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Introduction: Spiritual Landscapes of Southeast Asia

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Abstract

This Introduction foreshadows the main themes of this special issue on spiritual landscapes of Southeast Asia. The concept of 'spiritual landscapes' highlights the links, found throughout Southeast Asia, between spirit beings or potent energies and particular sites in the landscape, including trees, mountains and rivers. The concept also broadens anthropological approaches to the religious significance of the landscape in two main ways. Firstly, it problematises the separation of 'natural' and 'cultural' environments, and secondly, it side-steps the implication that something called 'sacred geography' can be separated from the pragmatic activities of daily life. In this Introduction, having given an ethnographic overview of spirit-places and environmental forces in the region, I suggest that we need to take more seriously the claims of many Southeast Asian people that their landscapes have agency. In the context of religious conversion, the agency of the landscape often becomes a central concern, as reformers and missionaries seek to 'purify' the environment of such spiritual power. However, in addition to 'purification', ongoing conversion may also involve new forms of conversation with the landscape, including re-enchantments, religious syntheses, or reassertions of the landscape's potency.

Key Words

Landscape; Southeast Asia; Religious change; Spiritual potency; Agency

Despite the varied histories and religions of Southeast Asian societies, a reading of many historical and ethnographic accounts reveals a common understanding that the world inhabited by humans was intersected by a spiritual or invisible realm. This understanding often manifested itself in what can be called a distinctive 'spiritual landscape' of potent places, pathways, rivers, trees and mountains. This Special Edition[1] seeks to examine what has happened to the varied spiritual landscapes of island Southeast Asia in the context of new religious forms, migration, changing agricultural practices, and military and political projects. How do understandings of spiritual landscapes transform when people move (either freely or forcibly) away from their ancestral lands? How do people negotiate their allegiances to 'world' religions versus the particularities of potent places? What are the limits to a Catholic, Protestant or Islamic landscape? What kinds of purifications, re-enchantments, syncretisms or anti-syncretisms of the spiritual landscape does ongoing religious conversion entail?

'Landscape', as a concept in the human sciences, tends to be utilised in one of three distinct ways. Firstly, it may be used in the common, everyday sense of a 'natural' or physical environment, a taken-for-granted backdrop of hills, rivers and valleys. This is the way in which landscapes are referred to in most ethnographies. Secondly, 'landscape' may be used to refer to a distinct 'way of seeing', a *representation*, as in 'landscape painting'. This is the sense of landscape employed most notably in Marxist critique, as in Cosgrove and Daniels' definition of a landscape as 'a pictorial way of representing or symbolising surroundings' (1988, 1), or Raymond Williams' historical argument that the very idea of the 'English landscape' both excluded 'working country' and implied 'separation and observation' (1985, 26). However, this representational approach is also the perspective adopted in classic anthropological work that sees the prior divisions of society as 'mapped onto' the 'space' of houses and villages (Durkheim and Mauss ([1903] 1963). Thirdly, 'landscape' may be utilised to refer neither to a 'natural' object, nor to a cultural 'representation', but to a historical process of interaction between people and the environment in which both are shaped. This is the understanding of landscape that I employ in this Introduction, drawing in particular on Ingold's 'dwelling

perspective', and his negative definition of landscape as neither 'land', nor 'nature', nor 'space' (2000, 190). The focus on both historical process and human activity in this understanding of landscape necessitates acknowledging that the same physical *environment* affords many possible *landscapes*, an acknowledgment of real importance to the changing spiritual landscapes described in this volume.

Landscapes are cumulative, historical matrixes of places and pathways. They are always in process, full of memory, and are entangled in complex, ever-changing ways with human lives. There is thus no meaningful distinction that can be drawn between a 'natural' landscape of physical features onto which people project a 'cultural' landscape of representations and symbols (Ingold 2000, 189). If this seems an unusual statement to make, take a moment to think of some of Southeast Asia's most iconic, endlessly-photographed landscapes: the steep rice terraces of the Ifugao of the Philippines, or the Balinese. As on-lookers, we may admire the way in which hundreds of years of human labour have sculpted these mountain terraces, contributing to an ever-shifting patchwork of muddy, lush and shimmering fields.[2] However, the Ifugao or Balinese who *inhabit* these landscapes do not confront them as a world 'out there' (Ingold 2000, 173). Rather, this landscape becomes meaningful to them partly through practical activity, as they climb up steep paths, walk through deep mud, or bend over in the hot sun to transplant rice seedlings. To pre-empt the possible criticism that this understanding of landscape somewhat romantically privileges the rural, consider also how urban landscapes may be constituted for their inhabitants in daily acts of crossing a busy street, buying vegetables in a market, or driving through a suburb. Over time, a landscape, which is never complete but always being made and re-made, will become saturated with memories, its places often acting as 'mnemonic pegs' (Basso 1996, 62) for stories and reminiscences. This practice-oriented approach to landscape is one that has been gaining ground in landscape archaeology in recent years, particularly in Tilley's defence of a revitalized, holistic concept of landscape that 'links bodies, movement and places together' (2004, 24; see also Lemaire 1997). However, for anthropologists, such an approach also needs supplementing with an attention to the larger forces (missionary, governmental,

capitalist) that may shape landscapes in both intentional and unintentional ways (see Bender 2001; Baxstrom 2008).

