Introduction

The Shape of the Land

When you visit a village in southern Manggarai, one of the first things that people say to you after they have gently shaken your hand and offered a greeting is “This is the shape of our land here.” They do so in a manner that combines humorous apology with modest pride. The statement implies both “this is the way we do things here” and “what you see is what you get.” This is not a land of modern houses, busy highways, or electricity, but of steep slopes and stony fields, where hardworking people enjoy the products of their land and labor. If you visit a person’s house for the first time, they will often adopt the same tone, looking around at dirt floors or bamboo walls, saying, “This is the shape of our house here.” Similarly, if you scramble down steep paths to visit someone in their garden-hut, they are likely to declare, with a laugh, “Eh, Auntie, this is the shape of our field here.” These statements seem to stress a connection between people and place: “our house here” may be a humble dwelling, but it is ours and we are part of it; “our field” may be perched on a stony mountainside, but it is our land and we eat its produce.

Taking its cue from the many everyday ways in which people in west Flores emphasize or humorously comment on their connection with fields, houses, and villages, this book draws a cumulative portrait of Manggarai places, revealing their shape, significance, and value. It describes the intimate connections between the land of Manggarai and its rural inhabitants, and shows how these connections are remembered, practiced, and debated in both ritual actions and everyday life. However, because Manggarai people stress the importance of paths as well as houses, rivers as well as fields, and movements as well as settlements, the book uses the notion of landscape as a way of drawing out the mobile entanglements of people with their historical and contemporary environment. This is a potent landscape, replete with
personal and collective memories, but it is also a landscape formed by people, spirits, and goods on the move.

In 1997, shortly after arriving in the Manggarai region of eastern Indonesia to begin my fieldwork, I visited the mountain village of Wae Rebo for the first time. With a new friend from Ruteng, I hitched a lift with a priest travelling to the church at Denge, driving for many hours along a bumpy stone road through numerous villages. That night, we stayed in the house of the head of the local administrative unit (kepala desa). The next morning, the head, his daughters, and the local unit's security guard accompanied us on the steep walk, through dense rainforest, up to Wae Rebo. Reaching the summit of one section of the path, I looked to the south and saw the houses and fields of the lowlands beneath us, with the strangely shaped island of Pulau Mules just off the coast. Three hours later, emerging from another dense section of forest, I glimpsed the village of Wae Rebo for the first time. Resting snugly inside a bowl of mountain ridges was a grassy village yard encircled by a number of houses, including four round structures with tall, thatched, conical roofs sloping to the floor. My companions emphasized to me (in Indonesian) that this was a unique village: nowhere else in Manggarai were original specimens of such traditional housing to be found. This was why the district head (Bupati) of the Manggarai region was currently planning a visit to the village, to see for himself its unique housing forms.

My memory of that first, steep descent through coffee gardens into the center of Wae Rebo and my first entry into the dark interior space of a round house (mbaru niang) are now something of a blur, but the confusion provoked within me is not. The village was beautiful, its houses were clearly fascinating, its residents seemed friendly enough, but was it an appropriate site for my research? Wasn’t Wae Rebo rather too remote? Did I really want to live somewhere unique, somewhere that was due to receive an official state visit? How should I know when I had found “my” fieldsite?

Our visit was a short one, and we returned to the lowlands that afternoon. I was keen to get back to Ruteng and to investigate other possible fieldsites. As we wearily climbed back down the mountain paths, my friend asked the kepala desa where Wae Rebo children went to school. He replied that they went to school in Lenggos, in the lowlands, but they didn’t travel there from Wae Rebo every day. This was because Wae Rebo also had a site in the lowlands, called Kombo, where many of its villagers lived. Wae Rebo people were strong walkers, he told us, as they were always travelling up and down the mountain between their two villages. Sure enough, having met no one
on the path when we climbed up earlier in the day, on our way back down we bumped into several men carrying large sacks on their shoulders, their machetes rattling in their holders as they briskly climbed. As he described Kombo to my friend, the kepala desa said the site had been founded by order of the local government and mentioned some kind of related dispute. Frustrated by my poor language skills, I struggled to understand the details of this conflict. However, my curiosity had been aroused, and Wae Rebo suddenly seemed a more possible fieldsite. Why, I wondered, had the government ordered the community to build a lowland site? How often did people walk up and down between the sites, and what motivated their journeys? What was it like for schoolchildren raised in the highlands to move to the lowlands to attend school?

