Things in (Un)Common: Two Reflections

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Abstract: This article reflects on the way two things associated with Bali – heirloom daggers (kris) and the island's territory – are enlisted to assemble multiple but linked worlds. The kris in question traverse pre-colonial polities, colonial policies and institutions, national heritage, and efforts to recompose local politics. Bali's terrain, made by geological and cosmological forces and ritual practices, has been drawn into Cold War killings that produced mass graves, and development focused on mass tourism. I examine how these projects affect one another and how their actual or potential collision brings multiplicity into view.

Keywords: multiple worlds, ontology, things, heirlooms, territory, Indonesia, Bali, tourism, Cold War

Résumé : Cet article s'interroge sur la façon dont deux éléments associés à Bali – les dagues familiales (kris) et le territoire de l'île – sont engagés pour rassembler des mondes à la fois distincts et liés. Le kris en soi a traversé les régimes précoloniaux, les politiques et institutions coloniales, l'héritage national et les efforts visant à restaurer des politiques locales. Le territoire balinais, fondé sur des forces géologiques et cosmologiques et des pratiques rituelles, a été mêlé dans les tueries de la Guerre froide qui ont mené aux fosses communes et à une politique de développement orientée vers le tourisme de masse. Je présente comment ces projets s'interpellent l'un l'autre et comment leur collision réelle ou potentielle révèle des multiplicités.

Mots-clés : Mondes multiples, ontologie, choses, objets de famille, territoire, Indonésie, Bali, tourisme, guerre froide

With the inauguration of its Palapa satellite system on Indonesian Independence Day in 1976, Indonesia's territorial claims to both land and water reached also to the skies. An archipelago of over 17,000 islands, stretching across 3,000 miles – from unruly Aceh on the island of Sumatra to the contested Western half of the island of New Guinea – became connected by relays of television, telephone and radio signals over 22,300 miles above the earth. The satellite epitomised President Suharto's New Order's emphasis on modernity and development. Beaming broadcasts of what was then Indonesia's sole television network, state-owned and operated, it also amplified ideologies of progress, fostering a specific mode of national unity.

However, both the satellite's name and the ceremony initiating its operation also galvanised a different archetype, equally relevant to the New Order but rooted in selective traditions. Palapa's appellation indexes a story about Gajah Mada, a fourteenth-century hero credited with expanding the Majapahit Empire from Eastern Java across the entire archipelago and beyond.[1] At the ceremony, Suharto activated the satellite by pressing a button in the hilt of a replica of a kris, a long dagger. While prized throughout insular Southeast Asia, kris are associated especially with Java and its court traditions, and many scholars trace their prototype to Majapahit. The gesture that initiated Palapa mobilised ancient and new, Indigenous and cosmopolitan, technologies of power.

Palapa is not the focus of this article. I begin with this venture because it felicitously conjoins the two things that are – territory and kris.[2] Unlike Palapa's archipelagic sky-gaze, however, I zoom in on practices involving those things on one tiny island: Bali, Indonesia's most famous province and the site of my long-term fieldwork. The satellite's launch is also relevant conceptually, involving as it did processes of both commoning – of building a singular, shared world – and uncommoning, revealing a plurality of partly intersecting but diverging worlds.[3]

The English word *common* refers to property, interests or values shared by, or pertinent to, a community, as well as to matters that are prevalent or widespread. Its plural form, *commons*, highlights resources belonging or accessible to a public, rather than those privately owned. Palapa deftly spoke both to commons and to what Indonesians, in theory, have in common. But nothing simply exists in common (or as a commons). It must be made so by acts of commoning, whether in the past or present. By contrast, uncommoning accentuates disjunctions and divergences. What diverges are not only interests and values but even realities, which are composed by practices.

Why insist on plural realities, rather than multiple cultures, as anthropologists usually do – or as the Indonesian nation-state, with its motto "unity in diversity," promotes? Culture belongs to what John Law (2015) calls the "one-world world." What he has in mind is the modern hegemonic bifurcation of reality into one nature and many cultures. That nature forms an obdurate actuality external to human experience. By contrast, for Australian Aboriginal peoples, for instance, "a reified reality out there, detached from the work and the rituals that constantly re-enact it, makes no sense … Processes of continuous creation redo land, people, life, and the spiritual world altogether, and in specific locations" (Law 2015, 127).[4] Multiculturalism treats such disagreements as cultural difference, a matter of different beliefs, and might grant respect to Aboriginal views. But as Law (2015, 127) notes, "however nice we are, we have not abandoned our basic commitment to the idea of a single all-encompassing reality. Neither have we really stopped assuming that [others] have got it wrong." Unfortunately, there are plenty of situations where niceness no longer obtains.

While Law emphasises the modern division between nature and culture, one-world worlds also result from other endeavours. Before nature came the Catholic Church, its name asserting its universalising mission; efforts to convert people to any "world" religion continue that task. In addition to nature and god are the myriad one-world-making activities spawned by the field of economics, associated with capitalism, neoliberalism and development.[5]

Nation-states form a key vector of contemporary commoning. They inherit old and mediate new elements of the long, often violent, history of efforts to make a common world, even as they uncommon by distinguishing themselves from other nation-states. Palapa's inauguration commoned by performing territory as neutral land and water claimed by a nation-state and by treating development as an inherent good; it uncommoned by gathering, through the satellite's name and the fake kris, history, tradition (*adat*) and, specifically, Javanese forms of authority and mysticism (*kebatinan*).

