This book offers rich resources for thinking about the uplands in conjunctural terms. I have in mind the kind of analysis proposed by the geographer Doreen Massey, who argues for an understanding of the specificity of a place not as an expression of its essence, but rather as the outcome of the ways it has been "constructed out of a particular constellation of relations, articulated together at a particular locus" (1993: 66). Three key relations I highlighted in my examination of the Indonesian uplands (1999b)—relations of marginality, power and production—seem to be salient in Vietnam as well, where they are articulated together in distinctive ways.

**Marginality**

In Vietnam, as in Indonesia, the positioning of the uplands as the margin or the "other" of civilization, and its characterization in terms of apparently isolated, culturally distinct peoples and places "without history", is a myth that belies the dense traffic between uplands and lowlands over several centuries, a traffic interrupted only when colonial powers intervened to reshape routes and spaces for ease of rule. The tenacity of the myth is remarkable, and the material presented in this book offers important insights on the purpose it serves in licensing particular forms of intervention: the uplands as a frontier to be settled, wasteland to be brought into productive use, water resources to be tapped, minerals to be mined, forest to be exploited or conserved, poverty to be reduced, and backward people to be civilized. An important goal of this book is to unsettle this set of place-myths by replacing them with more nuanced analyses of the diversity of practices and flows constituting upland spaces. I tried something similar a decade ago, but the myths persist. Their longevity, I would like to suggest, is not simply a confirmation.
that practitioners don’t read scholarly work, or that nothing has changed. Rather, it is an indication that myths continue to be woven into new assemblages. Circa 2010, for example, in both Indonesia and Vietnam, a UN and donor-sponsored global programme to tackle global warming by “Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation” (REDD) recalled all the presumed deficiencies of the uplands (poverty, backwardness, forest destruction) and reproduced them for new ends. Power

A relational understanding of power enriches many of the chapters in this volume. There are plenty of examples of top-down schemes that reshape people’s lives in drastic and damaging ways: resettlement, eviction, forest enclosure, speculation, and the steering of state land and subsidies away from “the poor”, their intended beneficiaries, into the hands of party cadres or local elites. In Vietnam, as in Indonesia, often it is not material resources (land, capital) that beget power but rather the reverse: a person who holds office ends up holding land. Yet top-down schemes and attempts to grab resources don’t always succeed, as they are contested or undermined by actors wielding countervailing powers: competing government agencies or transnational donors with competing visions of how resources should be used; villagers making moral claims against local officials or patrons; negotiation or quiet evasion of rules, and crossing of boundaries; and forms of solidarity rooted in kinship and community, among others. As the authors demonstrate, the provision of roads that ease state supervision, from one perspective, also enables uplanders to break out from monopolistic trade and credit relations and receive better prices for their products. Uplanders are not unilateral victims, but nor are they victors in their encounters with power. Rather, they are engaged in ongoing struggles, sometimes achieving small victories or compromises, but still lacking in secure access to land or other resources.

Production

The continued relevance of land in upland livelihoods stands out in these studies; so too does the role of markets in drawing uplanders into new spaces and new forms of production. In Vietnam, as in Indonesia, agriculture is expanding into forests, and it is also intensifying, as former swidden lands are planted with cash crops such as coffee and cassava. Counter to prevailing assumptions about farmer preferences for subsistence security, some upland farmers take the risk of converting all their land to a lucrative cash crop, intent on making all the money they can before boom turns, inevitably, to bust; some are more cautious, keeping various options open. In one case reported in this book (Chapter 9), speculation made land itself a “boom” commodity, and uplanders were eager to sell their land at inflated prices while they could. Having come to see themselves as backward, both through the discourse of others and through their own observations and comparisons, they wanted to become “modern farmers” and, just as important, “modern consumers”, equipped with a motorcycle, fridge and TV.

While in many contexts the way to achieve consumer goals is to move to the city, both Vietnam and Indonesia continue to have active land frontiers, fuelled by rural-to-rural migration and the willingness of “land pioneers” to endure harsh conditions in order to establish new smallholdings. Some of the pioneers are pulled in by the hope of riches. Others move to the forest because they have lost land somewhere else, through failed ventures, debt or top-down enclosures. The importance of the land frontier as a “safety valve” relieving livelihood pressures in the lowland agricultural cores cannot be overstated. If REDD and related conservation schemes, backed by donor resources, succeed in closing the land frontier without providing new employment, landless ex-farmers from the uplands and the lowlands will have nowhere to turn but the cities, as margins and centres become ever-more densely linked.

Many of the relations I have described above are not distinctive to Vietnam or to Indonesia. They are found to varying degrees, and in different configurations, across Southeast Asia’s upland regions. Yet there are elements deriving from Vietnam’s unique colonial and socialist history that are quite distinctive. One feature I found especially striking was the density of French colonial investment in bounding, mapping, describing and—in effect—constituting distinctive upland “minorities”, an endeavour that continued into the nationalist period, albeit under a different rationale. Parallel efforts were much lighter, and less consequential, in the territory that became Indonesia. From Vietnam’s socialist period, there are practices of collectivism and concepts of popular entitlement that still have resonance, together with a land law that continues to reserve the state’s right to reallocate land periodically. Whether this set of concepts, practices and laws will be sufficient to modify the pattern of increasing inequalities that is accompanying Vietnam’s impressive growth is still to be seen. Meanwhile, readers can learn a great deal from this book about how key sets of social, economic and political relations are currently being reconfigured in upland locales, and gain insights that travel well to other conjunctures, each with its own distinctive articulation.