A week later, with a photocopied Manggarai-Indonesian dictionary weighing down my bag, I moved to Wae Rebo to begin fieldwork. Though initially based solely in the highlands, over the months that followed I gradually began to accompany my informants on their journeys to the lowlands or other villages reached by mountain paths. I also began to gain a more complex understanding of the many similarities and differences between Wae Rebo and Kombo as sites and to hear different accounts of their history. Thus, from the start my ethnographic attention was drawn to the historical significance and emotional power of movements within a landscape of named, potent, yet profoundly different places. As my fieldwork progressed, I heard ever more complex stories of the entanglement of places and people, narratives that stressed the metaphysical connections between Wae Rebo-Kombo people and their land, but that also hinted at the dangerous consequences of the intermingling of spilt blood, potent places, and human fate. Thus, this book analyzes the power of a collective, shared landscape shaped by state development policies and responses to religious change, while also taking seriously the intense personal connections between Manggarai individuals and certain places and pathways.

Although this book is unique in exploring the multiple aspects of the power of a Southeast Asian landscape, approaches to power in the region have of course long stressed its distinctive materiality. In his classic paper ([1972] 1990) on “The idea of power in Javanese culture,” Benedict Anderson argued that Javanese power was not, as in the modern European conception, an abstract aspect of a relationship, but was something concrete, an “existential reality” (1990, 22). In the Javanese context, power was amoral, unitary, of a constant quantity, and always embodied, whether accumulated by a person or concentrated in an object or place. Anderson describes how people on Java
constantly read the signs of power’s accumulation or diffusion in the person and environment of a ruler. Powerful persons could be recognized by the heirlooms they amassed about themselves but also by their “poise, restraint and equanimity in all situations” (Brenner 1998, 148). Though there has been a fair amount of comparative regional research on conceptions and consequences of such distinctively Southeast Asian “potency” (Errington 1990, 42) as materialized in both persons and objects, less attention has been paid to the pooling of such potency in the landscape. This is surprising, since Anderson’s original paper emphasized how Javanese power, as an “intangible” and “mysterious” energy, was “manifested in every aspect of the natural world, in stones, trees, clouds, and fire” (1990, 22). Indeed, Anderson stresses that this conception of “the entire cosmos being suffused by a formless, constantly creative energy” is what provides the “basic link” between the “animism” of Javanese villages and “the high metaphysical pantheism of the urban centers” (ibid.).

As subsistence farmers who baptize their children as Catholics and marry in church, but who continue to hold sacrificial rituals in fields and houses and to take note of a range of nonhuman persons, people in rural Manggarai continue to approach their environment in a distinctively “animistic” manner. In Chapter 4, I draw on recent phenomenological approaches to animism that have emphasized its significance, not as a system of beliefs, but as a way of being-in-the-world. These approaches not only help make sense of why, despite Catholic conversion and state-sponsored village resettlement, Manggarai understandings of an animate landscape remain strong, but also help elucidate what is specific about animism in this context. More generally, phenomenological approaches not only to animism but also to landscape, influence this book’s aim of evoking the sensual specificity of, for example, houses as places, or people’s temporal movements along marriage or other paths.

In his work on dwelling and the perception of the environment, Ingold has emphasized how human environments are not neutral backdrops to activity, nor an external world of “nature” over which people gain a conceptual hold (2000, 42). Instead, against what he calls “the logic of construction,” he draws attention to the fundamental historicity of our environments, “forged through the activities of living beings” and continually emerging “in the process of our lives” (ibid., 20). This broadly phenomenological perspective is in striking contrast to the Durkheimian tradition within social anthropology that saw relations among social groups as the natural basis for symbolic classifications mapped onto spatial arrangements (Durkheim and Mauss ([1903] 1965)). It is also an explicit reaction against theoretical approaches that
understand a “landscape” as a distinct way of seeing: “a pictorial way of representing or symbolising surroundings” (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988, 1). For Ingold, those who inhabit landscapes do not confront them as a world “out there” (2000, 173). This means that no meaningful distinction can be drawn between a “natural” landscape of physical features and a “cultural” landscape of representations and projected symbols (2000, 189).

