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"My book is, I hope, a mirror with a progressive infrastructure," observes the Martinican philosopher and critical theorist Frantz Fanon in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*.[1] The scholarly work of James C. Scott reflects a similar disposition.

Scott has been at the forefront of political science for the past four decades, and this is noteworthy given that his avowed intellectual interests of late align more closely with agrarianism, anarchism, and the convergences of area studies and the social sciences than they do with the refashioning of political science as a discipline. With numerous influential articles, including "Patron–Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia," and books such as *The Moral Economy of the Peasant, Weapons of the Weak, Domination and the Arts of Resistance,* and *Seeing Like a State,* Scott has produced a body of work that addresses comparative democratization, political economy, political theory, comparative agrarian societies, theories of hegemony and resistance, peasant politics, revolution, theories of class relations, and the geopolitics of Southeast Asia.[2] Moreover, he belongs to a short list of living thinkers whose writings ostensibly focus on a particular region of the world, and yet have far-reaching implications that continue to cut across a range of disciplines.

The latest book by Scott is arguably one of the most important works of political science published in the last 15 years. *The Art of Not Being Governed* represents both a culmination of his earlier body of writing and an extension of his research agenda into a new and very fruitful domain. This text examines the dialectical relations between hill people and valley people, nonstate actors compared to state actors, and the comparative complexities involved in acts of resistance by agents in Southeast Asia that reject civilizational discourse and the coercive norms of state entities. More than a philosophical justification for the possibility of anarchism abstracted away from real-world applications, as Robert Paul Wolff's classic *In Defense of Anarchism* details,[3] Scott describes the work as a *political anarchist* history of upland Southeast Asia.[4] Additionally, although at numerous junctures the book is reminiscent of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's hypothetical history in the *Discourse on Inequality,* Scott implicitly creolizes the concepts of Rousseau as well as Fanon, engendering a novel approach that questions both the so-called modernity of early- to late-modern political thought and the geopolitical scope of interlocutors that one engages with to find answers to crucial issues.[5]

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I contend that two axioms frame Scott's study. First, theorists of agency must examine *relationally* both the state and the populations living beyond the control and purview of the state in order to comprehend the great transformations in individual and collective political action vis-à-vis social structures. Second, the art of political anarchism enacted in nonstate spaces is not entropy. Indeed, the production of chaos is a phenomenon most appropriately attributed to the modern state itself.

Study Scope and Organizing Concepts

The specific realm of Scott's investigation has the neologism *Zomia* (pp. ix, 26). According to Scott, Zomia refers to a territory of 2.5 million square kilometers with around one hundred million minority populations located outside state boundaries. This large space is "at the periphery of nine states and at the center of none" (p. ix). Scott's inquiry into Zomia is not about the ideas forged at borderlands, as theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa intricately describe.[6] What distinguishes Zomia is its being the last major collection of peoples on the globe who have not been integrated into nation-states and whose conscious statelessness should not be mistaken for a lack of organization and political relevance.

The hill peoples of Zomia are "runaway, fugitive, maroon communities who have, over the course of two millennia, been fleeing the oppressions of state-making projects in the valleys" (p. ix). Scott elaborates:

> [I]t makes best sense to see contemporary hill peoples as the descendants of a long process of *marronnage,* as runaways from state-making projects in the valleys. Their agricultural practices, their social organization, their governance structures, their legends, and their cultural organization in general bear strong traces of state-evading or state-distancing practices. This view of the hills as peopled, until very recently, by a process of state-evading migration is in sharp contrast to an older view that is still part of the folk beliefs of valley people. . . . If, on the contrary, the population of Zomia is more accurately seen as a complex of populations that have, at one time or another, elected to move outside the easy reach of state power, then the evolutionary sequence implied by the older view is untenable (pp. 127–28).

Scott ascertains that Zomia's "days are numbered" and "fast disappearing" (pp. ix, 324), and he seeks to demonstrate what might be missed by failing to study radical forms of association that operate outside of and against state apparatuses. The work is thus crucial in our present moment, when politics and conceptions of the political in hard times demand responses by agents aiming for transformation amid political, social, and economic stress.