Landscapes and human lives are entangled in ever-changing ways. In particular, landscapes are entangled with notions and practices that concern such areas of anthropological interest as religion, kinship and morality. This can be clearly seen in those ethnographies that follow the lead of their main characters, and put place and landscape at the forefront of their analyses. For example, in *Wisdom sits in places*, one of the most evocative ethnographies of landscape, Keith Basso (1996) describes how discovering the places, and learning the place-names, of the Apache landscape involves a kind of moral education. Other anthropologists have emphasized how, for example, landscape and kinship are entangled: 'country' becomes the 'objectification of kin networks' in Myers' (1986, 68) account of the Pintupi of Aboriginal Australia;[3] Gow (1995) argues that the Amazonian Piro see kinship (in the form of evidence of habitation) when they look at the land; Leach argues, simply but forcefully, that for the Melanesian Reite, 'kinship is geography' (2003, 31).

This special edition offers a new perspective on the entanglement of landscapes and human lives by introducing the concept of 'spiritual landscapes'. This concept is meant to draw attention *both* to the ways in which people imagine spirit forces and energies to emerge from or be connected to places, *and* to the attitudes that people may have to the 'hidden' or mysterious realms lying beyond, behind or immanent within the visible earth. Whilst some of the ethnographic particularities of the papers might tempt us to speak of 'enspirited landscapes', this suggests that the landscape only has spiritual potency so far as spirit-beings are thought to reside in it. By contrast, the notion of spiritual landscapes allows for the possibility that, with the diminishment of the significance of 'spirits', the landscape may nevertheless continue to be granted a spiritual role, and to thereby allow for the imagination of continuity in the face of change.

Thus, one of the main advantages of the concept of spiritual landscapes is that it broadens anthropological approaches to the 'religious' significance of place and landscape. There

are two main aspects to this broadening. Firstly, since the notion of landscape employed in this Introduction (though not necessarily uniformly in the papers that follow) questions the distinction between a 'natural' and a 'cultural' environment, so it also problematises the separation of 'natural' and 'supernatural' phenomena. As Woodward argues, one of the main flaws with anthropological discussions of 'traditional religions' is 'the failure to observe that for most people the "natural world" includes objects and forces that cannot be observed by sense perception alone' (1989, 23). Though a recent attempt to revitalize the concept of 'supernatural' as an etic category stresses that the concept does not have to be employed in a way that assumes the emic separation of natural and supernatural (Lohmann 2003a, 176), I am in sympathy with Aragon's desire to 'keep modernist ideologies… from prejudging the boundaries of all religions' (2003, 132). The spirit-beings and energies that are part of many Southeast Asian spiritual landscapes are engaged with as an intrinsic, everyday aspect of those landscapes, rather than as paranormal or unnatural phenomena. Of course, what needs to be explored are the ways in which such beings and energies may in turn be 'diabolised' by the world religions and possibly become detached from the landscape.

Secondly, by contrast with such notions as 'ancestor worship' or 'sacred sites', speaking of spiritual landscapes is a way to sidestep the problematic Christian heritage of our anthropological concepts (see Cannell 2006). An object, site or place may be said to be 'sacred' if it is thought to possess 'particular powers demanding respect, reverence and ritual' (Askew 2003, 64). However, though these *may* at times be the attitudes taken up towards the spiritual landscapes we describe, they are by no means necessary for us to acknowledge such a landscape. To speak of 'sacred landscapes' would imply a perception of the environment set apart from the profane activities of daily life. By contrast, many of the spiritual landscapes of Southeast Asia are emphatically 'vernacular' landscapes, in the sense popularised by the American geographer J.B. Jackson, for whom landscapes included the roads, sidewalks and houses of the 'workaday world' (Meinig 1971, 228; see Jackson 1997). A spiritual landscape is not necessarily one that we would recognise as 'religious'. It may gain negative potency from deaths and burials during military conflict (Bovensiepen, this issue), or it may necessitate acknowledging the

original owners of donated farming land (Allerton, this issue). People may engage with spiritual landscapes in ritual activities, but also in a more pragmatic fashion in the course of everyday life.[4] Moreover, even when a converted population abandons older ritual forms, many taken-for-granted notions regarding spirits and their places may be retained (see Forth 1998, 19).