Ingold’s approach to the social temporality of the landscape influences this book’s argument in a number of ways. His emphasis on the ongoing incompleteness of a landscape under perpetual construction is, as we shall see, helpful for understanding the experience of Wae Rebo-Kombo villagers who inhabit a two-placed, partly resettled village and who continue to deal with outsiders’ perceptions of their highland and lowland sites. In his refusal to distinguish between the “built” and “unbuilt” environment (2000, 19), Ingold’s dwelling perspective also helps make sense of the many connections between Manggarai houses and “the land” more generally. Such connections tend not to be emphasized in the literature on Indonesian houses, which, as will become apparent, focuses on architectural form and cosmological order. Perhaps most significantly, at the heart of Ingold’s approach to landscape, as well as his more recent attempt to connect lines and place making (2007), is an acknowledgment of the importance of movement. As mentioned, the Manggarai landscape is one defined by mobility, not only in Wae Rebo-Kombo villagers’ journeys up and down mountain paths, but also in the daily movements between houses and to fields, or the more poignant journeys along marriage paths or to “outside” realms. The significance of this mobility, its role in creating places of value, and the particular challenges it presents, will be explored in detail in the chapters that follow. So too, however, will some of the problems in adopting an exclusively phenomenological approach to place and landscape, at the expense of overemphasizing bodily interaction or neglecting broader political and economic forces.

In adopting a nonrepresentational approach to place and landscape, inspired in part by phenomenological accounts, this book gives equal prominence both to the taken-for-granted, often unspoken aspects of everyday life and to the interpretations offered by Manggarai “experts.” I consider such a stress on the everyday to be important for two reasons, though I acknowledge that it is by no means a simple or uncomplicated strategy. First, this dimension of life has long been neglected in anthropological work on eastern Indonesia, in part of because of the domination of scholarship on this region by the structuralist “Leiden School.” This Dutch school sought to identify cultural areas
Indonesia. Map by Mina Moshkeri
that were sufficiently homogeneous and distinctive to form a separate “field” of investigation (Locher 1968, ix), and “eastern Indonesia” was most definitively identified as such a “field of study” by van Wouden’s *Types of social structure in eastern Indonesia* ([1935] 1968). In this work, van Wouden argued for the importance to eastern Indonesian societies of “connubium” (forms of cross-cousin marriage), associated cosmological classifications based on “oppositions,” and systems of dual sovereignty combining secular power and mystical authority. Research within the Leiden School has produced many detailed ethnographies, and its influence continues to be seen in some of the neostructuralist work of the “Comparative Austronesian Project” based at the Australian National University. However, in its search for cosmological order, the Leiden tradition has not only ignored or trivialized the messy and contradictory aspects of what eastern Indonesian people say and do in everyday life, it has also taken it as given “that a certain kind of coherence existed and could be discovered and given a name” (Keane 2004, 148). By contrast, an ethnographic interest in “the apparently trivial and humdrum” (Gullestad 1991, 480) can be linked to shifts in conceptions of culture—no longer seen as coherent or unified, but increasingly recognized as “negotiated, contested and (sometimes) resisted” (ibid., 480).

Ethnographies of eastern Indonesia that follow in the footsteps of the Leiden tradition have, as Keane notes, tended to approach the task of mapping cosmological coherence by seeking out experts, or “those persons apparently responsible for speaking on behalf of society” (2004, 148). Indeed, many female ethnographers of the region appear to have adopted the fieldwork strategy outlined with admirable honesty by Hoskins, who states that for most of her fieldwork on Sumba “men served as my ‘teachers,’ while women were my ‘companions’” (1993, 9). By contrast, from the beginning of my fieldwork in Wae Rebo-Kombo, I explicitly avoided concentrating only on those with ritual expertise, but aimed to uncover the taken-for-granted, implicit notions in which all Manggarai people might be considered to be “expert.” I focused on somatic experiences of living and sleeping in different kinds of dwellings, and on the practical skills necessary to being and becoming a competent Manggarai person. I listened as much to the stories of women as to those of men, and to “backtalk” (Tsing 1993, 152) as well as the ritual speech that is the focus of so much eastern Indonesian ethnography (see Fox 1988).