Scott's analysis of the late-modern importance of fugitive hill people is grounded in four concepts pertinent to both political theorists and political scientists more broadly: 1) nonstate spaces, 2) zones of refuge, 3) civilization, and

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4) political agency. The notion of *marronage*—flight—underlies Scott's articulation of these four concepts, and I shall explore the interrelated significance of marronage for his claims. Let me address these four concepts in turn. While Scott remains skeptical of the ability of those residing in Zomia and other contemporary nonstate spaces to preserve what he takes to be important shatter zones, I suggest that his findings actually have widespread application today.

We can observe this contemporary relevance in the political geography of post–September 11 terrorist network cells—exemplified by Osama bin Laden's disciples within Afghanistan; guerrilla liberation organizations, including the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico; the present-day Saramaka maroons of Suriname; and the transnational Rastafari movement, which proclaims a notion of freedom and respect generated out of the dialectical interplay between conditions of dread and love. These examples are but a small selection of violent *and* nonviolent actors with competing visions of political action, each inhabiting nonstate spaces.

Nonstate Spaces

Scott's previous book, *Seeing Like a State,* explored how certain state schemes to improve the human condition failed in their attempts at social engineering. Scott argued here that the effort to render everything visible and "legible" to "high modernist" state regulation and rationalist government planning eclipsed the valuable local, practical knowledge (*mētis*) of societies. *Seeing Like a State,* however, only cursorily centers attention on nonstate actors and the inhabitants of nonstate spaces.[7] *The Art of Not Being Governed,* in contrast, brings nonstate spaces to the center of his theorizing. By *nonstate spaces,* Scott means "locations where, owing largely to geographical obstacles, the state has particular difficulty in establishing and maintaining its authority" (p. 13). It is possible to have nonstate spaces within the confines of a city, and the regions of swamps, mangrove coasts, mountains, and marshes also represent classic examples of nonstate forms (p. 31). As such, nonstate space is not a synonym for hills or an elevated altitude. With regards to the peoples of Zomia, though, the "valleys" do refer historically to lowland states and the "hills" to the nonstate spaces. Many of Zomia's inhabitants have taken flight to the hills from the Han-Chinese state, and these spaces signify sites of "political resistance" and regions of "cultural refusal" (pp. x, 20).[8] Nevertheless, the hill peoples of Zomia have a dialectical, symbiotic relationship to the coercive valley states that they have fled (pp. 26–32).

More than merely territories of legibility, state spaces in Scott's current analysis refer to "zones of governance and appropriation" (pp. 40–63). States create the idea of uncivilized "subjects" who require controlling. Forms of slavery, fiscal legibility, and qualities of state self-liquidation define the techniques of population control essential to state governance and the management of potentially unruly subjects (pp. 85–97). The peopling of the hills, therefore, results from collectivities of persons wishing to break from what Rousseau labels "chains of dependence" and to escape living as subjects of enslaving state practices.[9] Scott notes, via the book's epigraph from a treatise by Pierre Clastres, that hill peoples forge in these nonstate spaces "societies against the state."[10] Keeping the state at a distance is a priority for hill occupants (pp. 127–77).

Zones of Refuge

Scott asserts that conscious flight from state to nonstate spaces represents an act of marronage whereby former governed subjects become free, self-determining agents in an idealized utopian territory external to the dominating practices of the state form. "Marronage" conventionally refers to a form of flight in which a group of persons isolate themselves from a surrounding society in order to create a fully autonomous community of freedom, and it has been integral for centuries to interpreting the idea of freedom in Haiti as well as other Caribbean islands and Latin American countries, including the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Suriname, Venezuela, Brazil, Cuba, Colombia, and Mexico. These communities of freedom—known variously as "maroon societies," *quilombos, palenques, mocambos, cumbes, mambises, rancherias, ladeiras, magotes,* and *manieles*—geographically situate themselves from areas slightly outside the borders of the plantation to the highest mountains of a region located as far away from plantation life as possible. Moreover, two normative types of marronage manifested themselves historically over time: *petit marronage* (fleeting, episodic acts of individual flight) and *grand marronage* (larger, collective maroon communities with their own defined borders). These communities strongly resemble Scott's depiction of Zomia in that they have their own anarchistic, albeit highly systematic, notions of agriculture, economy, and the political.[11]

Borrowing from Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán,[12] Scott conceives of nonstate spaces such as Zomia as *zones of refuge,* or shatter zones, that protect agents from the modes of governance and appropriation issued by states (pp. 7, 22–26, 130–37). While Scott references Fanon only once in the text (p. 77), his argument in places echoes Fanon's political theory. Fanon argues in *Black Skin, White Masks* that the solution to the problem of alienation facing colonized black women and men in the Francophone Caribbean who have been adversely effected by oppressive state forces is to acknowledge the *zone of nonbeing,* "an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge."[13] Fanon rejects the propositions put forth by early twentieth-century existential phenomenologists who contended that individuals experiencing the utmost coercion can only note their condition of

