

Panel proposal for the 2022 EUROSEAS conference

Title: Animism and Extractivism in Southeast Asia

Convener: Judith Bovensiepen (*University of Kent, UK*)

Abstract

Southeast Asia has been a prime target for land grabbing and extractivist projects in the 21st century, from logging, palm oil plantations, gold, coal and nickel mining, to oil and gas extraction. Underlying the extraction of raw materials from the environment at large scale are modernist assumptions that posit a fundamental separation between nature and culture. At first sight, such naturalist assumptions differ drastically from the ways in which many rural people across Southeast Asia relate to the environment – some of whom have animist orientations, attributing sentience, subjectivity or interiority to the non-human world. So how do people with animist orientations (which are often held alongside other religious affiliations) experience and respond to extractivist projects? How does it affect and transform relations they have with each other and with the environment? Does extractivism lead to a reinvigoration of animist practices? Or are animist orientations weakened by the encroachments of capitalist developments? When do extractivist projects actualise difference? And when do they lead to transformations or co-optations of human-environment or corporate/state-society relations?

To answer these questions, the panel will engage with debates in social anthropology and political ecology on new animism studies, cosmopolitics and political ontology, as well as critical materialist approaches to extractivism that emphasise the uneven distribution of power inherent in contemporary geopolitics. This approach will allow us to theorise how multiple contradictory ways of relating to the environment co-exist within the same setting and to examine how localised religious and cultural dynamics can infuse global political and economic processes.

Format: There is not yet a list of panel participants. If the panel abstract is accepted by the Euroseas selection committee, the convener will approach potential contributors who have previously expressed an interest in the topic, and will also circulate the panel abstract for open submission. The goal is to invite contributors presenting case studies from different parts of Southeast Asia in a single session (90 min), and to bring together speakers from different disciplinary backgrounds and diverse academic institutions.

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