None of the highlanders in my study received remittances from family members working elsewhere. Nor did they receive regular state transfers such as pensions or child allowances. In contrast to rural people in many parts of the world whose livelihoods appear to be farm-based, but are actually supported by subsidies and remittances, these highlanders were highly dependent on their own farms or wage work in the local area. They had not successfully inserted themselves into migrant labor streams headed for other provinces or countries, which tend to require Indonesian-language skills and connections they didn’t possess. Nor, finally, could they move off to find land somewhere else in the province because the land frontier outside their immediate area had effectively closed down as well.

The problem isn’t unique. If we take a global perspective, most of the manufacturing jobs created in the 1990s were concentrated in China, which isn’t much help to Kasar or the billion or so un- or underemployed people around the world who desperately need work. Even in China, where jobs are surely needed, factory owners are installing robotics. Well-educated young people who aspire to urban lives and stable jobs also find themselves without

2 Introduction
work or in precarious employment. The protagonists of the Arab Spring of 2009 and Occupy Wall Street, the Spanish Indignados, and my undergraduate students in Toronto are among them. Like Kasar, they are in uncharted territory, lacking not just a means of livelihood but a sense of a future in which they will have a part.

Indonesia’s impressive growth in the past few decades has been virtually jobless, a pattern repeated in India, South Africa, and elsewhere. According to demographer Graeme Hugo, Indonesia is a classic “labor surplus nation” with about 20 percent of the workforce, forty-five million people, un- or underemployed. Some people migrate. About four million Indonesians work abroad, but migration hardly makes a dent in the employment problem. Indeed, the attention paid to migration in recent years, in Indonesia and globally, sometimes occludes an important fact: although UN agencies announced that in 2008, half the world’s population was living in cities, more than half the population of Asia and Africa continued to live and work in rural areas, and gained their livelihoods mainly from agriculture.

Even as economic growth has drawn some people out from rural areas to brighter prospects in the city, and many are pushed out from the countryside into urban slums, the total number of people living in rural areas is bigger than ever, and they will be there for decades to come. For billions of rural people, the promise that modernization would provide a pathway from country to city, and from farm to factory, has proven to be a mirage. Lacking an exit path, they stay where they are, but all too often the old set of relations that enabled them to live and work in the countryside has disappeared, and the new ones—increasingly capitalist in form—do not provide a viable livelihood.

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. Surely, if anyone could continue to live in the countryside on the old terms, it should be them. More surprising 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, “written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.” The process through which they lost control over their collectively owned land was far less dramatic, even mundane. It was the highlanders themselves who took the initiative to plant tree crops, which had the effect of individualizing their land rights and led to the forma-
tion of capitalist relations in which their capacity to survive was governed by rules of competition and profit. So long as social movements don’t recognize the insidious ways in which capitalist relations take hold even in unlikely places, they can’t be effective in promoting alternatives that will actually work. My goal in writing this book is to examine closely just what happened in these highlands and draw out the implications for politics.

For too long, important political debates have been foreclosed by transition narratives that posit an apparently natural evolution in which farming becomes more efficient and exclusive, and people whose labor is not needed on the land move into other sectors of the economy. My findings challenge notions of agrarian transition as a teleological unfolding. They also counter understandings of capitalism as a totalizing system in which—for better or worse—everyone will eventually be incorporated. While I agree that all the land and natural resources of the globe may one day be incorporated, I argue that a great many people have and will have no part to play in production organized on the basis of profit. They are not heading toward the proletarian futures transition thinking maps out for them, because no such futures are in place, nor are they on the horizon. But they can’t stay as they are, or turn back to a past condition imagined to be more wholesome, as social movements promoting development “alternatives” propose. There were good reasons for the steps Kasar and his highland neighbors took to try to improve their situation, even though for many of them the result was not as they hoped. The dead end reached by Lauje highlanders circa 2000 also exposes the limits of the current repertoire of “alternatives” promoted by social movements (local, community-based, food-first, small-scale), to highlight the need for a different political response.

The analytical framework I adopt in this book focuses on the specificity of this conjuncture: the set of elements, processes, and relations that shaped people’s lives at this time and place, and the political challenges that arise from that location. My analysis draws on ethnographic research that I conducted through repeated visits over a period of twenty years (1990–2009). An ethnographic approach enabled me to pay close attention to the perspectives of the highlanders themselves and follow struggles and debates as they unfolded. Revisiting offered insights that are hard to glean from one-shot research designs, whether based on surveys or ethnographic research. It enabled me to track subtle shifts in everyday ways of thinking and acting before they had settled into a “new normal” that no longer seemed strange.

In 2009, the fact that some highlanders had no land at all was not some-
thing they noted with surprise, but rereading my field notes reminded me that this situation was not anticipated and indeed was unthinkable two decades before. Knowledge gained from previous visits enabled me to have searching conversations with highlanders that would not have been possible if I had arrived for the first time in 2009, asking about the past. It was not just that memories became dulled with the passage of time. Selective forgetting and remembering was integral to how the new relations were experienced, and how they were shaped.

Each visit also brought surprises, reminders that my study did not enable me to predict the future. By 2009 much of the cacao—the crop that stimulated the enclosure of land and many other changes I will describe—was dead, hit by an incurable virus. How highland lives and livelihoods will re-form minus cacao isn’t a future I can foretell, although in chapter 5 I reflect on elements that were shaping the new conjuncture.

Ethnographic research obliges the ethnographer to confront the gap between the chaotic “common sense” of lived realities and the schemes he or she must apply in seeking to make sense of them. It disrupts the ethnographer’s prior categories and assumptions, exposing uncharted territory where familiar categories don’t hold. As it disrupts, it opens up the possibility of generating new knowledge and connections. This kind of intellectual work is intrinsically political in the definition proposed by the Italian scholar Antonio Gramsci.

With this book, I would like to do some more specific, political work, by challenging policies that promote the intensification of capitalist relations as a recipe for poverty reduction, and social movement agendas that render people like Kasar invisible or unrecognizable because they fail to fit the “alternative-development” niche. If these disruptions are productive, they can help build a future in which Kasar and his children will have a part.

Capitalist Relations

Livelihoods in much of the world are shaped by capitalist relations, yet we seldom stop to examine precisely what is distinctive about these relations, nor to consider how they are formed. This book brings capitalist relations sharply into focus. It offers a close-up account of the processes through which capitalist relations emerged among highland farmers, reconfiguring the ways in which they were able to reproduce themselves both socially and materially.

The formation of capitalist relations has been a core theme of “agrarian
studies” where debates have centered on whether noncapitalist relations are displaced by capitalist ones, persist alongside them, or are combined in uneven but enduring configurations. These are questions with important political stakes. Many scholars have argued that the persistence of noncapitalist, “peasant” forms of production impedes the full development of capitalism. Some scholars see this impediment as a progressive outcome, since less capitalism means less inequality. Other scholars see the impediment as regressive, because they consider that capitalism must develop fully before we can have a socialist future. Still others argue that peasants, especially “middle peasants” whose control over their own land gives them some autonomy, can themselves be a progressive or perhaps revolutionary force. These are important debates, but the figures that populate them tend to be rather static: they are smallholders, landlords, tenants, laborers, moneylenders, or tax collectors. I build on the agrarian studies tradition while using an ethnographic approach to delve more deeply into rural peoples’ understanding of their own lives, their hopes and fears, and the social and political projects that engage them.

Empirical questions derived from Marx, neatly summarized by Henry Bernstein—who owns what, who does what, who gets what, and what do they do with it—are indispensable tools for making sense of rural livelihoods. They also help to sort out whether or not capitalist relations, with their uniquely dynamic character, have actually taken hold. A distinguishing feature of capitalist relations, which Marx identified, is the ironic combination of an ideology that stresses freedom with material relations that restrict it. Building on his work, theorists Robert Brenner and Ellen Wood make the shift from market-as-opportunity to market-as-compulsion the critical diagnostic of capitalist relations.