Geographies of Spiritual Power in Southeast Asia

Many mid- to late-twentieth century accounts of Southeast Asian societies, particularly historical accounts of the region's Indic states, stress the significance of what is frequently labelled 'sacred geography', or 'a conceptual system in which certain places are of central ritual importance because it is there that one accesses cosmic currents of ritual purity and power' (Lehman 2003a, xvi). These studies emphasise the importance of cosmological symbolism to the construction and political significance of temples, palaces and kingdoms. In his classic study of conceptions of state and kingship in Southeast Asia, Heine-Geldern argued that the structural and spatial organization of Indic states was a microcosmic mirroring of the macrocosmos, in which the capital stood as the 'magical center of the empire' (1956[1942], 3). Later, Tambiah utilised the notion of mandala, a composition of two elements, core and container, to describe such a 'galactic polity', a socio-spatial configuration visible in temples such as Borobudur on Java (1976, 102). Similarly, Geertz argues that the nineteenth century Balinese state was a 'theatre state', in which the king and court stood as the 'exemplary center' (1980, 11-18). Woodward, writing on the palace (*keraton*) of Yogyakarta, argues that despite the political upheavals of the Indonesian state, notions of 'Javanese-Islamic sacred geography' continue to shape the potency of the palace as the centre of spiritual purity (2003, 227).

However, as Wolters stresses, mandalas and galactic polities were 'a phenomenon of the lowlands' (1999, 39), even if some aspects of their influence may have reached to upland peoples. Away from these exemplary centres, Southeast Asian peoples held vernacular understandings, not of cosmologically-significant 'sacred geography', but of the spirit or 'soul-stuff' animating living things (Reid 1988, 6), as well as the spiritual potency of

mountains, caves, forests, trees, graves and rivers. Such understandings are described in the literature as distinct from, or else in tension with, the world religions, and are therefore conceptualised, variously, as 'animism' (Skeat 1900), 'supernaturalism' (Spiro 1967), 'spirit cults' (Tambiah 1970) or as part of an 'indigenous religious system' (Benjamin 1979). For example, Skeat described the folk religion of the Malays, as distinct from orthodox Islam, as a 'natural religion' in which most natural things were thought to possess souls, and such distinctive places as oddly-shaped rocks or very large trees were thought to be sacred or *kramat* (1900, 71). Later, building on Skeat's work, Benjamin argued that in the Malay system of animism 'almost everything in the environment that note is taken of has the power to concentrate essence in itself' (1979, 11).

Both older and more recent ethnographies provide details on specific places associated with spirit beings and forces in island Southeast Asia.[5] One common location of such potent forces is, most generally, the forest or, more precisely, particular species of tree. In nineteenth and twentieth century Java, *Ficus* tree species were considered sacred, and had their own legends of origin (Boomgaard 1995, 53). According to Boomgaard, not only did the Javanese think spirit-inhabited trees should be approached with care, they also acknowledged entire forest areas that were *angker* or 'taboo', with mortal consequences for those humans who ignored such taboos (1995, 55). Similarly, the Ranau Dusun of Sabah thought that a particular class of prankster spirits (called 'Miyons') inhabited trees of the *Ficus* species, and saw the forest as 'an almost cosmic entity' because of its many potent energies and spiritual dangers (Harrison 1979, 61, 70). Dix Grimes describes how spirits of the jungle are analogous to 'taboo people' in Buru cosmology, and consequently many practices are taboo in the jungle (1997, 129). Among the Huaulu of Seram, 'occult powers' fundamentally 'belong to the forest', and though they desire to enter human villages, are fearful of doing so unless there are wild trees in which they can hide (Valeri 2000, 23-26). In this issue, the spiritual potency of trees is stressed by Kari Telle, whose paper vividly describes the collapse of a 'sentient' tree in the middle of a Sasak graveyard, and ensuing worries over the correct ritual response.