One-world worlds are both compelling (Tsing 2005) and devastating. Compared to the ravages to human and even planetary life these one-world worlds engender, multiculturalism appears positively benign. But a one-nature/many-cultures (or world-*views*) imaginary is not only a project of erasure that by turning realities into beliefs leads, at best, to toleration. It also underwrites more manifestly brutal projects, such as the extraction of fossil fuels or (as discussed further on) development initiatives, which become evident when these clash with (an always local) "culture." Drawing on the authority and weight of universal facts and truths, one-world initiatives reveal multiculturalism to be a lie. All cultures are not equal; respect for diversity extends only so far before it can be ignored. One-world worlds define whatever does not conform to nature or their truths as culture and beliefs.

Conventionally, kris, as human-made artifacts, and territory, contiguous land and water on the earth's surface, constitute components of the one-world domain of material objects – inert stuff ripe for human appropriation and transformation, whether physically as resources or conceptually as blank screens onto which specific people project values, ideas and beliefs. Some of the practices discussed below do turn kris and territory into objects in this familiar sense. But I find it more helpful to consider them as *things*, in Latour's (2005, 23) sense, which draws on that word's etymology: gatherings that "bring together mortals and gods, humans and nonhumans." That formulation neatly underscores the range of actors kris and territory rally. But if they are things, they also are "things multiple" (Mol 2002), elements of uncommon world-making projects. When those projects conflict, their multiplicity comes into view.

In this article, then, I examine how practices that enlist Balinese heirloom weapons and the island's topography enact plural realities. Like Law and Mol, I consider how different practices do reality differently. What primarily interests me, however, is the impact of the accumulated outcome of engagements among contingent enactments, performances, and relations over time. That efforts to make the present and future necessarily build on prior doings provokes complex, at times jarring, connections among worlds. While kris and territory may both disrupt one-world politics and knowledges, they differ in one important way: kris are mobile; territory is not. Movement allows evasion of multiplicity in a way that fixity does not.

Mobile/Travelling Things

Kris are much more than long daggers. They are renowned for the patterns resulting from hammering laminations of iron and nickel onto their double-edged asymmetrical blades, many of which undulate, like a snake in motion. Even when fitted with magnificent hilts and sheaths, the blade is what counts. Once part of male formal dress, many kris remain treasured heirlooms – material links to ancestors. A subset of these daggers receive names, including honorifics, and a smaller subset yet achieve fame.

Kris of that sort first demanded my attention during fieldwork in Bali in the 1980s. Named weapons featured as lead characters in stories about the power of Bali's oldest dynasty in Klungkung, which traced its origins to Majapahit's conquest of the island. Their prominence in oral narratives reiterated their centrality in written chronicles about the origins and rise of powerful clans across Bali. In such texts, acquiring a named kris as an ally – frequently as a gift from a superior, either human or more-than-human – marked a man out for greatness. Provided they received appropriate care, such kris manifested remarkable abilities across generations. One kris mentioned in Klungkung's dynastic chronicle could open a chasm when thrust into the ground; when brandished, another froze opposing troops in place; a third, known from oral tales, ventured out on its own to destroy enemies.

The role such kris occupied in Balinese polities enmeshed them in Dutch efforts to establish a one-world world. Following Klungkung's defeat in 1908, the colonial press mocked claims about their powers, noting that conquest proved them false (Balinese disagree). To Dutch scholars, kris exemplified the fetishism that characterised "native thought" and justified European rule. Yet despite being relegated to the domain of false beliefs, heirloom weapons posed a practical problem for the colonial state. Concerns that faith in their power might lead descendants of defeated rulers to foment rebellion led to a policy of confiscation. Some were auctioned, while others were secreted away as curiosities or souvenirs. But the most impressive kris – those with hilts, blades and/or sheaths adorned with gold and gems – became gifts of power to knowledge, dispatched to the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences in Batavia (now Jakarta) and the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden. Stripped of their names and accreted legends, heirloom kris became artifacts in private and public European collections.[6] Such treatment not only neutralised their political danger but also turned them into potential mechanisms to make colonial subjects capable of proper engagement with modern institutions such as museums.

Independence wove these heirlooms into another pattern of modern commoning: heritage. The Batavian Society became Indonesia's National Museum, its collections the property of the nation-state. As cultural heritage (*warisan budaya*), heirlooms looted during colonial conquest now constitute a commons that theoretically belongs to all Indonesians – or all humans, since UNESCO designated Indonesia's kris as one of its Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2005.

But kris, in the National Museum of Indonesia and elsewhere, also *uncommon*. I turn here to two events: a conference in the Netherlands in 2006 and the centenary celebration of Klungkung's defeat in 2008, where the latent capacities of heirlooms looted by Dutch troops interrupted the one-world world, bringing into view other collectives such kris engage. These occasions gathered up the concerns of museum staff, as guardians of the international norms of museology; the mainly Muslim and Javanese worlds those persons contributed to making beyond their professional lives; and the partly overlapping and partly diverging worlds of Balinese whose ancestors once owned these daggers and who sought to draw on their generative capacities in projects of shaping the future.

The first lesson of the 2006 conference in Amsterdam is that kris may uncommon even at the centre of a former empire. Focused on colonial collecting, many conference participants were curators at Dutch museums. During breaks, they shared with me stories that revealed a novel competence kris acquired in circulating outside Indonesia: a capacity to affect (or, for one of them, infect) European sensibilities. Over the years, thousands of kris have made their way to the Netherlands: they have been collected by connoisseurs, inherited by descendants of men who had worked or lived in Indonesia (kris become heirlooms in Europe too), and purchased by visitors. One museum holds an annual Kris Day; others sponsor opportunities for people to bring objects (not only kris) for expert evaluation. Apart from an interest in appraisal, anxieties and afflictions prompt appointments with curators. Some suspect their kris of causing them misfortune; others seek advice on how to store or hang kris to avoid such problems. Some just want to be done with these bothersome things by donating them.[7]

Other forms of non-obvious uncommoning became apparent during a conversation with a curator from Indonesia's National Museum. As we chatted after my presentation, I asked what it was like to be responsible for so many powerful heirlooms (*sakti pusaka*), inviting her to uncommon. She shrugged and said, "Well, it's a museum." I nodded, taking this to be a reminder that

such places were as disenchanted as I imagined them to be – as a confirmation that the events that had brought kris there, to be catalogued and displayed or stored, had turned potent actors into inert, albeit stunning, objects.[8] The curator worked, after all, in that one-world world. She had studied museology in highly regarded institutions overseas, regularly attended conferences with Euro-American colleagues in places such as the Netherlands, and was very well published. She held, moreover, a prestigious position in Jakarta, charged with the important task of safeguarding Indonesian cultural heritage.

