

spaces to expedite women's entry into the labour force. *Neoliberalism and Everyday Life* is a good book, which explains the poisonous effects of neoliberalism which touch all Canadians' lives.

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To begin, a confession: what I know about Southeast Asia you could write on the head of a pin and still have enough room remaining to house an assortment of angels. My interest in Scott's work is that it is about the state and, most intriguingly, about various peoples who for centuries have been, in effect, running from states, avoiding them at all costs.

The area under study is "Zomia," sometimes referred to as the Southeast Asian *massif*, roughly 2.5 million km<sup>2</sup> stretching over a number of countries (including contemporary Burma, Cambodia, China, India, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam). Most of its roughly 100 million residents (including the Hmong, Kachin, Karen, Lahu, Lisu, Miao, Shan, Wa and Yao/Mien) live 300 or more metres above sea level in small, egalitarian social units.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, Zomia has been incorporated into a number of nation-states, especially those in search of natural resources, with governments guided by ideologies as diverse as communism and neoliberalism. Prior to World War II, however, the peoples of Zomia were never integrated for any length of time into states, into "civilizations."

Focusing on the period after c.1500, for which documentation is more readily available, Scott argues that, for well over a thousand years, hill-dwelling groups have “been fleeing the oppressions of state-making projects in the valleys” (ix). He maintains that hill-dwellers should not be viewed as members of historyless communities that roamed from place to place, with no political institutions, left behind by progress. In contrast, if we see them as anti-state peoples, we will be able to better understand their culture, agriculture and social structures. Writing in opposition to “state-centric histories” (36), Scott proposes instead a “history of those who got away” from the state, which “is also what makes this [book] an anarchist history” (x).

From their first appearance c.500 A.D. to the late nineteenth century, states in Zomia were relatively small, because they could not expand much beyond the limited areas in which they produced food, in particular, irrigated rice. From the perspective of these “padi states,” monoculture “was easier to monitor, assess, and tax than one shaped by agricultural diversity” (75). But the peoples who lived this way, attached to land, were vulnerable – and they knew it – which is why in this part of the world, when taxes, corvée labour, wars and other burdens became excessive, great numbers headed for the hills, so they could be outside the reaches of the state, primarily the Han-Chinese state.

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States tried to incorporate non-state peoples living nearby via wars and raids, turning those captured, for the most part, into slaves. The men and women trapped in such societies had few choices except to take flight, since open rebellion was risky. Once in the hills, they made it difficult for institutionalized exploitation to take root, by hunting, fishing and foraging, and especially through their use of swidden (slash-and-burn) agriculture, working a series of scattered plots. Their livelihood produced “the basis of a diet that could be shielded from state appropriation” (200).

The peoples of Zomia used various additional strategies in their struggles against states, including murdering aspiring chiefs in order to maintain egalitarian social structures; creating complex ethnicities that frustrated the categorization efforts of colonial officials; learning to speak two or three (or more) languages, so they could move frequently and blend in to other “societies”; and summoning prophets who in times of crises could lead their followers to safer places, promising “a new world of equality, peace, material abundance, and autonomy from outside rule” (291).

One of the most interesting of Scott’s arguments is found in the brief Chapter 6½ (“Orality, Writing, and Texts”), where he makes the tentative

suggestion that some peoples (if not in reality, then at least in tribal myths and legends) had writing at a point in their history, but their writings were either lost – occasionally texts were said to have been eaten by animals – or were stolen from them and destroyed. After such apparent débâcles, they elected to remain non-literate because they associated states with writing, especially household censuses and other forms of record-keeping that bolster states' efforts in procuring an economic surplus. In highland societies, literacy served no purpose; indeed, it was a potentially dangerous practice. Non-literate peoples typically have been viewed as barbarians; Scott suggests they were much more astute than they have been given credit for.

Those not familiar with the history of Southeast Asia, like myself, are bound to get lost in the narrative from time to time. Scott moves frequently between a dizzying array of peoples, cultures and locales, from one century to the next then back again. It cannot have been easy to organize the material for this study, and the occasional feeling of disorientation on the part of the reader is a slight drawback of the book. Furthermore, while well written, there seems to be a fair amount of repetition throughout, perhaps a result, again, of the subject matter; this volume could have lost some of its heft without affecting the heart of the argument or its defence. Be that as it may, *The Art of Not Being Governed* has done its job well, inspiring me to investigate more deeply the types of societies examined by Scott. A good place to begin would be two books he cites frequently as being among his major influences: Edmund Leach's *The Political Systems of Highland Burma* (Harvard University Press, 1954) and Pierre Clastres' *Society Against the State* (Zone, 1987).

Scott ends by noting, in passing, that we can no longer evade the state; our only option is to tame it (324). Even if it were over just a handful of pages, I would have welcomed some development of this view. From an anarchist perspective, what do the experiences of Zomians tell us about taming the state? The answer to this question is not clear. What I took from the book is that if we will always require a state – and a large and complex one at that – we must pay close attention to how the institutions of that state are structured. In discerning what our ideal state (and our ideal society) would look like, we need to ask: given a choice, would significant numbers of people pursue an exit strategy, leaving for something, that from their perspective, is both viable and preferable, or would they be mostly content to remain where they are? Come to think of it, that is a question that can, and should, be posed to all those with grand plans, regardless of where they place themselves on the political spectrum.