

Editorial note – Zomia and beyond

When the *Journal of Global History* was launched in 2006, an ambitious mission statement appeared on its website. This special issue seeks to fulfil some of the commitments in that document. Although it may seem that a focus on Zomia is somewhat narrow for a journal with a global remit, the questions raised in this debate have significant global implications, hence the ‘and beyond’ in the title of the issue.

Our mission statement stresses both our desire to straddle traditional regional boundaries and our belief that not all writing on global history has to take the whole globe as its unit of analysis. Following Fernand Braudel’s seminal writings on the Mediterranean, much research has teased out historical links between lands bordering great bodies of water. Similar zones of interaction around major ‘wastelands’ (such as mountains, forests, tundra, and deserts) have yet to attract the same degree of attention. Zomia is not only situated in one of the most stupendously elevated mountainous zones of the planet but it also crosses well-entrenched boundaries that Area Studies have created since the Second World War, between Southeast Asia, East Asia, Central (Inner) Asia, and South Asia. The overall Asian focus contributes to another of our expressed desires, namely to move global history away from an excessive concern with the West.

A further desideratum in our mission statement was to encourage interdisciplinary conversations, and here we present a dialogue between anthropology, geography, politics, and history. The relationship between anthropology and history, which is foremost in this case, has resulted in much controversy over the decades. Indeed, in the preparatory phase of this special issue, there were animated debates between contributors and editors, some of which remain to be completely resolved. We hope that ‘Zomia and beyond’ will stimulate other academic encounters of this kind.

Lastly, we have timed this special issue to follow closely on the publication of James C. Scott’s, *The art of not being governed: an anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia*. This provocative book is written from a venerable anarchist perspective, which has almost disappeared from academic writing, and it has stirred considerable interest in circles far beyond the region. All our contributors assess the book in various ways, and a review article rounds off the debate.

Scott’s book raises at least two questions of undoubted global relevance. The rejection of state formation, in part or in whole, is a topic that resonates with much research carried out elsewhere, notably on tropical Africa, the ‘scheduled tribes’ of South

Asia, Melanesia, and the 'First Nations' of the Americas and Australia. Similarly wide in application is the conundrum: are mountainous massifs primarily refuges for the weak or sources of special power? This has been debated in contexts as far apart as the Andes, the Ethiopian highlands, the Caucasus, and the Alps. We therefore hope that our readers will find debates relevant to global history in this special issue on 'Zomia and beyond'.

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