We stood companionably for a moment. But then she continued: "Besides, I regularly invite *dukun* [experts in healing and harming] to the museum to make sure the heirlooms stay 'quiet.'" She paused again before adding that her deceased husband protected her from any possible harm that might come from dealing with such potent entities.

Clearly, in addition to forms of professional expertise shared with curators around the globe, she had adopted or inherited other techniques to deal with forces museology cannot accommodate. Supplementary procedures enhanced standard curatorial routines. The National Museum forms a site of uncommoning.

My interlocutor's extension of her curatorial responsibilities built on and contributed to both the worlds made through the exercise of her profession and the worlds associated with her everyday experience as a Javanese woman living in the nation's capital. As a curator who is also Javanese, she would know Javanese kris lore through the work of both foreign academics and Indigenous intellectuals. As a resident of Jakarta, she undoubtedly heard plenty of political gossip. Earlier, I presented Suharto's deployment of kris as an activation of connections to the greatness of an ancient Javanese empire. However, kris continue to be linked to kings, especially the still culturally and politically prominent Javanese courts of Solo and Yogya. Kris index forms of power beyond modern politics, which politicians also seek to harness. Thus, many ambitious Indonesian men, including Indonesia's presidents, collect kris and avidly seek named kris. Suharto in particular was famous for his many kris, as well as for the many dukuns who advised him.[9]

Thus, to fulfill her duties, my interlocutor drew on knowledges and forms of expertise that diverge significantly from a one-world reality. Significantly, the object status of heirloom weapons is not a given: it must be achieved. To ensure that heirlooms from across the archipelago would enact their expected museum role as inert objects required the work of skilled experts; even this might not suffice to keep them completely inactive. Someone who interacted with such heirlooms on a regular basis risked becoming the untoward target of their dissatisfaction. Fortunately, the curator had help: from the loving attention of her husband, who had become her guardian after his death; this was an ongoing relation that required active attention on her part, as well.

Already, kris gather up several partly connected worlds. These include the one-world world that treats kris as inanimate objects. That is the world of the colonial state that appropriated them, the world of international museology, which developed universal standards for the care, display and transport of objects, and the world of nation-states and of cultural – and human – heritage. At the same time, kris figure in uncommoning worlds, gathering up the diverse interests of Dutch collectors, Indonesian politicians, and dukuns. But other practices add even more to this array.

I did not think to ask what kinds of dukuns performed in the National Museum, how often, and what exactly they did. *Dukun* is both a Javanese and Indonesian word; it refers both to specifically Javanese experts and to Indonesian practitioners in general of what anthropology terms "traditional healing" or "magic." Moreover, heirlooms themselves have different requirements, depending on where in the archipelago they come from. Thus, I turn now to Klungkung in order to follow developments involving one kris and a lance tip from the collection my interlocutor in the Netherlands curates.

In 2008, the Klungkung regency observed the centenary of the Dutch conquest. Annual commemorations had begun in 1984, when Klungkung's *bupati*, or regency head, was also the ranking member of the former dynasty; they now form a regular date on the yearly calendar. In 2003, voters had elected for the first time a bupati who not only had no ties to Klungkung's royal clan but was also a commoner. Descendants of the Klungkung dynasty began to seek alternative paths to involvement in local affairs. As part of a larger mission, they proposed to the bureaucrats responsible for planning the centenary a second "community committee" made up of Klungkung princes. The government would still organise official ceremonies belonging to the routines of the state (such as a flag ceremony with speeches by important Balinese politicians on the morning of the centenary), but in addition, the community committee would focus on tradition (Ind. *adat*) and religion (Ind. *agama*) – or, as a committee member told me in more resonant terms, relations to invisible forces (Bal. *niskala*). Their contributions culminated in a massive sacrificial rite following the flag ceremony, to "cleanse the earth"

of the blood shed during conquest. But the highlight, and arguably more significant achievement, occurred the day before in acts centred on two heirlooms on loan from the National Museum.

Loss of direct influence over local affairs was hardly all that motivated the princes. In addition to politics as usual, an uncommoning politics was also at work. A key committee member told me that three years earlier, at a rite at the family's shrines in the temple complex of Besakih, he had suddenly been struck by an idea. It was not, he insisted, *his* idea; he was merely the "postman." Its source was evidently clan ancestors, as shown by his kinsmen's enthusiastic response. It was no less than a plan to renovate the world through a series of rites, organised by the theme of *tri hita karana*, the three causes of well-being. These began with a full complement of death rituals for all deceased clan members who had not yet received them, followed by refurbishing the two sets of primary family shrines in the capital, Smarapura, and (eventually) the family shrines at Besakih.[10] These acts created harmonious relations with gods and ancestors. Phase two was the animal sacrifice at the centenary, which would tend to nature or the environment (Ind. *lingkungan alam*). This was not one-world nature but rather aimed at harmonious relations with *buta-kala*, in some accounts malign forces and in others the constituent elements of the physical world. This would reset time at year zero, he said. Phase three would be a coronation to revive Klungkung kingship for the good of the people. The new ruler would work side by side with the government to ensure human welfare.[11]