As I will show in chapter 1, Lauje highlanders had long been familiar with markets, and they sold food and cash crops as well as their labor, on occasion. They had a solid understanding of profit and loss, and were alert to the value of the labor they invested in producing crops for use or sale. It made no difference to them whether the market for their products was local or global, so long as they made a reasonable return on their hard work. They took advantage of market opportunities when they found them attractive but—crucially—they were not compelled to sell food or labor if the terms didn’t suit them.

Highlanders’ autonomy was grounded in their system of shared access to common land, and an open land frontier. All highlanders who wanted to farm had free access to land, and they could survive on the food they grew
for themselves. Their autonomy was only slightly modified by state rule and taxation, which were light and incomplete in this rather remote region. The big shift occurred when they started to plant tree crops, which had the effect of making their land into individual property. Initial landownership was unequal and over time, efficient farmers were able to accumulate land and capital, and pay workers to expand their farms and profits. Farmers who failed to compete lost control of their land and were compelled to sell their labor—if they could find someone who wanted to buy it.

The emergence of capitalist relations governed by competition isn’t an inevitable progression. Land in many rural societies is individually owned, and land and labor may be bought and sold, but they aren’t necessarily treated as fully fledged commodities that circulate “freely” in response to competitive pressures. Similarly, production of crops for the market isn’t by itself an indicator that capitalist relations have taken hold. Farmers often produce for markets while retaining control of their means of production—their land, their labor, and enough capital to keep their farms going from year to year, and one generation to the next. Under these conditions, they may make a profit, but they don’t need to farm efficiently or maximize profit as a condition of sustaining themselves and holding on to their land. Yet the stable “middle-peasant” households that reach such an equilibrium should not be treated as “natural” units. As anthropologist William Roseberry points out, the emergence of capitalist relations governed by competition and profit, and the absence or blocking of such relations, are both phenomena that need to be explained. They arise at some conjunctures, but not at others, with far-reaching consequences for people whose livelihoods depend on their farms.

The structure of capitalist relations, and the way they produce new forms of poverty, is invisible in liberal accounts that advocate the expansion of “the market” as the route to increased productivity and wealth. For Kasar in 2006 “the market” was already well developed. Indeed, it pressed in on him from all sides. Everything he needed to engage in production—land, labor, seed, fertilizers—had become a commodity, and so had the food he consumed. Nor was he making wrong choices, another assumption of liberal thought. As Marx observed, landless workers are not free to choose how to spend their time. Their lives are governed by a “dull compulsion” as they must sell their labor every day in order to survive. For farmers with inadequate plots of land the constraints are almost as severe. If Kasar could not access credit to buy seed and fertilizer, he could not farm; if the market value of his crops
didn’t equal the cost of food, he couldn’t survive; and if no one needed his labor, he could not earn a wage. Choice didn’t enter into it.

Roni, a merchant who supplied credit and bought highlanders’ crops, also encountered a form of compulsion. Unlike his father and grandfather, merchants of the old school who had inherited their capital and could earn enough to support their families just by keeping their capital in circulation from year to year, Roni had borrowed his capital from a bank. He could use this capital to make loans to farmers, or he could use it to buy land and labor to engage in production. What he could not afford to do was to make loans to losing ventures like Kasar’s. If he did this, he would lose his capacity to borrow from the bank, and he would also be outcompeted by merchants with more capital to invest and to lend out at interest. So he too lacked choice: he had to keep his money moving to generate a profit, or go bankrupt.

Kasar’s slide into destitution occurred during the same period of time, and through the same set of processes, that enabled his neighbors to prosper. His poverty wasn’t residual, a matter of being left behind. Nor did he simply live alongside neighbors who happened to prosper. Rather, the capacity of some highlanders to prosper depended upon the failure of their neighbors who fell into debt and were forced to sell their land. Like Kasar and Roni, the practices of these prosperous farmers were channeled and their “choices” increasingly constrained by capitalist imperatives of efficiency and profit. They helped their neighbors and kin on occasion, as they sought to balance their own accumulation with care for others. But they too were obliged to run their farms as profitable enterprises, or risk losing their land.

To summarize, my shorthand “capitalist relations” refers to the ensemble of relations characterized by private and unequal ownership of the means of production (land, capital), a group of nonowners compelled to sell their labor, and the use of capital to generate profit under competitive conditions. Competition means that the owners of capital must seek profit to generate more capital to invest simply to reproduce themselves as they are, that is, as owners. To the extent they succeed, their accumulation squeezes others out, entrenching and sometimes deepening the unequal ownership with which the cycle began.

The emergence of capitalist relations in their routine but insidious form is a topic that has received limited scholarly attention in recent years. Since the threat of communism abated, and with it the Cold War fear that dispossessed rural people could become “dangerous classes,” national governments and transnational development agencies no longer worry so much about the po-
litical implications of rural inequality. They promote optimistic, win-win scenarios based on the assumption that economic growth will benefit everyone in the end. They talk of the need for social protection and safety nets, but so long as people like Kasar pose no threat to economic growth or political stability, governments and transnational agencies can abandon them with impunity. For highlanders to become a threat, or less dramatically, to have traction as a political force, they would need to be organized and to have allies.

The mundane way in which capitalist relations emerged among highlanders helps to account for why no allies rallied to help the people who lost out in the process. Contemporary social movements focused on rural livelihoods tend to highlight spectacular episodes of dispossession by corporations (land grabbing), the monopolistic practices of transnational agribusiness corporations, or attempts by rural people to defend culturally rich and environmentally sustainable ways of life from external threats. In these highlands, in contrast, 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.

Why highlanders didn’t mobilize to prevent the commoditization of their land and labor, engaging in a “countermovement” of the kind Karl Polanyi describes; why they permitted the emergence of steep and enduring inequalities among them; and why they didn’t seek to limit their exposure to market risk are questions I will address in the pages to follow. These abse...
An Indigenous Frontier

The image of indigenous people that has become familiar through the social movement literature emphasizes their attachment to their lands, forests, and communities, and their capacities for self-government. The realities are of course very diverse. Here I provide a brief orientation to some of the distinctive features of the indigenous frontier at the center of my account. First the name: Lauje highlanders call themselves highlanders, farmers, or Lauje, depending on the context. They don’t see themselves, nor are they treated by others, as ethnically distinct from the coastal population, with whom they share common ancestors. The main difference is that they live in the highlands, and until the 1990s they farmed by the shifting-cultivation technique, which meant opening new farm plots from forestland and leaving old plots to fallow. They didn’t live in concentrated hamlets but scattered in their fields, guarding their main food crop, corn, from attack by wild pigs. They did not congratulate themselves on their “genius for managing without states,” as James Scott has argued for highlanders in the Southeast Asian mainland. They welcomed their inclusion in the system of rule through headmen situated on the coast that had been in place since Dutch colonial times because they found it helpful in keeping the peace, and resolving disputes.

It was the Dutch rulers, they claimed, who gave them their adat, usually translated as “customary law,” by which they meant their lightly institutionalized system for convening disputing parties and reaching settlements paid in fines. Highlanders’ sense of what was “customary” was unwritten, and largely implicit: I didn’t meet anyone who was willing to pontificate on Lauje custom or to generalize his or her sense of “how we do things” to something like “Lauje culture” overall. Although many Indonesians associate adat with autochthony and authentic indigeneity, other isolated people such as the Wana of highland Sulawesi and Meratus Dayak in Kalimantan are similarly coy about custom, and claim that their adat was given to them by external authorities.