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unfreedom and nothingness. For Fanon, it is the state of unfreedom in the zone of nonbeing that provides coerced agents the very motivations and resources to resist state power. He expands on this thesis in *A Dying Colonialism* and *The Wretched of the Earth*.[14]

Fanon's zone of nonbeing, in my view, corresponds to Scott's articulation of hierarchical dynamics of power in state spaces, for it is the dreadful conditions of state spaces that cause agents living within their borders to mobilize against the intrinsic qualities of state forms in order to create an alternative world. According to Fanon, flight from the zone of nonbeing to the zone of being is freedom—or the zone of refuge in Scott's political language—and it results in human disalienation.

The Art of Not Being Governed urges us to consider those who imagine what seeing like a *non*state and fleeing to the hills and other regions of refuge entails.[15]

Civilization

Scott's book is usefully compared with Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Huntington's civilizational approach presents nation-states as the single most important actors in world politics, and it offers a set of principles for dealing with civilizational conflicts so that Western liberal capitalist civilizations may thrive in the face of challenges to their existence.[16] *The Art of Not Being Governed,* on the other hand, subjects the rhetoric of civilization and the biases of civilizational discourse to concerted critique. Scott does not invoke Huntington. But Huntington's realist logic—and the state-centric discourses of modernization and development more generally—is precisely what he argues against. As he states at the beginning of Chapter 4:

> The permanent settlement of populations is, along with taxes, perhaps the oldest state activity. It has always been accompanied by a civilizational discourse in which those who are settled are presumed to have raised their cultural and moral level. . . . [I]if one substitutes the nouns *development, progress,* and *modernization,* it is apparent that the project, under a new flag, is very much alive and well. What is striking about this civilizational discourse is its staying power (p. 98; original emphasis).

States invented not only "subjects" but also the language of "barbarians" (pp. 109–11). Rousseau remarks that the modern inventions of metallurgy and agriculture "civilized men, and ruined Mankind," thereby establishing a context for the demarcations of rich from poor, civilized from barbarian, and developed from underdeveloped.[17] Scott provides a spirited defense of the purported barbarian hill people of Zomia *not* by claiming how "civilized" they are or can be. "Hill peoples," he writes, "are not pre-anything. In fact, they are better understood as post-irrigated rice, postsedentary, postsubject, and perhaps even postliterate" (p. 337). Hill peoples are, in effect, postcivilized.

Political Agency

This brings me to Scott's fourth central concept: political agency. The author routinely states that the inhabitants of Zomia fleeing state power do so by political *choice,* thus introducing a "new element of political agency" (p. 8). We can understand a *political movement* to denote a hybrid formation that applies elements of either physical movement alone or physical and metaphysical movement together in order for a collectivity to alter conditions of materiality and meaning that reflect their group interests. *Political agency,* by extension, refers to the materialization of collective action that already existed as perpetual potential activity prior to its actualization by the movement. I contend that Scott develops a unique theorization of nonstate spaces, zones of refuge, and critique of civilizationism that allow us to interpret anew the meaning of political agency in dark times.

Scott qualifies the boundaries of application for his book because of the "daunting task of taming Leviathan" that has ensued since 1945 (pp. xii, 324). The August 5, 2010 cover story of *The Economist,* ominously entitled "Leviathan Inc," signifies a similar concern surrounding the post–World War II expansion of nation-state power. For hill people, state evasion and state prevention centrally involve eluding classification as subjects and fleeing "the hard power of the fiscal state, its capacity to extract direct taxes and labor from a subject population" (p. 330). The rise and progressive transformation of neoliberal capitalism into a new form following the international market collapses of 2008, along with globalization, the military-industrial complex, and technological advances in the age of the Internet and global positioning systems, threaten the sovereignty of the not-governed nonsubjects of the hills.