There were, notably, no kris in this vision. Still, the committee made every effort to procure them. Two years earlier, the regency of Badung, the location of Bali's capital, had commemorated the centenary of the defeat of its own ruling families. For that occasion, they had managed to borrow Badung's most famous kris from the National Museum.[12] The committee sought to bring Klungkung's renowned heirlooms for the occasion both from Jakarta and from elsewhere in Bali, though they did not succeed. After considerable negotiation, they did receive permission from the National Museum for two less familiar heirlooms to visit.[13] Both had been identified in the 1930s, when the colonial state established indirect rule across Bali by restoring some measure of authority to defeated regions such as Klungkung. As part of this endeavour, the Dutch resident toyed with the idea of returning their heirlooms to the monarchs he installed. In anticipation, clan elders had travelled to the capital, where they identified one kris as the famous I Durga Dingkul, a second as I Arda Walika (which had a spectacular sheath and hilt; indeed, they wanted those transferred to I Durga Dingkul), and a lance tip as I Baru Gnit. While the plan never materialised, memory of these identifications remained. No one could explain to me why efforts to borrow I Durga Dingkul (or the kris I Tanda Langlang, which committee members assured me had also been identified and which they also tried to borrow) failed, but the museum did send I Arda Walika and I Baru Gnit to Klungkung.

While not the heirlooms of legend, they might as well have been, given their reception. I was among the staggering number of people waiting outside the Puri Agung, residence of Klungkung's late (colonially appointed) king and his eldest and highest-ranking sons and their families, when Javanese museum staff, the bupati and committee members arrived with the raucous crowd, ceremonial umbrellas and marching gamelan orchestra that had greeted the venerable guests at Klungkung's border. Jostling for a view, people held cellphones and cameras above their heads to snap photos as the head of the community committee (and future king) announced the heirlooms' arrival, their names and their historic importance over a microphone. White cloth was spread on the ground with small offerings laid upon it, and they were carried inside to Puri Agung's renovated shrines for a massive rite. On its completion, they were marched outside again with their entourage to meet up with other powerful things. Processing through Smarapura, the heirlooms greeted key places associated with the dynasty, primarily branch line compounds, with a long and poignant halt before the few structures that remain of the former Puri Agung near the crossroads. They had been carried out from that Puri to the crossroads to confront Dutch troops and then were collected from the bodies of the dead. The day ended when the visiting heirlooms mounted the steep stairs to the bupati's office to receive more offerings.[14] After spending the night under police guard, they were brought down the following day to witness the sacrifice. With their police and museum escorts, they were then dispatched back to Jakarta.

Over many years in Bali, I had never seen such dramatic and overt expressions of emotion as I did in response to the heirlooms' arrival, procession and overnight residence. Some people were in tears; others later told me that their eyes had watered even if the tears had not fallen down their cheeks. During the procession, the future king had carried I Arda Walika, and his "postman" half-brother held I Baru Gnit. Other male kin

supported them, holding their elbows. The prince with the lance tip became completely overcome at the crossroads. Some opined that he had fallen into a trance; others thought he was overwhelmed by contact with an entity that had belonged to his ancestors and had not seen home for one hundred years.

Over the course of these events, both I Arda Walika and I Baru Gnit acquired new powers, even from a one-world perspective, not only by arousing intense affect but also by mediating political possibilities. I focus, however, on brief moments where the overlapping but diverging worlds of the museum and the committee became evident.

For the museum, these artifacts belonged to the nation. (By contrast, members of Klungkung's royal clan considered them rightly theirs.) Four staff members and some half-dozen guards escorted them on the flight to Bali. Klungkung's bupati had to meet them at the airport, a requirement that kept the objects within the sphere of the state. There, he opened the wooden box that contained the heirlooms and removed each from its sheath to describe it – public proof of their safe arrival. The museum imposed further stipulations regarding their treatment. No one could touch them, for example, without donning gloves to protect the metal from contaminants such as oils and dirt; the bupati complied with this rule at the airport meet-and-greet. Particularly important was that whatever was done for and to the heirlooms during their sojourn in Klungkung had to be *undone* before their return to Jakarta.

Balinese usages made these rules difficult to follow. At the ritual inside the Puri Agung, the priest who "dressed" the heirlooms (in red cloth with gold leaf designs) treated them in exactly the same way as he did the rest of the kris being feted on the same occasion, kris more recently acquired by members of the family. As is usually the case when performing rites for bladed weapons, he did not wear gloves. This agitated the watching staff. Suitably admonished, the brothers who carried the heirlooms did their best: one donned a pair of work gloves (rather than the white cotton gloves curators wear, which would show dirt[15]); the other tore off pieces of the ubiquitous white cloth used for the procession and the rites to wrap around his hands.

While such gestures are small breaches of protocol, they differentiate museological routines that aim to preserve an object's material integrity from rites aimed at empowerment. A gulf began to open from the moment the heirlooms arrived in Klungkung through acts that turned them into something more than artifacts – perhaps (this remains to be seen) something more than they were before conquest: *Betara Pajenengan*. The word *Betara*, usually translated as "god," refers to a broad range of forces, including properly ritualised ancestors, deceased rulers and high priests, and potent things. *Pajenengan*, "regalia," connotes origins and sources of well-being (Wiener 1995).