Lauje elders I met deep in the highland interior in the 1990s described the period of their youth as one characterized by conflict, violence, feuding, and flight because the presence of “the government” was not strong. They were afraid to travel from one watershed to the next because they did not trust strangers, and relations with kin could also be tense. Serious disputes could arise over women (adultery, failed marriage proposals), over forest resources (e.g., tapping another person’s resin trees without permission), and over
threats or insults. One highlander, Gilanan, described a terrifying time in the 1970s when conflict with kin forced his family to run off to live in isolation in the forest, surviving on wild sago and hiking long distances to barter for food. The family's attempt to plant rice and corn failed because their lone farm in the middle of the forest was devastated by monkeys, birds, and wild pigs. They were relieved when another group of kin took them in and supplied them with food while they developed new gardens and re-established a more settled life.\(^{27}\)

Even in the 1990s many highlanders preferred to build their houses at some distance from neighbors so they could avoid excessive interaction with all the small sources of friction that can arise from quarrels among children, or fights between dogs. They thought that living close to other households was good for cooperation. Coordination among neighbors was especially important for growing rice, which worked best when a group of people cleared adjacent patches of forest and then planted their fields in a short period of time. Doing so minimized attack by pests and "shared the birds," as they put it. But too much closeness was problematic, and the clustering of many households in proximity was difficult to sustain.

Larger neighborhoods were sometimes drawn together by charismatic leaders, until they fractured and dispersed. In 1992 I visited Gau’ma, a close, cooperative neighborhood of about twenty households about six hours’ hike from the coast. The households were gathered around Mopu, a strong leader to whom most of them were related. During my visit they planted a whole hillside with rice in massive collective work-parties. When I revisited in 1993, Mopu had died, his kin had scattered, and no one planted rice. Two men, one of Mopu’s brothers and one of his sons, were competing for the leadership role. In 1996 the households had not regrouped. By 2006 Mopu’s kin had become Christian and some of them had again built houses close together, this time not clustered around a person but around a church. No obvious leader had emerged. There were still tensions as I sensed quite acutely when a dispute erupted over allegations of adultery. The whole neighborhood seemed to be on edge, afraid that the protagonists would take up their knives and attack each other. In the end some wise talkers succeeded in calming everyone down, but as I sat with a group of frightened people in a hut near where the parties had gathered for the “customary” process of dispute resolution, they were not confident violence would be avoided.

If Mopu had still been around I suspect his words would have been enough. He was feared as well as respected. Arguing against his judgment
or taking up knives would have been out of the question. He concentrated in his person powers of several kinds. He was a pasori, the person responsible for placating the spirits when clearing primary forest for new gardens, and ensuring the safety of hunters and rattan collectors when they were in the forest. He was also a pasobo, the person who conducted the ritual offering when planting the first rice seeds of the season, initiating the cycle of labor exchanges between all the households in his neighborhood. Further, he was the officially recognized chief of custom appointed by the headman on the coast to take care of negotiating marriages and settling disputes.

In view of the list of roles Mopu occupied it was not surprising that his kin found it difficult to replace him. However, his rather autocratic style was unusual. In most of the highland neighborhoods I came to know, leadership roles were dispersed or disputed and often there was no incumbent, or the incumbent was ineffective. Many competent men were diffident about leadership and reluctant to assert authority. They were also reluctant to accept direction from people they regarded as their peers. This made it difficult for highlanders to organize collective projects like holding a neighborhood ritual. Yet highlanders in the 1990s did not read the difficulties of pulling neighborhoods together as a symptom of decline in which a previous state of unity had given way to fragmentation. Rather, their stories about the past indicated that conflict was an ever-present possibility.

The highlanders’ dispersed settlement and the flux of who was farming in which place was a huge source of irritation for government officials, especially the headmen who lived on the coast but were responsible for governing sections of the interior. These men were also Lauje, but they had little sympathy for the highlanders, whom they viewed as unruly and primitive.28 This is a common stance among officials, as James Scott has argued. Ruling regimes seek to incorporate frontier places and people into “state-space” by drawing maps, conducting a census, and issuing identity cards. Often, they extend road networks to secure access for bureaucratic supervision and build primary schools to teach children to speak the national language and identify with the nation and its symbols.29 In Africa and Latin America as well as Asia, the wildness of frontiers also figures in culturally coded, sometimes racialized hierarchies in which people who live in cities, in the lowlands, or on the coast see themselves as civilized in contrast to people of the highlands and hinterlands, whom they see as wild and backward.30

An evolutionary scheme mapped onto a social hierarchy and topographical arrangement of space was central in the Lauje area, and I explain its fea-
turers in chapter 1. The important point for the moment is to note that Lauje highlanders generally concurred with the headmen’s assessment that their lives were lacking in key elements which they associate with a modern life: decent housing, clothing, roads, and schools. Their desire to access these things set in motion the profound economic and cultural shifts I trace in this book and had important political implications as well. Far from rejecting “state-space” in favor of sustaining their autonomy, they welcomed incorporation. But decades of neglect had made them skeptical that the roads, schools, and other benefits promised to them by government officials would actually be delivered.

DESIRES AND POTENTIAL
Frontiers are not only characterized by lack. They are simultaneously coveted places, envisaged by various actors as sites of potential. Scholars have shown how colonial regimes interpreted sparse indigenous populations and forested landscapes as signs that land was neither used nor owned, and proceeded to lay claim to forests, develop plantation agriculture, and install migrant populations. Notions of wildness are still deployed by contemporary development planners, who see frontier spaces as “underutilized” resources that should be put to efficient and productive use, and devise schemes to attract corporate investors. Frontiers also attract spontaneous migrants in search of land, often people who hope to prosper from a boom in the price and demand for commodities such as gold, timber, coffee, cacao, rubber, and palm oil. More often than has been recognized, the indigenous people who are the original inhabitants of these lightly incorporated but economically promising “frontiers” also see their land as a zone of potential. The cacao boom that swept Central Sulawesi in the 1980s and ’90s was led by migrants who moved into forested areas and bought land cheaply from the indigenous inhabitants, but indigenous farmers also took the initiative to plant the lucrative new crop in the hope that they too could prosper. Both migrant and indigenous smallholders were remarkably dynamic. Together, they expanded the total area of cacao from 13,000 hectares in 1990 to 225,000 hectares in 2009.

The dynamism of what I’m calling an “indigenous frontier” isn’t a new phenomenon. For centuries indigenous people across Southeast Asia have joined crop booms and extracted minerals, timber, and forest products to supply regional and global markets. Cloves were a boom crop in the “Spice Islands” in the fifteenth century. Colonial officials in the nineteenth century
expressed alarm at the willingness of indigenous farmers to abandon food production in favor of the latest cash crop. These officials expected “native” populations to be risk-averse, and to emphasize subsistence security over profit. This was especially the case for highlanders whom they often classified as “tribes” and placed at the backward end of evolutionary schemes. But this expectation was misplaced. As Clifford Geertz observed, the cautious model fits better among farmers in rice-producing areas who “involute” by intensifying production on their generally fertile, irrigated land. It is less common among farmers in frontier areas where there is room to experiment. The ecology matters too. Frontier areas often have poor soils that don’t respond to intensive techniques like terracing and irrigation. In these places, expanding farms onto new land at the expense of forest usually makes more sense.

Counterintuitively, relative isolation is central to the dynamism of an indigenous frontier. All farmers need cash, and more so as their needs expand and they aspire to send their children to school. But there are limited ways to earn cash in areas located far from towns or cities where they might sell fruit and vegetables, engage in petty trade, or commute to jobs. In isolated locations, local markets are quickly saturated: only so many tomatoes will sell on market day. Alternative sources of income are hard to find. There is little scope for craft production since many people have the skills to weave mats and baskets, carve wooden handles for their knives, and build their own bamboo and timber houses. Hence the best option to make money is often to grow industrial crops for sale on national or global markets, which are harder to saturate. Prices on these markets are notoriously volatile, however, and prone to cycles of boom and bust. Adverse prices are seldom mitigated by state-supported buffers, because of the marginal status of small-scale farmers in frontier areas, and because their crises don’t affect the price of rice, the staple food that impacts directly on political stability in urban areas.