Numerous Western theories of agency deemed salient by social scientists—from social contractarianism and existentialism to neo-Roman civic republicanism—assume that statistically significant political action either must occur inside modern state boundaries or necessitate a return to a primordial, premodern state of nature without any symbiotic relation to states that nevertheless allows for maintaining nonstate space autonomy.[18] Scott refuses this methodological reductionism in spite of his areas of convergence with Rousseau, for Scott, like Fanon, believes that the language of return presumes that agents in nonstate spaces either had aspirations for or were the object of immutable forces of civilizational assimilation. As stated earlier, the second axiom of Scott's text is that political anarchism forged in nonstate spaces in not entropy. While the political projects in Chiapas, the Blue Mountains, Afghanistan, and elsewhere might not become the leading forms of human association, their political anarchist communities have much to teach us about structure, agency, and transformation.

For the aforementioned reasons, Scott's magisterial *The Art of Not Being Governed* is a profoundly important

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text that demands our sustained current and future attention.

Notes

1 Fanon [1952] 2008, 161.
2 See Scott 1972, 1976, 1985, 1990, 1998.
3 Scott's text provides an answer to what Wolff 1970 (viii) declares is a major limitation to philosophical, rather than political, anarchism: "On the side of practical application, I have said almost nothing about the material, social, or psychological conditions under which anarchism might be a feasible mode of social organization."
4 Dawson 2001 (15, n.6) contends in an influential study of African American political ideologies that anarchism is a political tendency that "has found little support of any kind among African Americans." Although this claim is debatable, it is noteworthy that scholars in African American political theory nevertheless repeatedly utilize the conceptual insights of Scott despite Scott's divergent area of geopolitical focus. See Hanchard 2006 and Kelley 1994.
5 On the idea of creolizing political theory, see Gordon and Roberts 2009.
6 Anzaldúa 1987.
7 Scott 1998, 9–83, 309–41, 396, n.11.
8 Wedeen 2002 also analyzes the concept of culture in political science.
9 Rousseau 1997, 158.
10 Clastres 1987.
11 Bilby 2006; Hahn 2009; Patterson 1982, 1991, 1996; Price 1996, xi–xii, 1–2; Thompson 2006. Deleuze and Guattari 1987 and Glissant 1997a and 1997b provide rhizomic conceptions of lines of flight that complement the idea of marronage.
12 See Beltrán 1979.
13 Fanon [1952] 2008, xii.
14 Fanon [1961] 2004; 1965.
15 Roberts 2010.
16 Huntington 1996, 33–37.
17 Rousseau 1997, 168.
18 For a useful exploration into political agency outside the Western tradition, albeit without a focus on actors in nonstate spaces, see Jenco 2010.

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In his book, James Scott presents the history of "Zomia"—a transnational zone of withdrawal within Southeast Asia where, over centuries, political communities sought and found refuge from the encompassing reach of empires, kingdoms, and states. Scott's double thesis is that Zomia is a political order apart and that its natural, social, and cultural features combined to maintain the hill peoples (the plural is crucial) as "'runaways' from state-making processes in the lowlands" (p. 24). The author analyzes the factors that sustained the highlands as an intentional refuge zone. He also analyzes the dynamics that—after the retreat to Zomia—consolidated the single state lowlands and transnational highlands as mutually constitutive: assertive and encompassing states, retreating and consolidating highland peoples. He emphasizes the hill peoples' refusal of states as something more than resistance, in the process raising interpretive and reflexive issues that reach well beyond the Southeast Asian massif.

The remoteness of the mountain regions bridging Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and Burma—compounded by the complexities of interior transit—might seem naturally to yield a measure of isolation and backwardness; however, Scott rejects such determinisms along with any analysis that would bracket the upland societies as premodern holdovers. Throughout, his emphasis is on the elements of the social, cultural, and built environment that sustained a centuries-long pattern of rejection, withdrawal, and readiness for flight on the part of peoples who literally took to the hills as states ventured control. Scott refers to these combined effects as "the friction of terrain"—the literal and figurative terrain sheltering and supporting the fugitive political cultures. He draws on wide resources to develop a multistranded historical narrative that braids together topography, agrarian practices, political forms, dynamic schisms and alliances, and ethnogenesis (among other things). Crucial to his thesis is the contention that it was the state itself that was at issue, and not merely antipathy to a particular regime or program. While his focus is on the highland peoples, that negative relation to states is also always in view as the time-space of the new regional narrative offered in this book.

Scott is concerned to show that concepts such as resistance and disorder—keywords in the cultural turn in state theory—are only partly adequate for the state of affairs in Zomia. As such, the book asks readers not only to rethink what they thought they knew about Southeast Asia but also more generally to rethink cores and margins, state

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