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Scott, J. C. (2009). *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

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Should comparative politics be a normative enterprise as well as an analytical one? The publication of James Scott's latest masterwork provides an ideal occasion to wrestle with this fundamental question, which comparativists typically ignore. For Scott's long-anticipated book exploring the diverse hill peoples who bestride the borderlands of China and Southeast Asia (or "Zomia") is not merely an anarchist history, as its subtitle trumpets—it is an anarchist *manifesto*. Because Scott's purpose is normative as well as analytical, *The Art of Not Being Governed* should be assessed according to these dual (and perhaps dueling) motivations.

The term *manifesto* is not used lightly here. Like the most famed manuscript of that genus, Scott's *manifesto* boldly posits and positions a *dialectic* at its center. But in place of capital and labor, Scott privileges the dialectic between states and the self-governed, between the valleys and the hills, and between rulers and subjects. "The dialectic or coevolution of hill and valley, as antagonistic but deeply connected spaces, is, I believe, the essential point of departure for making sense of historical change in Southeast Asia" (pp. 17–18)—and not Southeast Asia alone, as the book's recurrent references to other regions attest. Scott's prioritization of this dialectic cannot be understood simply as his analytical strategy. It is an expression of his lifetime of accumulated indignation at the abusive and condescending treatment that states have meted out to mobile, self-governing populations since time immemorial.

The Art of Not Being Governed is motored by two normative and analytical claims. The first is that the "standard civilizational narrative" (p. 116) directed by lowland states and societies against upland "barbarians" has its history hopelessly jumbled. Like so many other stateless regions, Zomia is not a backward region but a "region of refuge" (p. 23). Zomians are no country bumpkins: They are *escape artists*:

Most, if not all, the characteristics that appear to stigmatize hill peoples—their location at the margins, their physical mobility, their swidden agriculture, their flexible social structure, their religious heterodoxy, their egalitarianism, and even the nonliterate, oral cultures—far from being the mark of primitives left behind by civilization, are better seen on a long view as adaptations designed to evade both state capture and state formation. (p. 9)

As Scott summarizes in his penultimate paragraph: “Hill peoples are not pre-anything. In fact, they are better understood as post-irrigated rice, postsedentary, postsubject, and perhaps even postliterate” (p. 337).

It is Scott’s ability to frame this region of “riotous heterogeneity” (p. 26) in systematic and straightforward terms that makes *The Art of Not Being Governed* a masterwork (another term not chosen lightly). His evidence that Zomia has mostly been populated by escapees from “state space” (p. 40) is copious and broadly convincing. His sources are secondary but sweeping. And as no one familiar with his earlier works will be surprised to hear, Scott delivers his message through metaphor upon memorable metaphor. Hill people are “ethnic amphibians” (p. 241) capable of “social shape-shifting” (p. 210) within a broad “bandwidth of identities” (p. 281). Countering low-lander portrayals of hill dwellers as parochial, Scott entreats and teaches us “to appreciate the mind-boggling cosmopolitanism of relatively marginal and powerless people” (p. 315).

By impeccably aligning his analytics and normativity in his “hill-side” argument, Scott fulfills his book’s primary purpose: to make it impossible to gaze toward the hills through teleological lenses again. This is a testament not merely to Scott’s strong analytics but to his strong normativity. Through his creative and sensitive theorizing of Zomia’s escape artists, Scott confirms Dietrich Rueschemeyer’s seemingly sacrilegious suggestion for social scientists to approach their subject matter with “intense political interest” rather than “neutral objectivity.” Passionate concern with a political problem motivates a scholar to engage in the “ever-renewed questioning and testing of hypotheses” that make a historical narrative convincing. “Political interest can, of course, encourage wishful thinking and lead to blind spots in perceiving social reality. Yet political interest can also create a very strong urge to know” (Rueschemeyer, 2003, p. 312). One cannot peruse *The Art of Not Being Governed*—or even marvel for a minute at Table 3, detailing the “Escape Characteristics of Crops” ranging from cassava to sorghum to bananas (pp. 202-204)—without recognizing that this book represents the product of a scholar’s lifetime of, frankly, giving a damn.

Yet normativity carries risks as well as rewards. Although Scott's "hill-side" argument is carried to fruition through his "strong urge to know," his "valley-side" argument stumbles into some normative blind spots. At issue here is not *that* hill dwellers are escape artists but *what* they are escaping. The villain here—in something of a sequel to *Seeing Like a State* (Scott, 1998)—is the modern Leviathan, with its boundless appetite for revenue and its endless energy for imposing social control by rendering its subjects "legible." It would hardly be an anarchist history or manifesto unless the state was sporting the black cape. In Scott's view, Zomia has long been "a catchment area for those ideas and people who were the casualties of state-making, the collateral damage of dynastic schemes" (p. 157). Hill societies are primarily peopled by "runaways from state-making projects in the valleys" (p. 127).