The configuration of powers on Indonesia’s frontiers further increases their dynamism. Indonesia lacks an entrenched landlord class of the feudal type found in parts of the Philippines, where private citizens have held vast estates for multiple generations, and dominate both local and national politics. In Indonesia’s frontier zones, it isn’t landownership that begets political power, but the reverse. Powerful people—government officials, village heads, army officers, customary chiefs, prominent villagers—grab land and claim ownership. They take advantage of a legal vacuum created by overlapping laws and weak enforcement. Brute force often shapes outcomes, and
money can buy land, even when it should not be for sale. The Lauje highlands are a case in point. The highlands are officially designated state forest land, under the control of the Department of Forestry. According to the Forest Law, no one should be living in the highlands, although indigenous highlanders have lived and farmed there for countless generations. Certainly, land in the highlands should not be for sale, but a vigorous land market developed there nonetheless, stimulated mainly by the highlanders’ own initiatives as they responded to the opportunity presented by the boom in cacao.

Social movements supporting indigenous people often highlight their commitment to holding on to customary land and conserving forests, but the dynamics of frontier zones do not favor a conservative approach. Land is abundant there. It is labor that tends to be scarce. Hence indigenous tenure regimes seldom focus on protecting forests or allocating a scarce resource. They are designed, rather, to recognize the hard work it takes to bring forested land under cultivation, and to manage the conflicts that can erupt when one person tries to take advantage of another person’s effort. In the Lauje highlands, loss of forest wasn’t the blow that devastated Kasar. It was the end of access to land on which he could farm to produce family sustenance, and the dawning recognition that the frontier as a zone of desire and potential was closed to him. However hard he was willing to work, he had no means to improve his family’s situation. This predicament is all too familiar in Asia’s fertile agricultural heartlands, where land scarcity and outright landlessness have been entrenched for many generations. In the Lauje highlands, and in other places with hitherto open land frontiers, it is new.

The social movement model of indigenous people living tranquilly in harmony with nature and with each other, eager to pursue development “alternatives,” fails to capture the frontier dynamics I have just outlined. It is especially ill-equipped to grasp how capitalist relations can emerge so quickly as indigenous concepts emphasizing the value of an individual’s hard work combine with market opportunities that are enticing but volatile, and a land regime that enables private enclosure. Indeed capitalist relations on an indigenous frontier can take on a peculiarly stark and unmediated form, rather like the form outlined in economics textbooks in which competition reigns and market forces dominate, with little “distortion” from state subsidies, monopolies, or remittances.

The mismatch with social movement agendas is no trivial matter. In the Lauje highlands it was a formative absence, a nonrelation that left an emerging landless class abandoned, without allies. The initiatives highlanders took
when they dismantled their system of shared land access and covered their land with industrial crops made them unrecognizable as indigenous people from the perspective of social movements that define indigeneity in terms of cultural authenticity, subsistence orientation, and a commitment to social and ecological balance. Nor did they fit the role of victim, a central figure in the campaigns of many social movements and humanitarian organizations. There was no apocalypse, no famine, no natural disaster, no eviction, no dramatic event, and no villain to blame. Nor was there an obvious way out.

An Analytic of Conjuncture

To analyze is to tease apart. I adopt an analytic of conjuncture to tease apart the set of elements that gave the lives of Lauje highlanders in 1990–2009 their particular form, and to explore how each element set the conditions of possibility for others, in changing configurations. In addition to economic elements such as prices, market demand, profits, and the cost of credit, I explore the material qualities of the milieu (rainfall, pests, diseases, soils, distances, topography); the character of crops (longevity, storability, vulnerability to disease, labor requirements); social boundaries and the values people attributed to particular kinds of places and ways of living; institutional elements such as customary and official rules that regulated who could do what (build a road, use land, inherit, marry, consume family food, buy or sell property, organize a ritual, resolve disputes); meanings and desires; and unseen spirits that enabled or interfered with human plans.

Presented in this form the list of elements is a long and static one, and distinct categories are hard to sustain: material and social elements are clearly meaningful; the prevalence of crop diseases was part of the construction of space; it influenced the cost of credit, and so on. The elements come to life as they collide and align in particular constellations. A conjuncture is dynamic but it is not random. There is path dependence. It is not the case that anything goes. History is front and center because every element in a conjuncture has a history that actively shapes the present, while at every conjuncture a new history is produced, sometimes deliberately, more often as an unintended consequence of how various elements combine. Together, the elements I have listed formed the terrain, the circuits, understandings, and practices within which capitalist relations emerged and left Kasar stranded on a tiny, barren plot of land.

Analyzing a conjuncture requires peeling back layers of meaning and
practice, and tracking relations across different spans of space and time. It is usually the work of scholars who can access data and make connections that are not necessarily emphasized by actors on the ground. The actors’ analysis is absolutely relevant, as it informs their actions, but like all analyses it offers a partial perspective on the situation. Scholars inevitably have a different perspective and can make use of the difference as a source of insight, so long as they don’t lay claim to an omniscient, bird’s-eye view. In the case at hand, many Lauje highlanders held fast to a teleological view of an ever-improving future that for analytical and political reasons I reject. But I don’t dismiss their understanding as “false consciousness.” Rather, I attempt to situate it in the conjuncture that formed it and attend to the work it does. I pay attention to the fact that shifts I identified as critical turning points, like the emergence of capitalist relations, were shifts highlanders treated as banal. The significance of the turning point they identified—the fact that land had come to an end—wasn’t something I grasped at first. On reflection, I could see how central it was to their understanding of what had changed in their world, and I made it the title and organizing theme of the book. The back-and-forth between highlanders’ categories and the analyst’s schemes is an integral part of ethnographic work. More generally, as I noted earlier, ethnographic attention to the specificities—who the people are, and what is important to them—provides a window on people’s lives and the projects that engage them.

A conjunctural approach, which attends to “history at one point in time” and in space, is a form of analysis with an illustrious heritage. It is consistent with Marx’s method, which examines the multiple relations that constitute concrete, historical forms. It is central to the work of scholars inspired by Marx who combine attention to processes of capital accumulation with an emphasis on emergence, contradiction, contestation, agency, and struggle—in short, the specific features of a conjuncture and the many relations that form it. We find it in the work of feminist and postcolonial scholars who have broadened Marx’s capital/labor framework to examine how relations between genders, generations, and social groups distinguished by ethnic identity or religion shape resource access and mechanisms of accumulation. We find it in the work of scholars inspired by Gramsci, who explore the way in which power is lived and inequality is normalized at the nexus of force, consent, and the production of desires for particular ways of living. It is especially prominent in the work of geographers who build on the work of Henri Lefebvre. Thus Doreen Massey highlights situated, embodied prac-
tices and the way places are relationally produced. Allan Pred and Michael Watts stress that “how things develop depends in part on where they develop, on what has been historically sedimented there, on the social and spatial structures that are already in place there.” For Gillian Hart it means refusing to “take as given discrete objects, identities, places and events,” and attending to “how multiple forces come together in practice to produce particular dynamics or trajectories.”

Within my discipline, anthropology, a conjunctural approach was elaborated in the 1950s by some of the scholars associated with the Manchester School, who insisted on situating events and processes in historically constituted fields of force. It was developed by anthropologists working in a broadly Marxist tradition. It is an approach that works against a notion of “cultures” as isolates or bounded wholes, hard on their edges like billiard balls that spin off each other, in Eric Wolf’s memorable image. It moves away from notions of authenticity, or the attempt to figure out whether change is generated from the inside, or by the impact of processes arriving from the “outside,” because it doesn’t assume there is an “inside” or a prior condition of fixity before change started to occur. Rejecting notions of functional equilibrium, a conjunctural approach treats practices that appear to hold constant for a period of time as a puzzle, as much in need of explanation as dramatic change.