The transformation began at the border, when the kris and lance tip were greeted with offerings and sheltered with umbrellas. The rites at the Puri shrines were pivotal, however. There, the kris and lance tip received the full array of offerings, at the highest level possible, to empower them. Balinese blades receive such offerings every 210 days, though not on this scale. Offerings for metal are dominated by the colour red, which is associated with Brahma, the force of creation; his element fire, vital for forging metal; and blood, as in battle, but also the blood of the unfortunate chickens sacrificed for the occasion. Unless the National Museum had employed Balinese experts, these weapons had experienced nothing like this for a century.[16] I missed the deactivation rites, though I presume that the museum's delegates ensured these occurred. Klungkung friends later informed me, however, that the princes had built a new shrine for the two weapons, so they could access them from afar. I can't help but wonder what effect this has had on the museum's quiet.

Inside the shrines, yet another moment of disjunctive connection transpired. As a by-product, the rites produced holy water (*wangsuh pada*) – that is, water imbued with the potency of the feted weapons. As usual, it was distributed to all in attendance: sprinkled on heads, and poured into cupped hands twice – first to sip, and then to brush over heads and faces. Someone suggested that the prince doing this should include the delegates from Jakarta, who might appreciate receiving this auspicious liquid associated with the treasures they had accompanied. I jotted down the following dialogue:

> *Cokorda*: "Here is holy water (Ind. *air suci*) from the heirlooms you brought."
>
> *Museum staff*: "Where did the water come from?"
>
> *Cokorda*: "It's holy water."
>
> *Staff*: "But what is the water's source? A well?"
>
> *Cokorda*: "No, it's piped water (*air suling*)."
>
> *Staff*: "Does it contain bacteria?"
>
> Cokorda (startled): "What?"
>
> *Staff*: "Bacteria. Has the water been treated for bacteria?"
>
> *Cokorda (a bit impatient)*: "Yes, yes."

At that point, a friend of mine couldn't resist adding the following: "Mister, *Tuhan* (God) already has removed the bacteria. It's perfectly safe!"[17]

For all interlocutors, water is subject to purification. The inquiring visitor speaks for metropolitan Jakarta; like a foreign tourist, he worries if it is safe to drink the water in this provincial town. My friend found his concern ridiculous. Rites like this turn ordinary water into something better: a conduit between humans and potent forces. The Cokorda's answer – that the water is *air suling*, piped water – offers a fine equivocation. (I should note here that the Cokorda lived in Jakarta for many years.) Balinese rites start with spring water. Often, bamboo pipes (*suling*) lead out from the source to make collection easy.[18] Clearly, however, sanitation and rites do beneficent water in different ways and for different ends.

Kris gather a host of concerns as they enact different realities through uncommoning practices. Yet as they move through these different collectives, from Indonesia to the Netherlands, from Bali to Jakarta and Jakarta to Bali, only mild conflicts emerge among the worlds they help to enact. Their very mobility contributes to obscuring what those worlds do not have in common.

On the Beach

Very different forms of uncommoning with more problematic consequences are rallied by the natural-social past-present of Bali's landscape. Coalescing (mostly) different politics and the accumulated outcome of past concerns unlike those involving kris, landscape assembles an even more entangled multiplicity.[19] Kris fasten past imperial projects (the Majapahit Empire, the Dutch East Indies) to more recent ambitions (Indonesian nation building, the revitalisation of former ruling classes). Territory sutures a much older non-human past – Indonesia as a volcanic archipelago, a chain of islands continually renewed by explosive subterranean upheavals – to the still largely unspeakable past that brought Suharto to power, as well as the ongoing legacy of his regime, by means of the constant effort to create land, life and well-being. Bali's territory thus encompasses considerably more than topography. It comprises not only beaches, volcanoes and ravines but also temples, mass graves and luxury hotels and villas; the living, the ancestors and the restless dead reside side by side with tourists. Entwining geology, religion and political economy, territory fuses land and water with ways of living and dying, especially of dying badly. In this section, I offer a cosmogeography, a mapping of practices and processes that produce coexisting and conflicting worlds on one tiny island.

As part of one-world nature, Indonesia's archipelago forms part of the circum-Pacific ring of fire. As the meeting point of several tectonic plates, Indonesia is a highly geologically active region marked by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Such events gave birth to Bali and continue to shape its ongoing existence. Volcanoes run west to east across the island. Mount Agung, a stratovolcano that towers nearly ten thousand feet above sea level, is the island's highest point; to its northwest lies Batur with its dramatic caldera and crater lake, over five thousand feet above sea level. Volcanic ash formed and replenishes the rich soil that for a millennium humans have worked to grow rice, irrigating the fields with the water flowing down deep ravines from the mountains to the sea. Volcanic eruptions also yield the basaltic andesite and tuff that people use to construct shrines.

Water, rice and relations with more-than-human forces form the foundations of Bali's cosmogeography. The gods, to whom the land ultimately belongs, dwell in the mountains; they are periodically invited to come down to be feted in Bali's thousands of temples. Bali's most important temple, Besakih – where that Klungkung prince received his ancestors' message, and home of the god Tolangkir – lies on Agung's slopes.

Nothing remains stable in this place of earth rumblings that periodically explode in fire. Even the apparently solid material of rock lacks permanence. In no time at all, stone structures are covered in moss and begin to crack. For a millennium, the Balinese have rebuilt shrines, and with them gods and social relations. A fragile cosmogeography, it requires constant recomposing.

In the 1960s, that cosmogeography became entangled with mass death. A piece by archaeologist Denis Byrne (1998) first drew my attention to these relations. While living in Bali in the early 1990s, he wondered at the dearth of surface indications of two relatively recent eruptions: of Mount Agung in 1963–64 and of horrific political violence two years later.

