



Lecture Series of the Department of Development Studies

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University of Sydney

Walking the Ridge:
Local Experiences of Nation-Building and
Development in Upland Northern Laos

Wednesday, 20 June 2018, 4.15-5.45 pm

Seminar room, IE, Department of African Studies
Spitalgasse 2, Courtyard 5, 1090 Vienna

Chair:

Judith Ehlert

(Department of Development Studies, University of Vienna)

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.