A conjunctural approach has implications for how we understand human subjectivity and agency. In place of “the individual” understood as a universal figure, the focus is on historically situated “socially determinate” subjects, further differentiated along lines of class, gender, and generation, among others. It means rejecting the liberal concept of the self-sovereign, strategizing subject who makes more or less rational “choices” between a set of “options.” Instead it foregrounds practices, taken-for-granted habits, and material configurations. In this vein, anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu explored the formative effect of daily routines, embodied dispositions, and the layout of a house. Calling attention to that which is not said, cultural critic Raymond Williams emphasized “structures of feeling” that are both social and material, the “experienced tensions, shifts, uncertainties, the intricate forms of unevenness and confusion” of life as it is lived at a particular period. Picture Kasar, who embodied experiences of exhaustion and isolation, but wasn’t inclined to talk about them.

Similarly, the philosopher and historian Michel Foucault explored how power works continuously to form our desires, practices, and identities in
ways that we are often unaware. His concept of power rejects the binary in which power is situated on one side of an equation, while freedom, autonomy, and resistance are situated on the other. Yet it doesn’t remove agency, or portray people as automatons. A subject, for Foucault, is always capable of action and reflection. The challenge, neatly summarized by geographer John Allen, is to examine how power works to form subjects through “a variety of modes playing across one another. The erosion of choice, the closure of possibilities, the manipulation of outcomes, the threat of force, the assent of authority or the inviting gestures of a seductive presence.” My account in this book builds on these understandings of the subject as an agent whose desires don’t stand outside a conjuncture but are formed within it, and are formative in turn.

Adopting a conjunctural approach has implications for method. It works against an understanding of spatial scope as a hierarchy in which relations often described as “broad” or “wide” or “large” or even “global” are implicitly flagged as more effective than “local” ones. Instead of drawing a boundary around a field site, or fixing the span of time, space, and quantity to be investigated, these parameters can be selected flexibly according to their relevance to the matter under study. Both spatially and temporally, the research focus can be more or less fine-grained as the topic requires, but even when the grain is fine enough for an ethnographer to exercise the art of observing and listening closely, the conjuncture under study isn’t bounded. It is still composed of a set of elements that have varied spatial and temporal scope. It is also formed by elements that are weak or absent.

Some elements of the conjuncture I examine in this book were put in place centuries ago, while others were made or remade in recent years. Their spatial scope varied: some of them connected the highlands to faraway places, while others involved exchanges among people who met face-to-face. Many of them mixed spatial scope. For Kasar, the problem was the low price of kapok, the tree crop he had planted, in relation to the cost of the food he now had to purchase. Kapok is a fiber used locally for making mattresses and pillows, its price fixed by a relatively restricted market. The price of cacao, in contrast, was fixed on world markets, mediated by the exchange rate for the Indonesian rupiah in relation to the U.S. dollar. Cacao’s cost of production was shaped by the price of agricultural chemicals, and by the interest local merchants charged on credit. Whether a particular highland neighborhood had a church in it or a mosque was the outcome of transnational networks of missionary activity, movements of specific groups of people up hill or
down, and localized practices of social boundary marking. Some relations were shaped even more immediately by features of the landscape that determined which crops would grow where, or the prevalence of rainfall and disease. The arrival of cacao as a boom crop in Sulawesi in the 1980s had a specific, relational trajectory. Sulawesi farmers filled a gap in the market that opened up when crop disease and civil war in the Ivory Coast disrupted production. Transnational corporations and government agencies were largely absent from the cacao boom, and twenty years on most of the cacao was still exported without processing. Other elements that figure in my account as formative absences are roads, schools, and political parties or social movements with an interest in highlanders’ struggles.

Comparison across conjunctures helps to identify the distinctive set of relations that form them. In The Will to Improve I examined a different conjuncture in the same province that was also shaped by the cacao boom, but included an influx of migrants and a plethora of development schemes, elements that were absent from the Lauje highlands. If we compare on a historical axis, farmers in west Sumatra in the 1920s experienced a crop boom rather like the one I examine. They caught “coffee fever” and planted much of their land with this crop. As in Sulawesi, the customary land-sharing system was soon dismantled, some farmers lost their land to merchants and moneylenders, and some sold land to their more successful neighbors and kin.

In both Sulawesi and Sumatra, restricted land access was exacerbated by enclosures of large land areas as state officials granted leases to plantations or set land aside as forest reserves. It was the pincer effect of the two processes together—state-orchestrated enclosure of large land areas, and a process of enclosure initiated by farmers—that aggravated inequality among farmers and left some of them short of land. A significant difference between the two conjunctures was that in Sumatra in the 1920s the Communist Party took up the farmers’ cause, while circa 2000 Indonesia’s social movements had little interest in Sulawesi’s struggling cacao farmers or land-short highlanders, a point I take up in chapter 5.

**Research Process**

Anthropologists are part of the conjunctures they study, sometimes in an activist role, but more often in the minor role of people who ask questions, and launch topics that may—or may not—stimulate discussion and debate. My involvement with the Lauje area began in 1990, when I held a three-year
postdoctoral research fellowship. My initial research was concerned with exploring landscapes, livelihoods, and identities in upland areas. I focused on the nine desas (administrative units) where the Lauje language is spoken, a zone that extends roughly forty kilometers along the northern shore of the Gulf of Tomini and twenty kilometers inland, ending at the rugged cliffs situated near the center of the peninsula. The area straddles two subdistricts, Tinombo with its capital in Tinombo town, and Tomini with its capital in Palasa. Of the total population of the Lauje area, around thirty thousand people in 1990, about two-thirds lived scattered in the highlands up to two days’ hike from the coast. The balance was crammed onto the narrow coastal strip, which was at most one kilometer wide, and less than fifty meters in places where the mountains rose almost directly from the sea.

I chose the Lauje area because a Canadian project designed to bring development to this rather neglected corner of Indonesia was about to commence there. My hope was that the project planners would make use of my qualitative research in highland neighborhoods to guide their interventions and make them effective. This part of my plan worked well as the reports I volunteered about changing farm practices and some unintended effects of project inputs were taken seriously by the project managers. However, the project ended prematurely without having much impact, and my role as purveyor of information that might directly influence the course of development in the area ended with it. The feature that kept me going back for two decades was the opportunity to track the remarkable transformation I analyze here.

I visited the Lauje area nine times, in 1990 (twice), 1991, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998, 2006, and 2009, and spent about a year there in total. My research design was conditioned by the organization of space in the area, which did not lend itself to a village study of the classic kind. The boundaries of the official administrative units (called desas) were perpendicular to the coast, so that each of the nine desas in the Lauje area included a portion of the coastal strip and a portion of the highland interior. In 1990, all the desas had their administrative center on the coast, where desa headmen and other desa officials were appointed from among the members of the local coastal elite, most of whom were Lauje or migrants from other parts of Sulawesi who had married into Lauje families. Some of the desas covered a huge area, with a range from twenty to one hundred square kilometers, although the numbers are approximate as the borders of the desas in the interior were not mapped or marked. Population counts were incomplete, but the official data given in table I.1 provides an approximation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desas</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Desas</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Area km²</th>
<th>Population per km²</th>
<th>Estimated population in highlands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dongkas</td>
<td>1,086</td>
<td>Dongkas</td>
<td>1,350</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinombo</td>
<td>2,999</td>
<td>Tinombo</td>
<td>3,523</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>2,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lombok</td>
<td>5,660</td>
<td>Lombok</td>
<td>5,497</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>4,672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogo’alas</td>
<td>2,758</td>
<td>Ogo’alas</td>
<td>2,758</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dusunan</td>
<td>1,663</td>
<td>Dusunan</td>
<td>2,018</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>1,715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibu</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>Tibu</td>
<td>988</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobalo</td>
<td>4,558</td>
<td>Bobalo</td>
<td>2,058</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>1,338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dongkalang</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dongkalang</td>
<td>1,802</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>1,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pebo’unang</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pebo’unang</td>
<td>3,092</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>3,092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E’eya</td>
<td>1,810</td>
<td>E’eya</td>
<td>2,420</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulatan</td>
<td>2,984</td>
<td>Ulatan</td>
<td>4,608</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palasa</td>
<td>8,443</td>
<td>Palasa</td>
<td>5,039</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2,771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palasa Tangki</td>
<td></td>
<td>Palasa Tangki</td>
<td>3,231</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1,777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palasa Lambori</td>
<td></td>
<td>Palasa Lambori</td>
<td>2,958</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1,627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>30,166</td>
<td></td>
<td>41,342</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>1,217</td>
<td>30,455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: The number of desas increased due to splitting. The new desas are shown alongside the originals so that the total population per original desa can be compared. The population growth corresponds to the provincial average of 1.4 percent per annum (BPS 2010, 93). My estimates of the highland population are based on the percentage of the desa land area that is flat or hilly, as noted in the Kecamatan Dalam Angka statistics.
As I’ve already noted with the example of Gau’ma, highlanders did not live in concentrated hamlets, but in transient clusters ranging in size from two to twenty households. Each household, which was generally based on a nuclear family of parents and unmarried children, built a small bamboo house in its current farm plot and shifted its residence when the plot was fallowed after two to five years. The typical pattern was for a few households of close kin to build houses near one another, with some distance—up to a kilometer—between their cluster and the next. Some of these clusters were acknowledged by the desa authorities as official neighborhoods (rukun tetangga, or RT), under the leadership of an appointed neighborhood head, but the boundaries of these official neighborhoods, and the set of households supposed to belong to them, were not well defined. Nevertheless, the concept of being a neighbor was important in the highlands, and I track the changing substance of what that relationship implied. I use the term “neighborhood” to refer to households that recognized themselves as belonging to a place and carried on neighborly relations with the people around them.

