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ZOMIA AND BEYOND. TAKES ON A HIGHLAND TRANSNATIONAL SPACE.

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Panel

This panel relates to the July 2010 special issue of the JOURNAL OF GLOBAL HISTORY (Vol.5, issue 2) titled *ZOMIA AND BEYOND. A CHALLENGE TO AREA STUDIES IN GLOBAL HISTORY*.

The notion of *Zomia* has been proposed in 2002 by Willem van Schendel and provides a novel and provocative way of thinking about highland Asia as a distinct, yet 'invisible' social space. With the publication in 2009 of James C. Scott's *THE ART OF NOT BEING GOVERNED. AN ANARCHIST HISTORY OF UPLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA* (Yale), the notion of *Zomia* now reaches new heights thanks to challenging suggestions based in that region's history. However, Scott's *Zomia* differs significantly from van Schendel's, but overlaps closely with what others call the 'Southeast Asian Massif'; this similarity will be discussed.

What these propositions all have in common though, is to suggest that highland societies in Asia, therefore including those located in Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam as well as adjacent provinces of Southwest China, have in common a history of keeping a distance with central powers and more generally, the state. They are runaways, maroons, but also skilled seekers for new opportunities. Historically, they are enmeshed in a complex network of ancient feudal bounds, stateless hamlets, and trade networks that are now fast growing due to speedy modernization. Local populations face these processes in various and often creative ways that involve overt and covert resistance to domination for some, but also fatalistic resignation for others. The case studies in this panel aim at documenting these processes on the ground and from there, test the marco-considerations underpinning the transnational notion(s) of *Zomia*.

References:

Michaud, Jean (dir.) 2010 "Zomia and Beyond. A Challenge to Area Studies in Global History" Special issue of the JOURNAL OF GLOBAL HISTORY 5(2).

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van Schendel, Willem, 2002, "Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Southeast Asia from the Fringes." ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING D: SOCIETY AND SPACE 20(6) 647–68.

Papers

ZOMIA AND BEYOND

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This paper introduces the panel and explores how we might further our understandings of the uplands of Asia by using different ideas such as the ‘Southeast Asian Massif’ and in particular ‘Zomia’, a neologism proposed in 2002 by Willem van Schendel and gaining in popularity with the publication in 2009 of James C. Scott's *THE ART OF NOT BEING GOVERNED: AN ANARCHIST HISTORY OF UPLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA*. Through a discussion of the genesis of the notion(s) of Zomia and the theses behind its various definitions, I question certain truths regarding the studies of highland societies in Asia. I also propose to disembody 'minority' studies from the national straightjackets that have been imposed by academic research bounded by the historical, ideological, and political limits of the nation state.

TOURISTIFYING REMOTENESS AND ETHNICITY IN SOUTHWEST CHINA: AN EXAMINATION OF LOCAL RESPONSES

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China announced in mid 1999 the campaign to “Open Up the West” with the goals of reducing socio-economic disparities, encouraging economic growth, and ensuring social and political stability in the non-Han areas (Goodman, 2004: 317). For the village of Zhaoxing, located in the remote province of Guizhou and inhabited by the Dong minority nationality, the Chinese state ideal of modernization has been channeled in large part through the development of ethnic tourism. As a result, what a Dong village should look like as well as the outward expressions of being Dong are increasingly fixed by delocalized agents of change driven by tourism profits. Concurrently, this once isolated, barren and profitless place (Oakes, 1998) is increasingly being incorporated to the Chinese nation state through what Scott (2009) calls “distance demolishing technologies” (state electricity, all-weather roads, railroads, highways, Internet and television). Far from being passive subjects of modernization, the Dong constantly negotiate to maintain or improve their livelihoods in their own terms. They selectively resist and indigenize elements of modernity according to the opportunities and

constraints stemming from their “unique and troubled place within the Chinese Nation” (Mueggler, 2001: 19). In Zhaoxing, I analyze the local responses to changes that are integrating the village as never before into the Chinese nation state.

'ZOMIA' IN THE BORDERLANDS: EXPLORING TRADING-SCAPES ON THE SINO-VIETNAMESE BORDER.

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The international borderline between the provinces of Yunnan, southwest China, and Lao Cai, northern Vietnam presents both challenges and opportunities for local populations on either side, namely ethnic minorities, Kinh (lowland Vietnamese), and Han Chinese. This paper investigates the creation and solidification of this borderline and related borderlands, while undertaking a contemporary analysis of cross-border trade networks. The paper explores how local residents navigate this artificial boundary with regards to kin ties, historical linkages, transnational societies and the international trade networks that they have shaped that reach deep inside each country. Contemporary border narratives of local traders managing important highland commodities such as upland textiles and live buffalo are analyzed. These narratives, collected during ethnographic field work in both countries, shed light on the means by which the borderline and borderland spaces are shaping both attractive prospects as well as restrictive constraints. In doing so, the complexities of border livelihoods in this region are illuminated and this 'Zomia' space is critiqued regarding inhabitants' avoidance or use of the state's gaze.

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DISCUSSANT