

## REFERENCE

Weber, Max. 1946. "Science as a vocation". In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H.H. Gerth, and C.W. Mills. Oxford University Press.

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*Countering Dispossession, Reclaiming Land: A Social Movement Ethnography*. By David E. Gilbert. Oakland: University of California Press, 2024. xiv +275 pp.

How likely is the reclaiming of land to succeed if it is done by small-scale farmers against large corporations? If such reclaiming goes against legal permits, national legislation and elite business interests, the short answer to this question is: not very likely at all. Yet, in Indonesia, where Cusiavera, the subject of this book, is located, an increasing number of case studies on land conflict show that the outcomes of such claims are rarely so definite: a grey area exists in which location, (lack of) investment, activism, customary rights and "boots on the ground" can give considerable nuance and variation to the actual outcomes of seemingly similar situations. Such variation exists among the reclaimers as well. As explained in the book, regional or national non-governmental organizations may seek ways to move beyond the capitalist industrialization of the countryside that impinges on smallholder life and production, change national policies and solicit international support for fellow dispossessed elsewhere, while local villagers may strive for repossession of estate lands to ensure that they can farm to meet daily needs. I believe that such differences in purpose among reclaimers should not be ignored or underestimated.

This book shows that complexity. Starting with an introduction that outlines the location, background, the issues at hand and the link to global reclaiming efforts, we learn that the village of Cusiavera claims collective lands along the slopes of the Aren volcano in West Sumatra. Control over these lands had been taken away by consecutive state regimes, which the community disputes.

The first part of the book, “Dispossession”, consists of three chapters that detail colonial-era establishment of outside control over the land and the completion of this process by the New Order regime. The chapters discuss how consecutive regimes first brought the area under their authority by removing the local population’s autonomy over the land through taxes and by giving out land concessions to companies to exploit the land for private profit. In doing so, these regimes overruled existing regulatory systems and land claims, leaving the population little choice but to work as labourers on land they consider their own or to move away.

The second part of the book, “Reclaiming”, starts in 1993, near the end of the New Order era, and it describes events up to 2016 in five chapters. These discuss how people, fearfully at first, started using bits and pieces of the company land before summoning the courage to go all-out to reoccupy the entire plantation. That courage seems to derive in part from a court of law ruling that the claim by the plantation company is inadmissible as it has not upheld its usage right for a considerable period of time. It also seems to be due in part to the absence of the company and its representatives from the area. At the same time, people had received support and advice from NGOs and had even hosted an international congress of Indigenous peoples, smallholder farmer organizations and activist organizations on “their mountain”—that is, the slopes of the Aren volcano. The chapters discuss in detail how agriculture becomes more pluriform after the devastating monocropping of agribusiness, including the strengths and diversity of nature and climate. Yet different opinions and ideas give rise to tensions among the people (potentially) holding rights to the land. Not all can benefit or not all claims can be admitted. For me, the strength of this second part lies in its discussion of the alternative ways of life attempted by those who used to live on the land: moving to urban areas and engaging in menial labour for low wages, and thereby facing uncertain futures. In comparison, smallholder farming on the mountain is more secure and offers a better future.

The book gives a detailed and compelling account of a community where reclaiming land worked, without ignoring internal conflict. Yet some questions remain. In similar instances in Indonesia, companies have grabbed such “vacant” land, regardless of protests and lack of support from the local population. Other cases of successful reclaiming are often in remote areas, where there are limited resources to exploit, making them less attractive to corporate interests. In Casiavera, apparently only one company contested control over the land, raising the issue of its actual value for industry. Further, an engagement with the wider existing literature on land conflict in Indonesia could help to pinpoint more elements of success or failure in contesting land control. A future publication discussing the Casiavera case in a comparative national context would allow for further testing of the explanatory power of the case. And when discussing land conflict in West Sumatra, it would be relevant to learn more about the legal processes involved (or lack thereof), given that the province has recognized customary communal rights in provincial legislation and the community claimed to have them. The book is a detailed case study that discusses the history and development of land usage and land conflict on the slopes of the Aren volcano in Sumatra. Specifically, this temporal perspective makes it a strong and insightful contribution as it connects the study to work on politics, law, anthropology and history of land issues in Indonesia.

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*Enchanted Modernities: Ancestral Vitalizations in the Upper Mekong.*  
By Micah F. Morton. University of Wisconsin Press, 2025. xv+259 pp.

*Enchanted Modernities* is about indigenous identities today, and how Indigenous peoples redefine themselves today by reaching back into their own traditions, where possible. The focus of the book is on