I discovered Byrne's article while teaching a course on the legacies of the Cold War. As Kwon (2008) notes, that bipolar conflict was far from cold in Southeast Asia, which was the key arena in which the United States played dominoes with the USSR at the cost of millions of human lives (not to mention those of other species in mainland theatres of war). The materials I use to teach increasingly challenge one-world world politics and history. They look at forces that involve more than human society – a field of endless conflicts over wealth and

ideas – and nature – the literal ground on which such conflicts are played out, or the source of resources over which those conflicts rage and out of which economies are built. When Americans speak of haunting in relation to US policies in Southeast Asia, particularly the war in Vietnam, they speak metaphorically. That haunting is literal, however, nearly everywhere in Southeast Asia. The dead act in and on the course of ongoing events: as ancestors, if their bodies were fortunate enough to receive the appropriate rites and if mutual obligations obtain between the living and the dead; or as ghosts, if they died bad deaths, as so many killed during the Cold War did. The unprecedented number of bad deaths has shaped forms of life, and the landscape itself, in ways imperceptible to one-world thought.

In Indonesia, Cold War violence took the form of the massacre of 500,000 to 3,000,000 people (estimates vary considerably) over a mere few months, beginning in October 1965 and ending around March 1966. Those killed were accused of being members or affiliates of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), the largest Communist party outside of China and the Soviet Union at the time. The PKI constituted one of several rivals for political power, including Islamic organisations and the armed forces, which Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, sought to keep in delicate balance. The balance shattered on 1 October 1965. What may have been an internal dispute within different factions of the armed forces resulted in the kidnapping and assassination of six generals. Interested parties took advantage of the situation to rid themselves of rivals. Ranking officer General Suharto called the incident an attempted coup by the PKI, which would, unless stopped, soon start killing all non-Communists.[20] Orchestrated by the army (and with the encouragement of the United States and allied states), the killings put Suharto and his New Order in charge of Indonesia for over 30 years. The New Order treated any opposition or even a whiff of atheism as evidence of Communist leanings, which were subject to reprisal. Indonesians generally remained silent about the killings; most still are.

Bali was one of several areas that experienced particularly intense violence. Approximately 1,500 people died when Mount Agung erupted in 1963–64; 80,000 to 150,000 died at the hands of paramilitary groups, neighbours, and even kin in 1965–66. Leslie Dwyer and Degung Santikarma (2007a, 2007b) have argued persuasively that the killings had an immense impact on Balinese life. Politics, with its raucous disagreements, was off the table; Balinese channelled their aspirations into the safer spheres of religion and culture. These became, moreover, valuable commodities, as Bali – and Balinese culture – became a major target for New Order development in the form of tourism. That development, which has, if anything, expanded since Suharto's resignation, has capitalised Balinese land, labour and ways of life. It has become impossible to grow rice in long-fertile areas, as the land is now too valuable. Increasingly, those living near tourist centres find themselves consigned to wage labour in service industries.

A full appreciation of the legacy of the killings, however, requires attending to what exceeds society and politics as usual, as well as nature, especially in the apparently peaceful places where tourists reside. Here, Byrne's (1998) report is crucial. As he tells it, one evening, he happened to meet an expat whose Balinese ex-husband had managed the Oberoi Hotel on the beach in Seminyak in the 1970s.[21] She told him that the hotel's grounds were renowned for ghosts. She discovered why from local women: thousands of Communists lay buried in a mass grave on the site.

The Oberoi is hardly the only luxury hotel built on top of the dead. In 2010, a Balinese history student told the following to a journalist: "I have spoken to developers who frequently come across bodies when digging foundations for tourist hotels in Kuta and Sanur … They instruct the builders to ignore the skeletons and to keep on building" (Simanowitz 2010). Pre-colonially, or so the stories go, it was common across Southeast Asia to bury human sacrifices in the foundation of important buildings to maintain their stability. These stories offer a disturbing echo of that practice.

Many Balinese who lived through those troubling times know where killings took place or where bodies were buried. Often, both occurred in locations that Balinese term *tenget*: dangerous or haunted. These are places where ghosts and spirits live; Balinese, therefore, do not. Such places include not only cemeteries but also beaches and ravines. Only cemeteries match Euro-American understandings of haunted terrain; beaches and river gorges, on the other hand, are geographical features that Euro-Americans find appealing. That made and makes these locations immensely attractive to investors in Bali's tourist industry, many of whom have been Jakarta generals and politicians, who made good use of their power to zone these areas for development. In addition, such places, unsuited for agriculture or human habitation, could be picked up for a song. Covering up evidence of the deaths that lay at the very foundation of New Order power initially may have added to the allure of such sites. In short, an entire industry was

built on top of the bodies of those whose deaths enabled those profiting from it to come to power.

Since the fall of the New Order, awareness of these spaces of death is slowly moving from whispers or tacit knowledge into print; this has often been spurred by more recent events. Take the elderly man living near Kuta Beach who pointed out to Degung Santikarma the location of a mass grave near the site of the bombings of a Kuta Beach night club in 2002 (Santikarma 2005). Non-human actors are uncovering bodies, as well. In 2013, large waves exposed skeletons at Cucukan Beach in Gianyar.[22] In addition, the dead have themselves become increasingly insistent. In 2015, for instance, villagers exhumed the bodies of nine victims of the killings from a grave on top of which a road had been built, after a series of possessions, "paranormal" sightings and suicides led priests to conclude they wanted a proper cremation (Topsfield and Rosa 2015).

Even before they became sites of violent death, Balinese already associated beaches with death and harmful forces. This returns us to cosmogeography through an observation endlessly recycled in both scholarly and tourist literature: the differential value that Balinese practices impose on mountains and the sea. Upstream, toward the mountains and the gods, is *kaja*. Shrines and temples are oriented in that direction; people feel that sleeping with their heads upstream is also beneficial. Downstream, toward the sea, *kelod* has the opposite value. The shores and the ocean itself are filled with the buta-kala mentioned in relation to the large animal sacrifice during the centennial. Balinese arts represent buta-kala as figures of excessive appetite, with bulging eyes, fangs and misshapen bodies. Greedy, angry and overflowing with unchecked appetites, they require periodic gifts to keep them in check; they also are necessary for life, however, as they are the constituent elements of bodies and the material world. Such associations make oceans the proper place to dispose of potential pollutants. Periodically, temple gods are brought down to the beach for purifying rites. Cremations and further death rituals that turn the dead into ancestors similarly involve processions to the sea, to toss ashes and debris into the waves.