What kinds of states have historically endeavored "to bring nonstate spaces and people to heel" in Scott's estimation? Pretty much all of them, actually:

Governments, whether colonial or independent, communist or neoliberal, populist or authoritarian, have embraced it fully. The headlong pursuit of this end by regimes otherwise starkly different suggests that such projects of administrative, economic, and cultural standardization are hard-wired into the architecture of the modern state itself. (p. 4)

Here we see Scott's second main argument—his valley-side argument—and his second major normative purpose. Not only have states *misperceived* hill societies; they have *mistreated* their subjects through disastrous "dynastic schemes" and "state-making projects," ironically accelerating the very peopling of nonstate space that stymies their grandest designs.

It is not difficult to fill a hefty tome with details of the depredations committed by Southeast Asian Leviathans, whether in their classical, colonial, or postcolonial guises. Yet the challenge for Scott's valley-side argument, as with his hill-side argument, is one of aligning analytics with normativity. Have states been as uniformly concerned with standardizing and subjugating their charges as Scott insists? And have states' stabs at standardization and subjugation been primarily responsible for the patterns of escape from state space that Scott so impressively documents?

When we peer under the black cape, the best answer appears to be "not so much." Even from a strictly theoretical perspective, any claim that states exhibit near uniformity in their attempts to homogenize and administer their populations is problematic. As Catherine Boone (2003) has argued, states often choose not to bother governing a region at all, even indirectly, when

valuable economic resources are absent. The presence of armed rivals provides another rationale to project power into the periphery, but neither administration nor homogenization is the *modus operandi* in most militarized campaigns. (Marauding militaries have developed their own techniques of “slash and burn” on the periphery, tragically.) State strategies of social control often involve drawing and brightening the lines that divide society, not erasing them (Slater, 2010; Wimmer, 2002). And even Scott’s own theory of legibility was originally based on states run by highly authoritarian regimes driven by “high modernist” ideologies. Has that state form gone from peculiar to paradigmatic?

Scott’s own evidence suggests that states’ drive to standardize is radically uneven. It becomes increasingly clear as *The Art of Not Being Governed* progresses that states in China and Vietnam have pursued homogenization and administration strategies with considerably more vigor than their counterparts in Burma and Thailand. What highlanders have fled during times of military-led counterinsurgency in Burma and Thailand is not very helpfully described as “the hard power of the fiscal state” (p. 330) with its “mania for classificatory order” (p. 238). Even in China, we witness precious little high modernity at high altitudes. China’s most dramatic defiance of the “friction of terrain” (p. 43), its ill-starred military invasion of Tibet (p. 45), is the exception that proves the rule. State-sponsored “engulfment” (p. 12) by Han settlers is not an attempt to render Tibetans legible via homogenization but to render Tibet incapable of secession via variegation. Regions that prove “hard to pacify, let alone govern” (p. 215) underscore the point that, even for the most ambitious states, pacification may not entail much governance at all.

Scott does a better job of seeing these facts than facing them. He maintains his stress on “state-making projects” as his culprit despite all the evidence complicating this claim. On careful review, many if not most of Scott’s examples of flight from state space occurred when *state power was in abeyance, not ascendance* (e.g., times of famine, crop failures, natural disasters, epidemics, external conquest, and dynastic infighting). There is no easy way to assess whether rising states or collapsing states have been greater extruders of populations. But the biggest human hemorrhaging into Zomia of all, from China in the wake of the Taiping Rebellion, seems to fit the collapse scenario best. And if the past is prologue, the present might well be epilogue. Recent postdisaster migrations out of New Orleans and Port-au-Prince have been escapes from the tragic hardships of statelessness, not stateness.

Scott ultimately squares this circle by referring to flight from either state expansion or state collapse as, similarly, a “state effect” (p. 326). Although analytically correct—and Scott’s consistent focus on the state specifically and

his “explicitly political perspective” (p. 80) generally are among his book’s most alluring features—this move effectively undermines Scott’s normative critique of the modern state. In the final analysis, a book that never utters the word *citizenship* cannot provide the kind of nuanced theory of the state that political scientists require. *The Art of Not Being Governed* leaves that next great step to the rest of us—and inspires us to hitch our normativity to the massive analytical task of theorizing the modern state’s own “riotous heterogeneity.”

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Globalization has generated concerns among citizens, governments, and scholars that autonomous international financial and economic forces will undermine democratic sovereignty. Attempts to ascertain the strength of these forces have tended to emphasize effects in the real economy. Many of these attempts have found reasons to believe that globalization is less threatening to political sovereignty than initially thought. In this book, Maria Victoria Murillo provides evidence that states also retain policy discretion when undertaking fairly dramatic reforms of public utilities. Combined with the literature on the private economy, the results presented here suggest that states continue to operate with policy autonomy even as international flows of goods, services,