Following the standard procedure for rural research in Indonesia, I visited each of the desa headmen in their homes or offices on the coast and sought their permission before hiking up to visit the neighborhoods located in the desa interior. Initially, they were reluctant to grant access. Their standard reply was that the forests were dense, and the highland population was sparse, semi-clothed, residing in trees or under rocks, and prone to use poisoned blowpipes against strangers. Several headmen attempted to dissuade me. They may actually have believed their characterization of the highlands, since some of them had never hiked into their own desa interior. The hills were indeed rugged, the valleys steep and narrow, and there were no navigable rivers or plateaus. Access required fording rivers and climbing steep, winding, unmarked foot trails. The headmen were perhaps concerned that I would fall on a trail or drown in a flash flood. Or they may have preferred to maintain their monopoly over the data supplied to visiting officials, development planners, and anthropologists. I was polite but stubborn, and eventually they agreed to allow me to hike inland. They insisted that I must be accompanied by desa officials in my first forays and worried that I would complain about the highland diet, or about bathing in streams, or sleeping on the bamboo floors of highland homes. After a while the headmen relaxed and left me to hike as I pleased, accompanied by a Lauje-language interpreter and a guide of my choosing, usually someone from the highland neighborhood I planned to visit.
In the early 1990s, I visited about twenty neighborhoods located along the coast and in the highlands and came to an initial understanding of the landscapes, livelihoods, and identities of the people in each of three zones which I label coast, middle hills, and inner hills. I present these in summary form in table I.2, and explore them in detail in chapter 1. All the highlanders and almost all of the coastal dwellers were Lauje, and they acknowledged that they had common ancestors in ancient times, although sharp social and religious divisions had arisen among them. The people of the coast and the middle hills were Muslim. The inner hill people remained animist until the mid-1970s when the New Tribes Mission, a U.S.-based Christian evangelical group, set up a mission station in the highlands at Ogo’alas and began to convert them. For reasons I explain in chapter 1, the distinction between middle hill Muslims and inner hill animists was deeply formative of highland social dynamics. The two groups kept their distance and Muslims thought themselves superior. From a coastal perspective, however, all highlanders were wild and backward. These social distinctions coexisted with extensive trade relations between the three zones, relations in which highlanders’ capacity for autonomous self-provisioning jostled with desires for inclusion and social advance.

During my visits to the highlands in the early 1990s, I observed that a major change was under way stimulated by the arrival of new tree crops, clove, and cacao. Each year, the farmers I visited were planting these crops in their farm plots alongside their staple foods, rice, corn, and cassava. Although they did not talk in terms of enclosing the land, the effect of planting these trees was to make previously common land into individual property, a process I describe in chapter 3. When they began planting trees, highlanders imagined they would still plant some food for their own use, but their supply of land quickly ran out. Polarization followed, as successful farmers bought up their neighbors’ land.

To track the changes in land use and access I started to revisit ten hillside neighborhoods in the middle and inner hills of several Lauje desas. Each neighborhood had distinct features, the product of its distinct ecology, location, and the history of its population, making me realize how inappropriate it would have been to select one and make it stand in for an abstraction like “Lauje culture.” But there were patterns to the changes taking place in all of them, and comparison across these sites helped me to clarify why a particular set of relations emerged in one place and not another; why at this time, and not before.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Era</th>
<th>Coastal zone</th>
<th>Middle hills</th>
<th>Inner hills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1591 Tomini Kingdom</td>
<td>Settlement?</td>
<td>Food farms</td>
<td>Food farms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600–1850</td>
<td>Slavers, raiders, merchants visit to buy forest products, tobacco. No permanent settlement</td>
<td>Food farms; collect forest products; grow tobacco for sale from 1820.</td>
<td>Food farms; sell forest products?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850–1910</td>
<td>Permanent settlement of Lauje and migrants; coconuts planted; Islam established; trade in forest products and tobacco; fishing</td>
<td>Food farms; sell forest products, tobacco, Islam introduced?</td>
<td>Food farms; sell forest products?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910 Dutch rule imposed</td>
<td>Highlanders forced down to coast; crowding; disease; famine</td>
<td>Highlanders return to hills; resume food and tobacco production</td>
<td>Avoid Dutch soldiers; hide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910–70</td>
<td>Coconut trees dominate landscape; land concentration; buy or barter for food in highlands; fishing; trade in highland products; pay taxes; limited administration, schools</td>
<td>Food farms; grow tobacco; wage work in ebony camps; pay taxes; Islam consolidated</td>
<td>Food farms; collect forest products regularly for sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonial rule 1910–42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese occupation 1942–45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence, 1949–45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separatist movements 1950</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Order 1965–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970–90 New Order</td>
<td>Road opens 1975; rice imports become routine; coconut economy; fishing, trade in highland products; schools and basic health services</td>
<td>Tobacco collapses; some outmigration; some movement in land to grow food and shallots; rattan hauling as wage work</td>
<td>Food farms; collect forest products; rattan hauling as wage work; Christianity spreads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consolidated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990–2010</td>
<td>Coconut economy declines; trade in cacao and cloves; supply goods to highlanders</td>
<td>Cacao and clove planted; land becomes scarce; food production much reduced; rattan hauling as wage work; some schools</td>
<td>Food farms; some shallots, garlic, cacao. Coastal people move in to buy land, plant clove and cacao; Christianity spreads, churches built; road building from 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On each revisit to these highland neighborhoods I stayed for a few days talking to farmers and informal leaders, and to the official neighborhood head if there was one. I asked them about the changes that had occurred there since my last visit, starting with an inventory of who had moved in or out, who had bought or sold land, and what they were growing in their fields. These were factual questions highlanders didn’t find difficult to answer, and they didn’t find them sensitive because I didn’t try to probe the reasons for land sales in these inventory sessions, just whether or not they had occurred. The inventory exercise gave a helpful concreteness to my line of questioning, and from it I made a list of households for follow-up visits. But the inventory did not provide an indication of land areas, nor did it capture the set of land transactions that was taking place as ambitious farmers started to acquire land in different neighborhoods. There were no official documents covering landownership or sale, and the land tax system introduced in the mid-1990s recorded only a fraction of the land highlanders used and claimed as their own. So I tracked the quantitative element as best I could and focused my attention on the mechanisms driving these changes, the new sets of relations that were emerging, and the perspectives of the people directly involved.

