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EHESS-Campus Condorcet, Paris-Aubervilliers, France

Panel Proposal

Convenor: Edyta Roszko,

Senior Researcher, Social Anthropology

Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen, Norway

edyta.roszko@cmi.no

Panel Format

The panel is envisioned as a single session of approximately 90 min, with up to 4 presenters and a discussant. The panel is open to people with a diverse disciplinary and regional expertise.

Brief description of the panel

The Centrality of Islands: Re-conceptualizing anthropogenic interference and natural processes in the Southeast Asia

Historically, small islands of Southeast Asia constituted hubs for fishing and trade and were used by seafarers as landmarks for navigation and as fresh water sources. They were part of a wider circulation of marine goods like tortoiseshell, sea urchin, snail, sea cucumber, bird's nest, fish sauce, cotton and silver that took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries along less frequented maritime routes in the region. Today, these islands constitute important markers of oceanic sovereignty but also climate change. The singularity and connectedness of those islands are displayed in human-caused changes (e.g. rising sea level, plastic pollution, ocean acidification; deforestation, draught) but simultaneously refuted by maritime disputes, militarization, and neoliberal politics. The historically recent legal regime of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) allows coastal countries to extend territorial sovereignty to claim erstwhile high seas as exclusive state property, which can subsequently be privatized. The disputed South China Sea was for example until the late 20th century a zone of ethnic fluidity, *maritime* connection, and *marine* resource commons. Legal regimes such as EEZs are the result of Western geographical imaginaries, which became hegemonic on a universal scale, as brought out in analytical frameworks such as the 'Black Atlantic' or 'North-Atlantic Universals', erasing local histories while vernacularizing European land-based immobile categories. Taking the singularity of the 'sea' as a starting point, this proposal foregrounds the islands, beyond territorially bounded nation-states and

homogenous national histories. It invites paper contributions that combine the analysis of the marine environment with a focus on maritime connections and movements of humans and their interactions with the islands and seas, conceiving of the marine ecology as a space of anthropogenic interference with natural processes. In this way, the panel empirically and theoretically shows that islands are not a marginal or peripheral, but important vectors in global connections and globalization, both historically and to this day.