However, I chose this strategy not only as a reaction against neostructuralist traditions of anthropological research and a feeling that there must be more to the character of eastern Indonesian life than the rather solemn
practice of ancestral ritual, but also, in the second place, because of work critiquing the ways anthropologists conceptualize human thought and culture. In a series of writings, Bloch (see especially 1991, 1998) has argued that most anthropologists ground their representations in a false theory of cognition, which assumes that everyday thought is “language-like.” This is why both informants and readers may often feel that anthropological accounts are missing something, that they do not convey what a culture “was really like.” By contrast, Bloch himself emphasizes the importance of paying close attention to the nonlinguistic side of practical activities, a side that anthropologists, through their method of participant observation, are uniquely placed to understand. This means that, in order to avoid exoticizing our subjects, anthropologists should focus, not only on formal events, speech, or rituals, or on the verbal explanations given to us, but also on “so-called domestic life and everyday activities” (Carsten 1997, 20).

Nevertheless, explicitly turning one’s attention to the taken-for-granted, unspoken aspects of daily life is by no means a straightforward or easy strategy. Marianne Gullestad, for one, has cautioned that, while appearing “transparent and simple,” the actual meanings of the idea of everyday life are “both complex and variable” (1991, 480). Certainly, socioeconomic position, gender, age, and other differences within any society mean that what is considered “everyday” by one person may be experienced as “extraordinary” by another. More significantly, and as Gullestad notes, not all societies can be said to necessarily have an “everyday life” in the Western (in her case, Norwegian and home-based) sense of the word (ibid., 481). In Manggarai, there is no one, local, positive conception of something we might call everyday life. In particular, there is no sense that such a sphere could be mapped onto the “domestic.” Instead, there could be said to be a number of axes of difference between different styles of activity, in which a more ordinary or humble way of life is contrasted with a more extraordinary, unknown, or ancestrally focused one. One such axis of difference is the contrast between village (kampung) and town (kota) life, where the former is associated with a more rough-and-ready, less “developed” (maju), yet highly valued existence. Indeed, this humble, village-based existence is the one alluded to in statements such as “This is the shape of our land.” Another axis of difference relates to the widely held understanding that human life is mirrored by an immanent realm of spirits and ancestors, of those explicitly described as “people on the other side,” whose concerns and habits are different from, but should never be forgotten by, living humans. A third axis contrasts today’s time and people with that of “the old people in the past,” who handed down those practices which people
see as “just our character/custom” (ruku muing), even though the purpose of the “old people” may now be obscure, and even though present practices may only imperfectly correspond to the templates passed “from above in the past.” A fourth axis of difference is that between periods when the tempo and activities of productive life—weaving textiles, clearing fields, collecting firewood, digging up cassava—are interrupted by both ritual activities and resulting taboos or prohibitions. Though ritual sacrifice in fields, or events to name babies or welcome brides, are considered part of the essential work that contributes to health, wealth, and fertility, this work nevertheless involves a different kind of collective focus and effort to that expended during, say, the “weeding season” or the “coffee season.”

The Manggarai everyday life described in this book therefore emerges out of a series of contrasts with other realms of existence, modes of being, or collective tempos. As we shall see, paying serious attention to the everyday qualities of life inside household rooms, to ways of walking and arriving, or to personal recollections is not simply a way to paint a more three-dimensional portrait of eastern Indonesian life. It is also a strategy for uncovering the implicit, practical knowledge and values of Manggarai sociality. However, despite its explicit interest in the everyday, this book does not ignore the extraordinary, the ritual, or the ancestral. Indeed, at times it makes them the focus of sustained attention. Although works within the Leiden tradition may have gone too far in emphasizing unchanging cosmological coherence, or in neglecting the perspective and experiences of women or children, their focus on ritual did reflect something of both its ubiquity and its significance in eastern Indonesia. Life in southern Manggarai is continually punctuated by life-cycle, agricultural, or other rituals in which chickens are sacrificed and after which people eat together. Indeed, so frequent are such events that—with the exception of very large-scale endeavors involving the whole community—they even have something of a habitual flavor. What intrigues me about such events is both what they make explicit, and what they make possible in respect to place. Why are ritual speeches often addressed to village sites, rooms, or the land? How do rituals influence the power of place, or the connections between places and people? How might they bring about material and other changes to the landscape?