Clear distinctions do not always seem to be drawn in Southeast Asian societies between the realms of forest and mountain as spirit domains. For example, the Gumai of South Sumatra see the different 'spheres' of the world, including a combined sphere of mountain/ forest, as 'controlled by invisible supernatural spirits' (Sakai 1997, 45). In the Karo highlands of Sumatra, *keramat* refers to 'powerful and benevolent' spirits, associated in particular with Mount Sibayak, sometimes conceived as nature spirits, sometimes as humans metamorphosed into spirits, and sometimes as 'supernatural sites' themselves (Steedly 1993, 119). In the past, other, more dangerous and mischievous spirits were also associated with the mountain's trees, rocks and streams. Steedly notes that 'entering this spirit-filled world called for a certain fortitude', and so travellers would leave small offerings for the spirits at places along mountain passes (1993, 122). Similarly, in the Philippines, Mount Apo is thought to be the abode of mountain spirits and to possess an everyday (though increasingly contested) sacredness (Alejo 2000). The contested potency of mountains, and their changing spiritual significance, is a central theme of both Howell's and Amster's papers in this issue.

Spirits have also frequently been described as associated with bodies of water, including lakes, rivers and the sea, an association described for the Manggarai of west Flores by Allerton in this issue. Such water-spirits may be conceptually fused with other place-spirits, as in Endicott's account of Malay animism, which makes no clear distinction between jungle spirits and spirits of water (1970, 106). Forth argues that among the Nage of central Flores, free spirits known as *nitu* may be described as the 'owners of trees and stones', but are pre-eminently associated with bodies of water including, in coastal areas, the sea (1998, 65-6). Writing of the island of Luang in the Banda Sea, Pannell notes that humans do not have the right to 'access and use the products of the sea with total freedom', since the right to use a sea product is 'mediated' by the relationship between the user and a 'powerful being' who lives in the sea (2007, 86). Similarly, Spyer has described how male divers in the Aru islands speak of (frequently erotic) encounters with undersea spirit women, or 'sea wives', who demand sacrifices from these divers in return for a supply of pearl oysters (2000, 144-6).

Throughout the region, spirits of forests, mountains and rivers may be contrasted with a more general category of spirit known as the 'owners' or 'masters' of the land or earth. Hicks describes such a class of spirits for the Tetum of Timor: the 'lords of the earth' who own such places as bamboo groves, old trees or lakes (1976, 25). Among the Buid of Mindoro, the 'spirits of the earth' are those to whom the land 'belongs', and whom humans must be careful not to offend, whether through the violation of agricultural taboos or even the quarrelling of spouses (Gibson 1986, 38, 48, 174). If they remain unoffended, such spirits provide the Buid with a 'general and diffuse sort of protection' (Gibson 1986, 173). These kinds of 'spirits of the earth' may be one form taken by the phenomenon of 'founders' cults', described by Tannenbaum and Kammerer as 'part of the Southeast Asian matrix of cultural possibilities that reflects widespread beliefs in spirit ownership of territory and control of fertility and prosperity' (2003, 8). Lehman, in the same volume, argues that in mainland Southeast Asia 'the original and ultimate owners having dominion over the face of the land are spirit lords commonly associated with more or less prominent features of the landscape' (2003b, 16). Though Lehman and the other authors in this volume (Tannenbaum and Kammerer 2003) are most concerned with the changing political implications of claims to relationships with such spirits, in this special edition we seek to emphasise the contestation that may occur over the landscape itself.

Ancestors are clearly a significant presence in many Southeast Asian landscapes, and are often associated with mountains (Wolters 1999, 19), or are thought to have come from the sea (Boomgaard 2007, 5). Lehman argues against the 'error' on the part of the analyst of conflating founders' cults with cults of the ancestors (2003b, 33), but there are clearly many ethnographic examples where ancestral spirits are intertwined with other categories of land or earth spirit (see both Allerton and Bovensiepen, this issue). Such intertwining seems to be more common in societies, such as the Manggarai and Nage, where the category of 'ancestor' embraces both early, founding ancestors and more recently-deceased 'mundane' forebears (Forth 1998, 243). By contrast, Wolters argued that in many Southeast Asian societies, ancestor status 'had to be earned', and was not automatically granted to 'mere forebears' (1999, 19). When ancestral status is only

granted to a potent few, the spiritual landscape may be one punctuated by powerful sites including individual graves and shrines. Woodward stresses that power in Java, thought of as an animating 'physical substance', is particularly concentrated at holy (and especially royal) graves and shrines (1989, 166). Visiting such graves is therefore not, as Geertz had argued, a form of 'ancestor worship' (1960, 76), but a way of personally accessing such potency.