Thus, neither beaches nor mountains are merely facts of one-world nature. Let us return to Besakih, the temple on Agung's slopes. A sprawling complex, Besakih contains myriad smaller temples, most maintained by specific descent groups (such as the one belonging to Klungkung's princes). Also, there is a special temple to which the spirits of all the properly ritualised dead are brought. The tripartite shrine in Besakih's central courtyard, made of black basaltic andesite, is one of very few sites where all Balinese, regardless of descent, may make offerings. Many do during the temple's annual ten-day rite, "All the Gods Come Down" (*Betara Turun Kabeh*). Much less frequently (purportedly once every hundred years), Besakih is also the location of a massive ritual (*Eka Dasa Rudra*) directed to the buta-kala, which involves the sacrifice of a variety of unusual animals to represent the contents of the world (clearly *not* the one-world world). This rite, organised by Klungkung's colonially installed ruler, was under way for the first time in recorded history when Agung erupted in 1963. As already noted, volcanic eruptions, devastating when they occur, lead to fertility and prosperity over time. In the era of development (in Indonesian, *pembangunan*, from a root that means both "to build" and "to wake up"), some of the debris that eruptions produce – in the form of sand, gravel and rock – is arguably more valuable than rice. For years, I passed trucks ferrying such material to construction sites. Their proximity clearly facilitated the erection of tourist infrastructure. Balinese and outsiders alike have profited from the sale of these volcanic and divine gifts.

Agung's eruption during an ambitious rite to "cleanse the earth" is pertinent to some stories that circulate about the 1965–66 killings. There are those who interpret the eruption as a sign that the rite had failed to placate the buta-kala. Some accounts of why people killed their own neighbours and kin therefore uncommon explanations that refer to army directives, fear that one had to kill or be killed, or anxieties that enemies were everywhere. Some wonder if buta-kala, wanting blood spilled on the ground as in animal sacrifices, possessed the killers. For such narrators, this would explain why some killers did more than kill: they hacked up bodies, ate organs or drank blood.

Beaches, in short, like village cemeteries and also ravines (increasingly also sites for development, not only of more luxury hotels but also of villas built and occupied by expatriates), became killing fields precisely because they already were uncanny. Not only buta-kala but also other potentially dangerous beings inhabit such places. They include entities that Euro-Americans tend to label spirits and that Balinese call, as a group, *tanana* ("not there"), such as the *tonya* and *gamang*, who live in large trees (especially banyan trees, which Suharto's Golkar party adopted as its eerie symbol), and the *wong samar* ("obscure people"). Many once were humans who died bad deaths. In turn, all of that killing, the thousands of bad deaths, amplified the creepiness of these locations.

Uncommoning of several kinds has made an appearance in this account of Balinese territory. The nature known to geology is uncommoned by the cosmos made

through ritual. Massacre is uncommoned by possession, and relations to the dead uncommon projects of development. What strikes me as most worth emphasising is the uncommoning that occurs at the meeting place of tourism (an industry on which many Balinese now depend for survival), contemporary Indonesian politics, and Balinese practices nowadays commoned as religion. The places at which the tourists stay stack layers of nature and culture, past and present, the living and the dead, Balinese and foreigners, harmony and violence, and political economy and spiritual economy. Here, the making of a one-world world is entangled with the making of other worlds. These overlapping worlds generate intersections that tourists may find charming: the offerings hotel employees or servants make in and next to the places they are staying, or the processions of colourfully dressed Balinese they see at the seaside. At times, the intersections are less delightful: Balinese occasionally talk about tourists who go crazy or see ghosts, requiring intervention by local healers.

Concluding Remarks

The two things this article has examined form sites where plural worlds overlap. Each thing gathers up diverse actors and concerns and partly connects them. What Balinese once made with heirloom kris, for instance, has everything to do with why they ended up in the National Museum. Their removal to the capital in turn allowed I Arda Walika and I Baru Gnit to be enrolled in efforts to recompose the place of the former royal family in the political and more-than-political life of Klungkung, Bali, and the nation, and to acquire new capacities to assemble collectives. Similarly, practices that make Bali's landscape – efforts to produce and restore prosperity – have turned some spaces into the kinds of places where people might kill and developers might build.

But there is an important difference, not only in the specific politics and the specific histories these things pull into their orbit, but in the degree to which the worlds each thing makes clash. This difference is in part due to the mobility possible for kris and the immobility of land. But it is more crucially a consequence of the coordination (Mol 2002) that different projects may require.

Are the heirlooms that reside in Jakarta identical with those that visited Klungkung? Yes, but also no. In Bali, they became enmeshed with different others; they composed different possible worlds; they did reality in a different way. But there was no need to coordinate these different enactments, to negotiate across the worlds they generated. In short, they did not come into major conflict.

This is not the case with the bodies that lie under luxury hotels on Bali's beaches, however. Suharto's resignation prompted a small but growing movement to exhume the mass graves created in 1965–66 – an especially urgent matter as those who know their locations are aging and dying. However inconvenient, it was possible to exhume the nine bodies buried beneath a road in one Balinese village when the dead demanded it. Perhaps more of the dead will make such demands in the future. But how could bodies under the Oberoi, or those caught in the foundations of other hotels, be exhumed, even if there were sufficient political will (which there isn't)? Mass graves are the outcome of atrocities. To uncover them would, as Santikarma (2005) argues, damage Bali's brand as a harmonious paradise. For the many Balinese whose livelihoods now depend on the tourist industry, this would be a disaster. Thus, territory brings into view clashes among forms of and ways of making prosperity, even for Balinese: those resulting from maintaining proper relations between the living and the dead and between humans and other-than-human forces, and those associated with the commoning force of capitalism.