Steep ravines and deep river gorges, the waters of which are swollen during the intense rainy season, dominate the landscape of west Flores. Indeed, with its mountainous interior and potholed, winding roads the fragmented terrain of Flores reflects a wider cultural and linguistic fragmentation. The island
never had a common language or, until Indonesian independence, any form of sociopolitical unity. For the Dutch colonial authorities, who achieved nominal sovereignty in 1859, Flores was an “unprofitable” island, suitable only for a policy of “non-interference” (Dietrich 1983). Prior to Dutch sovereignty, Manggarai (the area of which covers roughly one-third of Flores) had been the focus of a struggle between the Makassarese empire of South Sulawesi and the Sultanate of Bima on the island of Sumbawa. These powers fought for control over parts of Manggarai until well into the nineteenth century, in part to control the lucrative slave trade from the region. With the establishment of their “Ethical Policy” in 1907, the Dutch took a more active interest in and control over Manggarai, sending out military patrols in
the name of “pacification,” and in 1929 elevating the leader of Todo, the most powerful area (dalu), to the newly created position of raja or king of Manggarai (Steenbrink 2007, 89). However, as with other regions of Flores, for much of the twentieth century, it was not the local government that took the central role in development in Manggarai, but rather the workshops, clinics, schools, and plantations of the Catholic mission.

Whereas Protestantism dominates many other islands in eastern Indonesia, Flores is well known throughout the country for its high percentage (over 90%) of Catholics. A Portuguese Dominican mission was established in the sixteenth century in Larantuka, east Flores, creating a legacy of names and sacred objects that continues to this day (Lewis 1988, 330). However, because Portuguese influence did not extend to the west of the island, Catholicism was not introduced to Manggarai until missionaries of the Societas Verbi Divini (SVD), or Divine Word Society, entered the region in the 1920s. Today, the majority of Manggarai inhabitants strongly identify as Catholic. Children are baptized as babies and receive first communion during their primary schooling; couples marry in church in addition to village-based marriage rituals; most people try to observe Sunday as a day of rest; and many people are interested in discussing the life of Jesus. However, beyond this fundamental, and strongly felt identity, there is considerable diversity of practice and discourse. Though town dwellers in Ruteng tend to attend church regularly, this is by no means the case in all rural areas. People hold a variety of attitudes towards Catholic worship and its relationship to older practices categorized as “custom/tradition” (adat) or, more colloquially, as “chicken speech” (turu manuk). Though these different attitudes will emerge in the chapters that follow, it is worth stating at the outset that the majority of my informants did not see Catholicism as relevant to all areas of their lives. For example, throughout my fieldwork, most villagers emphasized to me that “only believing in prayers” does not protect them from sickness or harm, and that “leaves and grasses” or “village medicine” involving magic are essential to good health.

Today, Flores is located in the modern Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), one of the poorest and least urbanized provinces of eastern Indonesia, itself the poorest national region (Barlow and Hardjono 1996, 12). After Indonesian independence, Manggarai became one of the five districts (kabupaten) of Flores, under the rule of the Bupati or district head based in the central town of Ruteng. In 2003, as a result of both population increase and political tensions, the region was split into two districts, West and Central Manggarai, each with its own Bupati.
West Manggarai was the port of Labuanbajo, a town that sees a regular influx of tourists come to view the famous dragons of Komodo island. Though tourism, as we shall see, has reached Wae Rebo, it has had little significant economic impact beyond Labuanbajo and the Komodo National Park. The majority of Manggarai people, like most of the population of Flores, continue to be economically dependent on agriculture. In addition to subsistence cultivation of wet and dry rice, maize, tubers, and vegetables, people increasingly invest their time and resources in cultivating cash crops. These include candlenut, vanilla, cloves, and cacao, though in many areas the most notable cash crop is coffee. A good coffee crop can generate a significant income for farmers, yet most will also save a large quantity of beans for their own personal use. This is because glasses of sweet coffee (even when served in “mixed” form with roasted maize) are, in addition to betel quids, the basic requirement of Manggarai hospitality.

My first, coffee-fuelled fieldwork in southern Manggarai was for a period of twenty months between September 1997 and April 1999. During this time, I lived with a married couple in Wae Rebo whose children were either married and living in different villages or away for long periods at school elsewhere in the region. I also undertook various journeys to other villages, staying in Kombo at Easter, Christmas, and times of important events as well as on my way to and from administrative trips to Ruteng. I returned for a further period of four months from April to August 2001. This time, I deliberately based myself in the lowlands, visiting the school at Lenggos and gaining a better understanding of the tempo of life in Kombo. I also paid two week-long visits to Wae Rebo-Kombo in 2005 (with my family) and in 2008 (to attend a death ritual). The ethnography in this book is therefore based on a total period of about two years’ fieldwork.