The Christian-influenced notions of 'sacred sites' and 'ancestor worship' suggest an attitude of reverence and contemplation towards a landscape of ancestral and other spirits. By contrast, reading ethnographic accounts, it becomes clear that Southeast Asian landscapes of spirits and energies are acknowledged and dealt with pragmatically through both everyday and ritual actions. Endicott noted that, because Malay earth spirits resided directly under villages and fields, people constantly took them into consideration when planting crops, digging the ground or even performing plays (1970, 106). Cannell describes how Bicolanos acknowledge the 'unseen geography' of their area through short greetings addressed to the spirits, or particular forms of avoidance behaviour (1999, 85). Dix Grimes argues that Buru spirits of the jungle are like a kind of 'taboo people', and there are many things that humans cannot do in their (unseen) presence (1997, 128-9). In some Southeast Asian societies, the existence of hidden forces in the landscape may not necessitate any special rituals, but may nonetheless be feared for the communicative acts that such forces transmit. Thus, among the Ranau Dusun of Sabah, the presence of spirits in the landscape was thought to be signalled by 'one of a host of possible omens' requiring uncertain interpretation, including bird omens, rainbows and snakes (Harrison 1979, 60). In this issue, a key comparative concern is the extent to which a pragmatic, and occasionally fearful, attitude towards the landscape may have been replaced by one of greater reverence and contemplation.

Landscape, Religion and Agency

In their concern with reading signs and omens, their ritual efforts to placate the spirits, and their everyday acknowledgements of the influences of an unseen realm, many

Southeast Asian peoples accord a kind of agency to the spiritual landscape. That is, they see it as having the power to act in the world. In several of the contributions to this issue, we also see such an attribution of agency, for example in Telle's argument that the Sasak see their landscape as possessing 'a sort of wilful presence'. Comparative ethnography shows that approaching the landscape as an animate realm in-and-of-itself is not confined to Southeast Asian societies. For example, Harvey argues that for many Andean people 'the landscape self-evidently has agency (intentionality and capacity for autonomous action) and must be actively engaged if that agency is to be directed favourably towards human endeavour' (2001, 198). Povinelli (1995) engages with the agency accorded to Australian Aboriginal landscapes by showing how the sweat and speech produced by human labour in turn affect the productivity of the land. Echoing Povinelli's attention to whether rocks might smell or listen, Cruikshank's work on the intersection of nature and culture in the Yukon and Alaska asks 'Do glaciers listen?' (2005).

For Guthrie (1993), viewing landscapes, rocks or glaciers as agents is part of a common evolutionary strategy by which humans are inherently biased to see the world as social. His 'new theory of religion' claims that religion 'may best be understood as systematic anthropomorphism: the attribution of human characteristics to nonhuman things or events' (1993, 3). Such anthropomorphism is, according to Guthrie, a 'good bet' since, in an uncertain and ambiguous world, it makes sense to assume that things are alive until proved otherwise (1993, 3). Guthrie views animism as a form of such thinking, an unconscious inclination of *all* people to 'see nonliving things and events as alive' (1993, 39). Ultimately, though, such animistic interpretations are for Guthrie 'the failures of a generally good strategy', since the things and events to which such interpretations attribute life are, 'in hindsight', discovered to be inanimate (1993, 6). However, not only does Guthrie assume an a priori distinction between (interior) mind and (exterior) environment[6], but his characterisation of animism as an overextended cognitive strategy makes it hard to explain why people might hold onto such 'failed' interpretations, even in the face of apparently more 'scientific' arguments. To put it another way: Guthrie's theory seems unable to explain why, despite missionary critiques of 'praying to wood and

stone', a Manggarai villager might continue to insist that the land *can* hear and *does* have an appetite (see Allerton, this issue).

By contrast with Guthrie's approach, I would like to suggest that we take more seriously the (implicit or explicit) claims of our informants that the landscape has agency. To do so, one does not have to 'believe' that rocks can smell or that glaciers can listen. Instead, one needs to be alert to the ways in which places, as particular kinds of things, have 'real material and ideological effects on persons and social relations' (Tilley 2004, 222). This kind of position—that agency may have multiple locations beyond 'biologically discrete individuals' (Keane 1997, 7)—is emerging from an eclectic body of work on science, art objects and materiality (Latour 1993; Gell 1998; Tilley 2004; Miller 2005). Since a more thorough consideration of this work is beyond the scope of this Introduction, there are two aspects that I want to point to as suggestive. Firstly, contrary to the criticism that the term implies some kind of 'magical mind-dust' (Ingold 2007, 11), 'agency' refers not to will or intention but simply to 'doing' (Giddens 1984, 10), to exerting power or producing an effect. Moreover, agency might sometimes be distributed across 'networks', the 'mixes of artefact and idea and person which make up life' (Strathern 1999, 120), and of which landscapes—as I utilise the term in this Introduction—are clearly one form. Latour (2000) gives the example of the 'Berliner key', a particular kind of key that obliges a resident to lock the door behind them when entering a building, thus enforcing tight social controls on entry and exit. He argues that the Berliner key is not a mere reflection of a social ideal, but actively develops and shapes such ideals. Similarly, Carl Knappett argues that speed bumps or 'sleeping policemen' (the term is apt) are 'agents/ objects designed to force drivers to conform to a moral code' (2002, 99). For Knappett, these examples demonstrate that agency is 'widely distributed' across an environment, and inheres in 'the relationships between the various entities that constitute a field of action' (2002, 100).