Latour (2002) suggests that what is now uncommon might form a common world, a world carefully composed to include many concerns without making those of any existing world the default. This process would begin by asking how specific collectives are made; whether they are made well enough to stand up to challenges; and if they may be extended, and how. The concerns brought together in Bali's landscape show how complicated – even impossible – that might be.

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Notes

1 My account of Palapa is taken from Barker (2005).
2 I have followed Indonesian and Balinese usage of the word *kris*, which does not mark the distinction between singular and plural.
3 During the workshop in Davis, California, someone began to use *common* and *uncommon* as verbs. I find the emphasis on process helpful.
4 Like others in the field of science studies, Law (2015) argues that nature is made rather than given, even in the global North.
5 Latour (2002) speaks of a common (rather than one-world) world, arguing that religion, science and economics have too hastily proclaimed such a world exists, rather than recognising the complexities of composing one. Law (2015) is more attentive to the colonial (and other) relations of power embedded in such universals.
6 For more on both Klungkung's kris and this process, see Wiener (1994, 1995, 2007).
7 Kris Day occurs at Museum Bronbeek in Arnhem, a military museum that houses artifacts of colonial rule. Colonial and recent media (for example, novels, TV, film, Internet), as well as anecdotes, provide ample material to fuel such concerns. For instance, several Dutch acquaintances recalled a TV series entitled *Kris Pusaka* (*Heirloom Kris*) about a kris in a Dutch museum that wanted to return to Indonesia.
8 Friends in Klungkung told me that Dutch officials, aided by pro-colonial Balinese, polluted Klungkung's heirloom kris before their attack, rendering them impotent (Wiener 1995).
9 Many stories circulated about both Suharto's interest in "mystical" Javanese practices (*kebatinan*) (for example, see Bourchier 1984) and his powerful kris, gifts from both persons and non-humans (see *Nine Lounge* n.d.).
10 All centenary activities took place in Smarapura, Klungkung's capital.
11 This occurred in October of 2010. By contrast, Badung's 2006 centenary actually concluded with a coronation. Revivals of royal families have been going on across the archipelago, and the new rulers meet regularly. The dual structure of authority reverts to a colonial model even as it reiterates a national pattern, inherited from the colonial state, of contrasting office (*dinas*) and tradition (*adat*) (see Warren 1993).
12 The Indonesian curator with whom I spoke in Amsterdam actually accompanied Badung's kris to Bali, but she was otherwise occupied during Klungkung's centenary. The Klungkung committee also followed Badung precedent by commissioning a procession of kris and palm leaf texts, the invention of a Balinese artist.
13 A major obstacle was the enormous cost of insurance, which exceeded the committee's budget. The committee succeeded only with aid from the minister of communications and the (ethnically Balinese) minister of culture and tourism, both of whom attended the centenary. The committee also tried to bring I Bangawan Canggu, which was, along with I Durga Dingkul, the dynasty's most famous heirloom kris, to the centenary. While none of the elders I met in the 1980s ever mentioned this, their sons now agree that I Bangawan Canggu has been at Puri Sidemen in Karangasem for centuries (Pedersen 2008). I was never able to understand why they didn't succeed in having I Bangawan Canggu attend; it is possible that someone brought holy water from Sidemen.
14 This was a last-minute change. The committee expected the heirlooms to spend the night at the Puputan Klungkung monument, next to which a large array of offerings had been laid out. I suspect that the Jakarta entourage insisted on the regency office on the grounds of security.
15 Cotton gloves constitute traditional equipment for handling metal objects in museum collections, although experts now prefer nitrile.
16 The family priest conducting the rite in Klungkung was not, however, a dukun.
17 The "God" of this communication is a further uncommon. The Indonesian *Tuhan* indexes more than a shared national language. It speaks to historical compromises over the status of Islam in Indonesia's founding, given the major role Muslim organisations played in opposing colonial rule. Hence, Indonesia has five founding principles purportedly shared by all Indonesians. The first is *Tuhan yang maha esa*, one almighty divinity. This was a tricky proposition for the Balinese, whose practices do not focus on the singular deity of concern to peoples of the book. In the 1950s, Balinese leaders, to gain recognition as followers of Hinduism (a "world" religion), declared that ultimately all deities were emanations of one. But did a deity make the water at this rite? God, of course, is great; removing bacteria would be a snap for an omnipotent deity. Therefore, my friend's words certainly could make sense to a Muslim; but like most ecumenical language, they obscure an uncommon.
18 Thanks to Richard Fox (personal communication) for noting this bilingual play on words.
19 I say "mostly" because the former kingdom of Klungkung is knotted into some of those tangles. Klungkung rulers (presumably including the one just coronated) have a special relation with the temple of Besakih on Mount Agung and Betara Tolangkir, the deity associated with the mountain. Moreover, the kris I Bangawan Canggu, a gift from the ruler of Majapahit, could shake or bind the earth (Wiener 1995).
20 By taking control of the media, Suharto also shaped the narrative through which these events were discussed.
21 Construction of luxury hotels on south Bali beaches began in the 1970s. The Bali Hyatt was erected on Sanur Beach in 1973, and the Oberoi in Seminyak in 1978. See Trauts (2007).
22 See *Indo Surf Life* (2013). People I knew in Klungkung mentioned casually that people had been killed on beaches there, as well.

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