It will not escape the attention of readers interested in Indonesia that my first fieldwork dates almost exactly coincided with what is broadly known as the country’s krisis: a period of environmental, economic, political, and social upheaval that saw extreme weather conditions, the devaluation of the Indonesian currency, the resignation of President Suharto from office, and violent incidents in some areas of the archipelago (see Vel 2001). Though subsequent research has tended, with good reason, to focus on the political repercussions and significance of this period, it is worth emphasizing the multiple elements of the crisis, as these were crucial to local responses in southern Manggarai. In 1997, my informants experienced rising prices of consumer goods simultaneously with an unusually prolonged dry season, while in 1998 people connected radio accounts of demonstrations in Jakarta with news of church burnings.
This led some Wae Rebo-Kombo residents to recall the past prophecies of a Dutch priest who had warned them of the potential for cataclysmic events at the dawn of the new millennium. When local news reached my informants of a Manggarai man killing his sister over a land dispute, some people asked one another whether these cumulative signs were evidence of the end of the world prophesied for the year 2000.

Responses to the political krisis in southern Manggarai were many and varied. Some older informants criticized the students demonstrating in Jakarta and linked them with young people in Manggarai who, on leaving their “big schools,” return to the village with overeducated and overcritical voices. Other, male informants spoke of Indonesia’s endemic corruption and seemed genuinely excited by the possibility of political change. A schoolteacher wrote a poem to be read on National Education Day extolling the virtues of teachers who “serve[d] every day,” even while reformation was “shaking the corners of the fatherland.” Some spoke of their fears that, with Suharto out of office, Indonesia would become an Islamic state and argued (in some cases quite vociferously) for a separate, Christian state in eastern Indonesia. Yet many more informants (particularly women), when asked their opinions regarding the political crisis, would claim ignorance or indifference, or would self-parody their lack of understanding (cf. Kuipers 2003, 181). One woman said it didn’t matter to them, as “village people,” whether the president had changed or not; another self-deprecatingly described herself as a “person who ate leaves” and asked how she was supposed to know what was happening in Jakarta? In this vein, throughout 1998, the language of “crisis” began to enter into local speech in various humorous ways. Female friends began to refer ironically to large piles of washing as a “clothes crisis,” or to a lack of participants at particular events as a “people crisis.” A boy losing a game with friends would be named “Suharto,” while a bossy woman might be called “Mega,” after the opposition politician Megawati Sukarnoputri. My friend Nina enjoyed remarking that, while people in Jakarta were rioting, the only thing she was planning to burn was her new field.

The impact of the crisis for some was thus a heightened sense that, as citizens of Indonesia, they were first and foremost Christian Indonesians, and that this identity was potentially under threat. However, for many of my informants, their identification as Indonesian was at best somewhat vague and patchy. None of them had access to television and to the awareness of national issues that watching television can bring (cf. Vel 2001, 154).

Even more important, though rural children begin to learn the national language, Bahasa Indonesia (BI), in primary school, very few of my informants
spoke Indonesian with any kind of fluency or regularity. This makes southern Manggarai very different to other areas of western Flores, most notably the towns of Ruteng and Labuanbajo, where many children now grow up speaking Indonesian as their first language. In the villages I know well, competence varies widely from person to person, with schoolteachers and those educated beyond primary school the most fluent, but with many elderly people having no understanding of or interest in the national language. When local schoolchildren are prepared for their first communion by visiting nuns from other regions of Flores, the latter are often surprised to discover that what they say to the children is met with blank looks and must be translated into Manggarai by schoolteachers. The majority of adults say that they can understand a little Indonesian but that they find it too “heavy” to speak. Indeed, if the Manggarai notion of the “everyday” emerges through the series of contrasts outlined above, then one further, significant axis of difference is that between the Manggarai and Indonesian languages. The national language is not considered appropriate for use in many contexts, and I have often heard visiting state officials criticized for addressing villagers in Indonesian. During collective events and village meetings, young men’s overuse of what is referred to locally as “high Malay” (Melaju tinggi) can also generate considerable conflict. My fieldwork has therefore been conducted entirely in the local language, and all foreign words in the text (with the exception of those explicitly labelled as BI or Bahasa Indonesia) are Manggarai.5