The second point to highlight is the way in which the new materiality studies emphasise that people can not 'think about or react to the material world in pretty much any way they like' (Tilley 2007, 19). This is particularly relevant to a consideration of landscapes

since, following Gibson (1979), a number of authors have stressed that humans perceive the environment in terms of what it offers, in terms of its 'affordances' (Ingold 1992, 42-44; Bird-David 1999, 74). As Telle's paper in this issue makes clear, a place such as a large and old tree can not carry *any* possible meaning, but affords people certain kinds of practices and ideas. Similarly, it seems to be no coincidence that mountains are so often conceptualised as sources of spiritual potency, or as sites for new religious identities (see Howell and Amster, this issue). Indeed, Tilley argues that we may translate the term 'agency' as meaning 'providing affordances and constraints for thought and action' (2007, 19).

Having suggested that we may wish to approach places and landscapes as agents, I want to return to issues of (ongoing) religious conversion. Questions of agency are not simply matters for academic debate. In encounters with Christian missionaries or Islamic modernizers, as well as in their increased personal adherence to world religions, people often experience a radical *clash* between different understandings of the location of agency. Webb Keane's recent work (2007) on semiotics and materiality sheds light on the processes behind, and the reasons for, such clashes of understanding. Keane is concerned with the ways in which the question 'What beings have agency?' drove the troubled classification of words, things and subjects in the encounter between missionaries and followers of ancestral ritual on Sumba. He outlines the concept of 'semiotic ideology' as a means of elucidating historically-specific, morally-loaded projects of 'purification' that involve sorting out the 'proper relations among, and boundaries between, words, things, and subjects' (Keane 2007, 4). The term 'purification' is borrowed from Latour, for whom it references the constant (and for Latour deluded) efforts of 'moderns' to separate out humans from non-humans, even as 'hybrids of nature and culture' proliferate all around (1993, 10). Whilst noting the 'puzzles' and over-generalisations of Latour's theory, Keane nevertheless draws from it the important question of *why* people may be led to purify (Keane 2007, 7). Keane shows how the mission encounter on Sumba involved a historical clash between the semiotic ideology of Dutch Calvinism, which saw speech and materially as utterly distinct, and that of ancestral ritualists, for whom words and things were not so radically discrete. In this issue, the tension between various

projects of landscape 'purification', and more holistic understandings of the multiple networks and locations of agency, is an important theme of all the papers.

However, whilst concerns to 'purify' place may be seen as much in Muslim as in Protestant contexts, the clash of semiotic ideologies that Keane outlines is by no means inevitable in the context of ongoing religious conversion. If, like Austin-Broos, we see conversion as 'continuing and practiced' (2003, 9), constituted not by a singular experience but by a passage through social experience, then we can acknowledge that conversion may slowly and gradually involve new forms of relatedness with the environment. Ongoing conversion may lead not to purification, but to the creation of syncretic landscapes (see Bovensiepen, this issue), or to a refusal of religious synthesis and an explicit attempt to maintain the boundaries between religion and local places (Allerton, this issue). However, it is also possible that conversion may not lead to heated exchanges on the existence of spirit-places; rather, and possibly more damningly, conversion may involve spirits being 'merely ignored' (Lohmann 2003b 109; *cf.* Amster, this issue). This suggests that the passage of conversion may lead to what Weiner terms 'topothanatia', the 'death, withdrawal, effacement or covering over of places' (2001, 234).

Spiritual Landscapes and their Transformations

It is clear that despite the many social, economic, political and ecological changes in Southeast Asia over recent decades, landscape and place remain imbued with considerable potency. Let us consider three striking, recent examples. Firstly, Abdurrahman Wahid, Indonesia's first democratically elected President, was frequently to be found praying at the tombs of Javanese Islamic leaders, before returning to Jakarta full of renewed political resolve (Chambert-Loir and Reid 2002, xv). Secondly, around the notorious Freeport mine in West Papua, the Amungme people continue to assert their primordial link with the landscape through their knowledge of its names, despite the landscape's destruction and the violence symbolised by army graffiti on rocks (Ballard 2002). Finally, during the 2002 construction of the KL (Kuala Lumpur) Monorail, a

unexplained accident in which a wheel fell onto a journalist's head was widely interpreted as caused by a local ghost or god associated with a Hindu temple (Baxstrom 2008, 194-7). In very different ways, the violently-dispossessed Amungme, the urban residents of a Southeast Asian metropolis, and President Wahid all acknowledge the unseen power of the landscape.

