This ie talk comes hot on the heels of a year-long ethnographic field study in an ethnic Khmu hamlet in the uplands of northern Laos. It will present a bottom-up view of how the Lao developmentalist state “touches down” in a specific locality. In particular, the talk will focus on how local people’s engagements with the encroaching forces of national development are shaped by their “traditional” animist beliefs. How is nation-building and development (re-)shaping local people’s relationship with the spirit world? How do local spirit beliefs in turn affect the way national-development is perceived, understood and engaged with? In addressing these questions, the talk will seek to highlight some of the ambivalences and contradictions - but also synergies - that arise as upland peasants in Laos seek to find their place in a rapidly changing world.