In what follows, I have made no attempt to disguise the identity of the two-placed village of Wae Rebo-Kombo. As I describe in Chapter 5, the village was visited in 1997 by a number of state officials, as a result of which my research featured in a number of articles in the provincial newspaper, Pos Kupang. This fact, together with the uniqueness of Wae Rebo’s housing and the nature of social connections and knowledge in Manggarai more generally, makes designating the village with a pseudonym practically impossible. However, with regard to individual informants, I do frequently use pseudonyms in the text. When describing public or positive events, or quoting from life histories where the person has given me explicit consent, I use the shortened names by which people are addressed in daily life. For older informants, this involves following polite forms of address by attaching a prefix such as Iné (Mother), Amé (Father), or Tánta (Auntie). When reporting sensitive or very personal information, or when I rely on what other informants have told me in the absence of the person under discussion, I use pseudonyms and change identifying personal details. Certain individuals may therefore appear in the ethnography under two different names. This may make for possible confu-
sion, but ethics in fieldwork and in anthropology is characterized by such contextual decisions rather than by blanket rules.

This introduction has outlined some of the book’s main questions and overarching issues with a deliberately light touch. Manggarai people and places are too complex and multifaceted to speak to a single theoretical concern, and more substantive engagements with the literature on human–environment interactions, house societies, travel, agency, and custom (adat) revival in Indonesia will emerge from the ethnography in the chapters that follow. My portrait of a distinctive and complex landscape, as the reader will see, moves out from the most intimate places of daily life in a series of concentric circles. It begins with the smallest places of significance—household rooms and the everyday movements in and out of houses—and then gradually extends its focus to longer journeys and larger scales of place making. Each expansion or resizing reveals different aspects of the connection between people and place.

Chapter 1 examines sleeping rooms, showing how these are entangled with their occupants’ bodies and souls during key phases in the human life cycle. It shows how rooms emerge as different kinds of entities at moments of their own social lives, and how particular rituals create the presence of the room as an agent. Chapter 2 considers ordinary houses and shows how everyday activities produce a house as a place of value through the creation of “liveliness.” The chapter argues that the significance of Manggarai houses cannot be comprehended through an architectural or symbolic approach. Rather, a multisensory approach is needed, one that is sensitive to the permeability of the house to sounds, smells, livestock, and the movements of personnel. Chapter 3 considers the characterization of marriage as a “path.” Based on women’s evocative memories of their marriage journeys, it shows how such journeys form paths in the landscape, and how travel along physical paths is central to affinal relations. Together, these three chapters show how processes of kinship and marriage in Manggarai are inseparable from the landscape of places and pathways. To give analytical priority to either social relations or the material environment would be to fail to understand their mutual constitution in this context.

Chapters 4 through 6 investigate larger scales of entanglement between people and the landscape, and examine the influence of missionization, state development, resettlement, and migration. Chapter 4 considers the agricultural and forest landscape. It shows how the agricultural cycle structures people’s recollections of the past, and how sacrificial rituals are inseparable from farming, as they are considered to be “what the land wants.” It explains why
Catholicism has had so little influence on ritual procedures and argues that Manggarai conversations with the environment are a specific form of agricultural animism. Chapter 5 examines the ways in which place is made, not only through everyday activities, but also through more self-conscious discourses and engagements with wider powers. It considers the question of what makes a settlement a real village and shows both the ritual implications of resettlement programs and the cultural and political implications of a state-sponsored house-building project. Chapter 6 describes everyday, extraordinary, and mythical movements within the landscape. It argues that the Manggarai orientation system is one that implies movement towards others and shows how the notion of “rooting” in place is not opposed to mobility but is what makes safe travel possible.

As readers progress through this book, they will see how valued places emerge both through the explicit creation of presence in ritual performance and through everyday practices and movements that do not have the creation of place as their explicit goal. In the conclusion, I draw out the book’s arguments about the necessity of taking “everyday life” seriously, even in this context of frequent sacrifice and powerful ritual speech. It is through the repetition of numerous everyday practices that the landscape gains potency as a source of memories and a record of mobility. However, it is through ritual performance that people explicitly create the presence, or utilize the power, of the landscape’s agency. Anthropology may occasionally take for granted the links between place and culture, but for people in southern Manggarai, these are links that must be continually remade, rethought, and recontested.