In this volume, we are particularly interested in the influence of new religious forms and practices on different spiritual landscapes. Previous ethnographic work, whilst it does not explicitly address the issue of landscape formation, is nevertheless suggestive of the influence of the world religions on conceptions of spirits and spirit-places. Cannell, for example, describes how Catholicism heightened the ambivalence people in Bicol felt towards the *tawo* spirits, but argues that this ambivalence actually predated the Spanish invasion of the lowland Philippines (1999, 126-7). Her ethnography provides nuanced evidence of how Catholic Bicolanos try to work out the 'relative legitimacy' (Cannell 1999, 229) of dealings with the unseen spirit realm. Aragon has described what could be called a form of purification policing among the Tobaku of Sulawesi, where Salvation Army officers attempt to be present at all community ceremonies, including agricultural rituals in fields, in order to ensure that 'ritual protocols meet church specifications' (2000, 236). Bowen's work on Gayo ritual shows the range of attitudes towards spirits that may be held within one Muslim community. He describes how a category of powerful spirits known as *aulië* are seen by the 'modernist-leaning minority' as exemplary, saintly beings, but by other villagers as 'mediators between humans and the environment' (Bowen 1993, 198-9).

Of course, pre-conversion understandings of spiritual landscapes were never static, and we must beware of portraying them as such in our analyses. Steedly's account of Karo spirits is particularly sensitive to this issue, arguing against the 'erasure of social-political context', in which historical accounts of spirits are detached from the surrounding social experience of, in the Karo case, banditry, colonialism and missionisation (1993, 131). Similarly, whilst acknowledging the impact of religious change on spiritual landscapes, the papers in this issue also pay attention to significant political, economic and social

factors. One such factor is migration, which Amster shows has profoundly shaped, in specifically gendered ways, Kelabit experiences of the landscape. In Bovensiepen's paper, she stresses the significance of the resettlement of Funar villagers during the Indonesian occupation of East Timor. Since 1999, these villagers have been returning to Funar, but they experience considerable anxiety that their previous enforced absence has disturbed reciprocal relations with the landscape. In my paper on the Manggarai of Flores, I also outline the challenges posed by a more peaceful, state-sponsored resettlement, and the ways in which new ritual forms engage with the spiritual aspects of a 'developed' landscape.

At the beginning of this Introduction, drawing on Ingold's (2000) work, I stressed that those who inhabit a landscape do not confront it as a setting or container 'out there', but discover its meaning through practical activity and movements. I also emphasised that an understanding of the landscape as a lived world needed to be separated from a perspective on landscape as a 'way of seeing'. However, both Amster's account of Kelabit migration and Howell's focus on town-dwelling members of a 'mountain church', alert us to the possibility that, as people move to urban centres, they may begin to adopt a more detached perspective on the rural landscapes with which they no longer daily engage. As a landscape becomes a kind of 'homeland' to which people intermittently return, so it becomes more possible for it to serve as a representation of an ethnic or other identity. By contrast, the papers by Allerton, Bovensiepen and Telle all deal with rural communities who cannot adopt such an exterior perspective, since their landscapes are the environments in which they continue to fetch water, build their homes, plant their crops and bury their dead. This alerts us not only to the links between environmental perception and ways of making a living, but also suggests the different spatial and temporal scales on which people's landscapes operate (Bender 1993, 2).

As mentioned, a key theme of this issue is the extent to which world religions necessitate a 'purification' of the landscape, a separation of what may be seen as properly-human agency from material places. In Howell's paper on the Protestant 'mountain churches' of northern Luzon, the project of purification seems to have been entirely successful, since

agency has been 'firmly differentiated' from the materiality of the environment. Similarly, Amster argues that Kelabit conversion to Christianity has helped to 'unhinge' spiritual concerns from a landscape previously teeming with spirits and other entities. By contrast, in both Bovensiepen's paper on East Timor, and Allerton's paper on the Manggarai, notions of spirits and energies remain embedded in the landscape, in large part because they have not been explicitly targeted by Catholic priests, who assign such notions to a non-religious category of 'culture' or 'custom'. However, there are still important differences between these two Catholic examples. Whilst, in Funar, the Church (particularly in the form of the Virgin Mary) is conceptualised as a similar kind of force to the potency of the land, in Manggarai a stricter separation is drawn between what concerns 'custom' and what concerns 'religion'. Here, crosses are merely signs of blessing and protection, but cannot contribute to the potent energy of the land. At first sight, Telle's account of Islamic attitudes towards the Sasak landscape suggests a project of purification as successful as those in the Protestant cases described by Howell and Amster. However, Telle argues that whilst the Sasak may have abandoned older ritual practices, they have not abandoned the conception of an animated, sentient landscape, and still pay much attention to its 'signs'.