From 1993 onward, I started to spend longer periods of two to ten weeks in three adjacent highland neighborhoods I have called Sibogo, Sipil, and Walu, with around 120 households in total. These neighborhoods straddled the border between the Muslims of the middle hills and Christians/animists of the inner hills, making them apt sites for studying relations between these groups as struggles over land intensified throughout the 1990s. I also tracked changes in Pelalang, an inner hill neighborhood not far away, in which Lauje people from the coast arrived seeking land. Coastal peoples’ mode of land acquisition involved the kind of bullying that would classify it as a “grab,” and it became worse after 2005 as roads finally began to arrive in the highlands, increasing the pressure on inner hill folk who were nearing the end of their land frontier.

In the four sites where I spent the most time, I got to know the residents well enough to place them in their kinship networks, observe how they were living from day to day, and talk to them in some detail about the dilemmas they faced during this period of rapid change. “Individuals,” as Lila Abu-Lughod observed, “are confronted with choices, struggle with others, make conflicting statements, argue about points of view on the same events, undergo ups and downs in various relationships and changes in their circumstances and desires, face new pressures, and fail to predict what will happen
to them or to those around them.” In the chapters that follow I combine this insight, which enables me to “write against” a notion of culture that homogenizes experience, with the analytical task of exploring how highlanders formed new relations to each other and to the land. Hence I don’t treat tensions as idiosyncratic, but attempt to situate them in the “structure of feeling” that characterized this particular milieu.

Revisiting as a method had one obvious advantage: it enabled me to track a set of processes as they took shape over time. It had the additional merit of enabling me to refine and reorient my research agenda as new questions arose and gave me time between visits to reflect on what I had learned and to write some articles in which I began to develop my analysis. It had disadvantages too. Most significantly, it limited my ability to learn the Lauje language as each time I began to make progress it was time to leave. Although I speak fluent Indonesian, the national language, and could use this language to talk to people like desa officials, merchants, coastal dwellers, and some highlanders, most highlanders couldn’t speak Indonesian. This problem is rather rare in Indonesia, which prides itself on universal access to primary education which extends both literacy and the national language. In the Lauje highlands there were only two primary schools before 1990, and very few highlanders lived close enough to attend them. There is no dictionary or lexicon for the Lauje language so I could only learn it by listening. Over the years I came to understand a lot of what was said and learned about a hundred key words directly relevant to my research, but I continued to rely heavily on my interpreter, Rina, a woman trader from the coast of one of the Lauje desas I met in 1992.

Rina had only primary school education but she was intelligent, warm, and sociable; she put highlanders at ease; and she patiently transcribed a thousand pages of tape-recorded interviews, giving me access to rich details in highlanders’ narratives that I wasn’t able to pick up at the time. Highlanders agreed to the taping because they knew my Lauje-language skills were limited and I would need to go over the tapes with Rina to understand their stories in full. Rina also carried on her own conversations with highlanders, chatting about people and events, asking for clarification out of her own curiosity, and launching into topics that expanded my horizons. Highlanders enjoyed quizzing her about the rise and fall of members of the coastal elite, the cost of their weddings, their family dramas and goings-on. This was Rina’s milieu, and she was happy to share the information. My social world was too strange and distant for this type of exchange. The most highlanders could do to situ-
ate me in my social milieu was to look at photos of my family, and learn the
names of my children. At least they could address me correctly by the name of
my oldest child, so “mother of Nick” was how I was known.

The written archive Rina and I created through our fieldwork process is
extensive, but I don’t treat people’s statements recorded in transcripts and
notes as “true” in any simple sense. Our archive was the product of a par-
ticular type of encounter, one shaped by the rugged terrain, the time and
energy needed to hike from one place to another, my limited language skills,
highlanders’ tiny houses where we could only stay for a few days without
outstaying our welcome, and many other elements. Most of the archive was
generated by sitting and talking to people in their houses. The topics I raised
stimulated highlanders to reflect on their practices and articulate perspec-
tives that are usually left implicit. Sometimes they caught the line of rea-
soning guiding my questions, which they confirmed or rejected, setting me
straight by proffering an alternative. Not surprisingly, they rationalized their
actions and preferred to present themselves in a good light. The understand-
ing I derived—situated and partial as it is—was built up gradually, by com-
bining insights and observations from many sources, and cross-checking
what was said with what was done wherever possible.

The people Rina and I visited frequently and got to know best took some
pleasure in these conversations, or at least did not try to avoid them. High-
landers at Sibogo told us about the bush-telegraph system they used during
our longer stays, sending children to find out which trail we had taken that
morning (up- or downhill, east or west). They worked on tasks close to their
homes if it seemed we were headed in their direction, and they had often made
preparations like digging up cassava for our lunch. They were kind enough to
welcome me back after long absences. When I was gone they kept in touch
with Rina because they saw her at her market stall and invited her to their wed-
dings and family events. Tragically Rina died in 2007 of diabetes, an illness
that should not have been fatal if treatment was available. I didn’t know of her
death until I returned in 2009, and my visit to the highlands that year, accom-
panied by her cousin, was colored by my sadness and the sadness of many of
our hosts who shared my affection for Rina, and a deep sense of loss.

Outline

Chapter 1 examines the processes that formed identities and drew highland-
ers, merchants, and government authorities into particular sets of relations
over the two centuries before 1990. Chapter 2 takes a fine-grained view of some highland neighborhoods to explore relations of work and care among highlanders in the period when they had plenty of land, and they grew their own food. Chapter 3 explores the process of enclosure that began around 1990 when highlanders began to plant cacao on their common land. It tracks the emergence of a concept of land as a bounded unit of space that could be privately owned, bought, and sold. Chapter 4 explores how capitalist relations emerged in the highlands as land, labor, and capital started to move in circuits defined by competition and profit. Chapter 5 examines highlanders’ responses to increasingly entrenched inequality, and the politics that emerge from this conjuncture.
Notes

Introduction

1 One in three children born to highland women I interviewed did not survive into adulthood, a rate that was unchanged since colonial times. David Henley, Fertility, 261.

2 For critiques of teleological narratives and discussion of bypassed or “surplus” populations whose labor is not incorporated into capitalist circuits of production, see Henry Bernstein, “‘Changing before Our Very Eyes’”; Jason Read, “Primitive Accumulation”; Gavin Smith, “Selective Hegemony”; Tania Murray Li, “To Make Live or Let Die?”

3 BPS, Sulawesi Tengah Dalam Angka 2010, 103.

4 Indonesia’s cash transfer system is discussed in Juliette Koning and Frans Husken, eds., Ropewalking; Chris Manning and Sudarno Sumarto, eds., Employment, Living Standards and Poverty.

5 The role of nonfarm incomes in supporting “farmers” is discussed in D. Bryceson, C. Kay, and J. Mooij, eds., Disappearing Peasantries; Benjamin White, Paul Alexander, and Peter Boomgaarden, eds., In the Shadow of Agriculture; Jonathan Rigg, “Land, Farming, Livelihoods, and Poverty”; Henry Bernstein, Class Dynamics, 104–8.

6 John Markoff, “Skilled Work.”


8 Graeme Hugo, “Indonesia’s Labor.” See also World Bank, Indonesia Jobs Report.

9 Karl Marx, Capital Volume 1, 667–85. See also Jim Glassman, “Primitive Accumulation”; David Harvey, The New Imperialism; Derek Hall, “Rethinking Primitive Accumulation”; Derek Hall, Philip Hirsch, and Tania Murray Li, Powers of Exclusion.

10 Terence J. Byres, “Neo-Classical Neo-Populism.”
11 In Social Facts, Sally Falk Moore used a similar, revisiting approach. See also Jonathan Rigg and Peter Vandergeest, eds., Revisiting Rural Places. In “Problems in the Empirical Analysis of Agrarian Differentiation,” Benjamin White stresses the need to track processes and mechanisms of change, not just outcomes.

