
Although not mentioned in the title, it is clear from the acknowledgements that this volume is primarily about James Scott’s (2009) Zomia (any reference to Willem van Schendel’s (2002) original notion of Zomia is missing in the entire book). The authors explain at the very beginning that they want this book to be understood as a direct result of reading and personally meeting James Scott at the 2010 *Asian Borderlands Conference* in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Consequently, this book’s four studies, put in context in a preceding introduction chapter, are revised versions of a panel “Identity Construction in the Borderlands” given at this conference. The alleged interest by Scott (p. 9) and newly relating their studies conceptually to Zomia (at least, in the original panel abstracts, there is no single mention of Zomia) were deemed sufficient to produce a separate book out of it.

Seemingly defending Scott’s conceptualisation of Zomia and justifying their reliance on it in their preface (pp. 9–13), the four authors argue for extending the historical validity of Scott’s Zomia (until 1950) to the contemporary context along two lines. Geographically, three studies extend the Zomian notion to the maritime world (“maritime Zomias”). Conceptually, all authors propose to “de-territorialise” Zomia in order to focus on “Inner Zomias” with “cast-out and widely dispersed migrants, modern resisters residing within ethno-national borders” (p. 15). The main argument is that although, or, more precisely, because post-colonial nation-states—called “commercial states”, as opposed to historical “padi states” with rice cultivation as their power base—“take possession of Zomia’s original territory and determine fixed borders” (p. 16), the Zomian logic of “opposition between two ensembles” (p. 17) continues as “these borders strengthen control and increasingly ‘Zomify’ groups, mostly migrants and illegal workers [...], who find themselves alienated from economic ensembles” (ibid.). Thus, the penetration of Scott’s (2009: 9–13) Zomia as a “nonstate space” by nation-states through their neoliberal policies of “enclosure” and “engulfment” does not absorb “Zomian components” (p. 21), but in fact creates “peripheral or Inner Zomias” (p. 18), continuously reproducing flexible identities through interrelations and exchange within and across “segments” or “particular strata” (p. 16) of different socio-ethnic groups, and revealing dynamics of creativity, adaptability and resilience to change. The studies thereby importantly widen the focus to include both external and internal state boundaries.
(often “along the social fracture lines”, p. 20) and beyond the otherwise overly dichotomic relations between minorities and the “state” (padi, “post-padi” or commercial).

Studying the only “classical” Zomia case of this volume, the “hill territory” (p. 49) of the north-eastern Cambodian province of Ratanakiri with its “hill people” (p. 51) (i.e., the Jarai, Tampuan, Brao/Krung and Cham newly migrating from the lowlands), Frédéric Bourdier (Chapter 2) writes of “cultural effervescence” to illustrate the continuous (re)construction of flexible identities through complex inter-ethnic relations in the context of intensified borderland movements, encounters and exchange. Writing against the assumption of “identity deprivation” (p. 45), resulting from alleged marginalisation, and a static understanding of ethnicity, he mainly argues for the ultimate “resistance of culture” (p. 66), rooted in tactical processes of permanent change, adaptation, creativity and innovation including redefinition and renaming of ethnic identities.

The following three chapters examine similar “Zomian” dynamics of cultural resilience in the maritime borderlands of southern Myanmar and Southern Thailand. Maxime Boutry (Chapter 3) argues that the adaptation of Burmese migrants to the inherently multi-ethnic context of Southern Thailand— or what he calls the “Burmese adaptive colonisation of Southern Thailand” (the title of this chapter)—through intermarriage, patron-client relations and rituals, is an extension of previous strategies of “cultural exogamy” (p. 73) used by Burmese fishermen and entrepreneurs settling in the “pioneer front” (p. 70) of the Tanintharyi Division (Tenasserim) and the Mergui Archipelago, e.g., systematically intermarrying with indigenous Moken women and, thus, perpetuating the pre-existing traditional relations of Moken to their taukay (patron/entrepreneur). He suggests studying these culturally adapting Burmese migrants as part of a geographically extended social space creating and operating along overlapping administrative, social, ethnic and cultural boundaries.

Taking up Thongchai Winichakul’s (2003) “interstitial approach”, Jacques Ivanoff (Chapter 4) traces how the historical and present processes of ethno-social encounters among different groups labelled as “Sea Gypsies” (mainly Moken, Moklen and Urak Lawoi) and their interaction with external newcomers and different instances of state power led to the construction of a “Sea-Zomia” in which, among others, Moken and Moklen continuously find new “interstices” in which to survive.

Conceptualising the coast as a “cosmological borderland”, Olivier Ferrari (Chapter 5) demonstrates how the “Sea Gypsies” in Southern Thailand act upon their allocation to the sea, internalising the Thai exonym chao lay (“people of the sea”). This results in a complementary, again “Zomian”, setting of territorial