Despite the successful removal of spirit notions and essences from the landscape, in both the mountain churches of northern Luzon, and among the Kelabit, we see an intriguing attempt at 're-enchantment' of a now Christian landscape. Thus, Howell describes how the mountain landscape of northern Luzon has been 're-imagined' in Christian terms. The mountains are no longer seen as having agency, but they do have spiritual significance as an ethnic homeland and as a 'gift from God'. Similarly, Amster argues that Kelabit conversion has led to a 'resacralization' of local place, particularly in the transformation of Mount Murud from a place of primordial spirits to a multi-ethnic pilgrimage site. In both of these cases, 're-enchantment' seems to take place partly through a conscious approach to the landscape as an object, whether of ethnic attachment or a gift. Perhaps the most extreme example of such objectification is Telle's description of a prayer house constructed from the timber of a fallen graveyard tree, a 'sentient', living aspect of the landscape transformed into a merit-making object. However, Telle's example, with its

stress on the continuity of perceptions of the landscape despite ritual shifts, suggests that in this case there are still limits to a fully 'Muslim landscape'.

Finally, a further common theme explored by the papers is the relative weight given to the positive or beneficial versus the negative or harmful aspects of the landscape. Bovensiepen describes how, following the end of the Indonesian occupation, the people of Funar returned to their village. In doing so, they stressed the health, wealth and well-being to be gained by living on ancestral land. However, Bovensiepen notes that they also say that *lulik*, or the energy of the land, is dangerous, especially outside of inhabited settlements, and in doing so translate such negative spiritual aspects as 'devils'. Amster stresses how, prior to conversion, Kelabit had to continually read the signs and omens of the landscape, attributed danger to key sites, and were prohibited from visiting others. In many respects, giving up this attitude to the landscape in the course of conversion has allowed Kelabit individuals to move freely both within and beyond their surrounding environment. Whilst Amster stresses the 'portable potency' that Christianity affords, Allerton's paper outlines shifting perceptions of the mobility of ancestral spirits, who are being called from the highlands to ensure the fertility of a lowland, state-funded wet-rice project. However, in the Manggarai context, a contrast is also drawn between the beneficial and harmful aspects of the landscape, and Catholic symbols and objects are increasingly utilised to protect against the latter.

As Southeast Asia's population continues to migrate to work elsewhere in or beyond the region, as people continue to move from rural to urban areas, and as the environment is increasingly utilised for mining projects or the planting of palm-oil plantations, people's spiritual entanglements with the landscape will continue to change and develop. Connections to the land, to its mountains, trees and rivers, can be used as a focus for exploring people's sense of continuity and discontinuity in the face of change. In the papers that follow, we see evidence, both historical and contemporary, of the distinctive Southeast Asian spiritual landscapes I outlined at the beginning of this Introduction. However, we also see evidence, both radical and subtle, of shifts in understandings of those landscapes, and of growing contestation over their meaning.

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[2] Since 1995, the Ifugao rice terraces have been on UNESCO's World Heritage List as a protected 'cultural landscape'. For more on how Ifugao Christian converts negotiate between their new religion and their ancestral rice rituals, see Ammayao (2003, 456).

[3] There is, of course, a rich and continuing tradition of work exploring the entanglements of kinship, morality and the ancestral landscape amongst Australian Aborigines, but for reasons of space and regional focus I am unable to consider it in any more detail here. See, in particular, Povinelli (1995), Munn (1996) and Merlan (1998).

[4] Michael Lambek has stressed how the 'pragmatic dimension' is always relevant to ideas about spirits: people are less likely to ask 'Which of these spirits exist?' than 'Which of them has power to influence my life now?' (1996, 247). Interestingly, Benjamin argued

that Islam did not 'oust the spirit-cults' in Malaysia in part because it did not explain 'the ordinary peasant's experience of daily suffering' (1979, 24).

[5] For the purposes of meaningful comparison across only a few case-studies, the papers in this issue focus on the peoples of island Southeast Asia. However, there are clearly many comparisons to be drawn with spiritual landscapes and their transformations in mainland Southeast Asia, where notions of spirits are also intrinsically connected to place (see, for example, Spiro 1967; Tambiah 1970; Askew 2003; Tannenbaum and Kammerer 2003).

[6] By contrast with such an assumption, Knappett draws on alternative cognitive perspectives which stress that 'the mind is *embodied*, and that the mind is *extended*' (2002, 98).