12 See Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, 115–35, on selections from tradition. His use of the term selection emphasizes emergence rather than conscious choice. See also David Scott, Conscripts of Modernity, 115–19, and Moore, Social Facts, 318.

13 See discussions of politics and the work of the intellectual in Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, 326–43. See also Gavin Smith, “Hegemony”; Kate Crehan, Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology; Williams, Marxism and Literature, 128–34.

14 Transition debates among Marxist scholars are reviewed in A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi and Cristobal Kay, “Surveying the Agarian Question” (Parts 1 and 2). On peasant-based mobilizations see Eric Wolf, Peasant Wars; Bernstein, Class Dynamics; James Scott, The Moral Economy.

15 Bernstein, Class Dynamics, 22–23.


17 The staying power of landholding middle peasants or “smallholders” is highlighted by Robert McC. Netting, Smallholders, Householders; Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, “The Peasantries of the Twenty-First Century.”


19 Social reproduction is never fully commoditized, as it is underpinned by the unpaid work of women and inter-household transfers, and often by state transfers as well. See Olivia Harris and Kate Young, “Engendered Structures”; Gavin Smith, Livelihood and Resistance; Susana Narotzky and Gavin Smith, Immediate Struggles; Harriet Friedmann, “Household Production”; Gavin Smith, “Reflections.”

20 Marx, Capital Volume 1, 689.

21 In “Approaching Moral Economy,” 78, Andrew Sayer argues that all economies are “moral,” that is, “influenced and structured by moral dispositions and norms” that are variously “compromised, overridden or reinforced by economic pressures.”


23 Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation.


25 David Henley, Jealousy and Justice.


27 Scott’s discussion of swidden as a form of “escape agriculture” in The Art of Not Being Governed, 187–207, underestimates the problem of pests and the time it takes to cut, dry, and burn a field before it can be planted. Henley, Fertility, explores linked cycles of violence, flight, disease, and famine.
On frontier imaginaries in Southeast Asia, see Michael Eilenberg, *At the Edges of States*; Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction*; Tania Murray Li, “Marginality, Power and Production”; Andrew Turton, ed., *Civility and Savagery*; Thomas Sikor et al., eds., *Upland Transformations in Vietnam*.


Desires for modernity are discussed in Robert Hefner, *The Political Economy of Mountain Java*; R. A. Cramb, *Land and Longhouse*; Andrew Walker, “‘Now the Companies Have Come.’”


See Klaus Deninger et al., *Rising Global Interest*.


Tsing, *Friction*, 31, notes that indigenous people seldom have a word equivalent to “frontier” in their languages. Lauje highlanders’ concept of a frontier was the primary forest into which they could expand indefinitely.


See Tania Murray Li, “Indigeneity, Capitalism.”

Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involution*. See also Elson, *The End of the Peasantry*; Netting, *Smallholders, Householders*, 230. As Netting also points out (298), abundant land with poor transportation gives farmers no incentive to produce more than they can consume.

Rodolphe De Koninck and Jean-François Rousseau, *Gambling with the Land*.


The concept of conjuncture I adopt differs fundamentally from Marshall Sahlins’s concept of the “structure of a conjuncture” by which he means that historical events are always absorbed back into structure, which for Sahlins is a synonym for enduring cultural essence. See Marshall Sahlins, *Culture in Practice*, 293–304, and the lucid discussion of Sahlins’s attempt to defend a concept of cultures as closed systems in Victor Li, “Marshall Sahlins and the Apotheosis of Culture.”

Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, explores the hybrid relations too often homogenized into the “development of capitalism” as a singular thing. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, emphasizes the formative effects of things—soil, trees,
pests, climate, slope—on social relations. These authors describe sets of elements as assemblages, but I reserve the term “assemblage” for ensembles pulled together for a human purpose. See Tania Murray Li, “Practices of Assemblage.” The concept of conjuncture does not entail agency of this kind.

See Don Kalb and Herman Tak, Critical Junctions. In “At Home,” 665, Stuart Hall and Les Black discuss situated perspectives on conjunctural shifts. See also Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges.”


See Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844. Marx’s approach treats abstract concepts (capital, labor) as placeholders that enable the analyst to advance toward an understanding of capital and labor in their concrete, historical forms. His approach is different from treating capital or labor as ideal types, of which particular expressions are variants. For discussions of Marx’s method, see Stuart Hall, “Marx’s Notes on Method”; Bernstein, Class Dynamics, 10; Gillian Hart, “Geography and Development,” 97; Vinay Gidwani, Capital, Interrupted.

See, among others, David Nugent, ed., Locating Capitalism; Roseberry, Anthropologies and Histories; Smith, Livelihood and Resistance; Don Kalb, Expanding Class; Gerald Sider, Culture and Class.

See, among others, Ann Whitehead, “‘I’m Hungry, Mum’”; Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities”; Donald Moore, Suffering for Territory; Sylvia Junko Yanagisako, Producing Culture and Capital.


Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space.
Doreen Massey, “Power Geometry.”
Allan Pred and Michael John Watts, Reworking Modernity, 11.
Hart, “Geography and Development,” 98, 97. See also Gillian Hart, Disabling Globalization.
Max Gluckman, Analysis of a Social Situation. In “The Extended Case Method,” Michael Burowoy reviews the Manchester School’s attention to “cases” and events.
See, among others, Eric Wolf, Europe; Sidney Mintz, Sweetness and Power.
Wolf, Europe, 6.
Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’”; see also Gillian Hart’s critique of impact models in Disabling Globalization, 13.
Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice.
Williams, Marxism and Literature, 129–30.
Michel Foucault, “Afterword.” For a critique of spatialized binaries, see Moore, “Subaltern Struggles.”

Notes for Introduction
63 John Allen, Lost Geographies, 196. See also David Scott, Conscripts of Modernity, 115–19.
64 In “Flattening Ontologies,” Sallie A. Marston, Keith Woodward, and John Paul Jones examine the hierarchy of scalar optics with their “small-large imaginaries.” See also Allen, Lost Geographies; James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, “Spatializing States.”
65 See Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Discipline and Practice.”
66 Moore, Suffering for Territory, 24, discusses the “consequential materiality of milieu” (emphasis in original).
68 The difference between treating conjunctures as “case studies” that illustrate general processes, and comparing across conjunctures to identify the relations that form them is discussed in Hart, Disabling Globalization; Gillian Hart, “Denaturalizing Dispossession,” 996.
69 B. Schrieke, Indonesian Sociological Studies, 95–130; Akira Oki, “The Dynamics of Subsistence Economy”; Geertz, Agricultural Involution.
70 Joel Kahn, “Peasant Political Consciousness.”
71 Neighborhood names and all personal names are pseudonyms. For ease of recall I’ve given women names that end with “a” and prepared a list of dramatis personae (appendix 1). Desa names are real, and neighborhoods are accurately situated on the Lauje area map.

Chapter 1: Positions

1 Scott, The Art of Not Being Governed.
2 Peter Bellwood, Prehistory.
3 Anthony Reid, “Inside Out.” In Fertility, Henley examines the historical demography of central and northern Sulawesi from 1600 to 1930. Contrast highlanders in the Southeast Asian mainland who believe their ancestors were lowland people who fled to the highlands to escape coercive rule. See Scott, The Art of Not Being Governed.
5 Henley, Fertility, 63–65. The new world crops were introduced by Spaniards who brought them from Mexico to the Philippines, from where they spread across the Indonesian archipelago from east to west. See Peter Boomgaard, “Maize and Tobacco.”
6 A Netherlands East Indies Company archive mentions a kingdom in the Lauje area around 1591 that had disappeared by 1672. It also mentions Lauje slaves in Gorontalo around 1678. Henley, Fertility, 197, 218.
7 This raiding/trading system is described in Esther J. Velthoen, “‘Wanderers.’” See also James Frances Warren, “Trade, Slave Raiding”; Henley, Fertility, 66, 71, 77–78; Albert Schrauwers, “Houses, Hierarchy.” In the Lauje area imported prestige