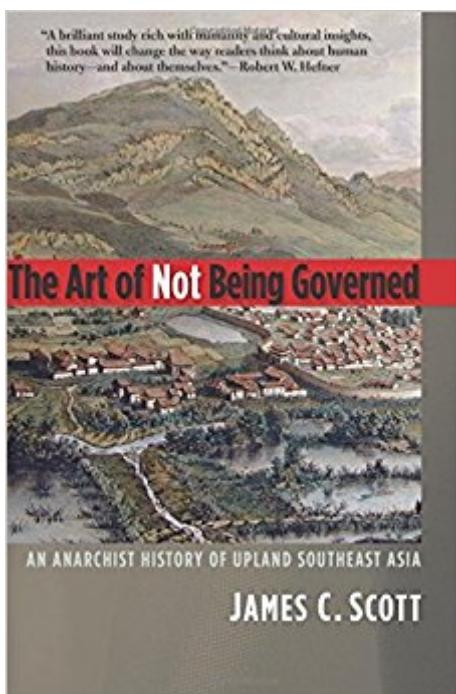


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# The Art Of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History Of Upland Southeast Asia (Yale Agrarian Studies Series)



## Synopsis

For two thousand years the disparate groups that now reside in Zomia (a mountainous region the size of Europe that consists of portions of seven Asian countries) have fled the projects of the organized state societies that surround them—slavery, conscription, taxes, corvée labor, epidemics, and warfare. This book, essentially an anarchist history, is the first-ever examination of the huge literature on state-making whose author evaluates why people would deliberately and reactively remain stateless. Among the strategies employed by the people of Zomia to remain stateless are physical dispersion in rugged terrain; agricultural practices that enhance mobility; pliable ethnic identities; devotion to prophetic, millenarian leaders; and maintenance of a largely oral culture that allows them to reinvent their histories and genealogies as they move between and around states. In accessible language, James Scott, recognized worldwide as an eminent authority in Southeast Asian, peasant, and agrarian studies, tells the story of the peoples of Zomia and their unlikely odyssey in search of self-determination. He redefines our views on Asian politics, history, demographics, and even our fundamental ideas about what constitutes civilization, and challenges us with a radically different approach to history that presents events from the perspective of stateless peoples and redefines state-making as a form of internal colonialism. This new perspective requires a radical reevaluation of the civilizational narratives of the lowland states. Scott's work on Zomia represents a new way to think of area studies that will be applicable to other runaway, fugitive, and marooned communities, be they Gypsies, Cossacks, tribes fleeing slave raiders, Marsh Arabs, or San-Bushmen.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"James Scott has published a book making a far more ambitious argument: Zomia, he says, offers a sort of counter-history of the evolution of human civilization. . . . What Zomia presents, Scott argues . . . is nothing less than a refutation of the traditional narrative of steady civilizational progress, in which human life has improved as societies have grown larger and more complex. Instead, for many people through history, Scott argues, civilized life has been a burden and a menace."â "Drake Bennett, *The Boston Globe* "For those who live in states, savages are those who do not. Yet since the Enlightenment, there have always been Western intellectuals who want to find a critical role for the savage to play. The general idea has been to harness the otherness of indigenous or stateless people as a means of interrogating . . . the modern state. In the past twenty years or so, this project has dropped off drastically . . . Scott has found a creative way to revive the tradition of critical thinking about the savageâ "and to highlight the social goals ofâ equality and autonomy embodied in the Zomian social order that states routinely fall short of realizing."â "Joel Robbins, *Bookforum* "Scottâ "s panoramic view will no doubt enthrall many readers . . . one doesnâ "t have to see like a Zomian nor pretend to be an anarchist to appreciate the many insights in James Scottâ "s book."â "Grant Evans, *Times Literary Supplement* "While *The Art of Not Being Governed* makes an important contribution to the larger field of uplands studies (and not only the study of the Southeast Asian uplands), its merits lie ultimately in the questions that it raises and the trenchant skepticism with which it will leave the careful reader."â "Bradley C. Davis, *New Mandala: New perspectives on mainland Southeast Asia* "Scottâ "s books is refreshingly welcome. . . . The author argues his case in a clear, comprehensible, and erudite fashion leaving readers in little doubt as to where he stands. . . . It has made a significant contribution by highlighting egalitarianism and independence as the ideals of hill societies. . . . Scott has provided us with a platform for rethinking ethnic identities and inter-ethnic relations."â "Christian Daniels, *Southeast Asian Studies* "If nothing else, James C. Scottâ "s *The Art of Not Being Governed* should cure the reader of putting too much faith in the smooth lines drawn on political maps. Scottâ "s nuanced account doesnâ "t romanticize the hill people, but he writes with sympathy about why they would want to have all the advantages of trade without the drudgery, subordination, and immobility of state subjects."â "Jesse Walker, *Reason.org* "In his dazzling, enlightening, and enjoyable new book, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, the Yale anthropologist and political scientist boldly

challenges the age-old story of "rude barbarians mesmerized by the peace and prosperity made possible by the king's peace and justice." "Tom Palmer, ReasonÂ "It is a clearly and beautifully argued book. . . . The Art of Not Being Governed fits together nicely with its predecessor as a landmark work of early 21st century social science. . . . It casts patterns of history into sharp relief that would otherwise languish in obscurity." "Henry Farrell, The American InterestÂ "Scott's thesis puts people who have been an afterthought in Asian-area studies in the spotlight." "Ruth Hammond, The Chronicle of Higher Education "James Scott has produced here perhaps his most masterful work to date. It is deeply learned, creative and compassionate. Few scholars possess a keener capacity to recognize the agency of peoples without history and in entirely unexpected places, practices and forms. Indeed, it leads him ever closer to the anarchist ideal that it is possible for humans not only to escape the state, but the very state form itself." "Prasenjit Duara, National University of Singapore "A brilliant study rich with humanity and cultural insights, this book will change the way readers think about human history and about themselves. It is one of the most fascinating and provocative works in social history and political theory I, for one, have ever read." "Robert W. Hefner, Boston University "Underscores key, but often overlooked, variables that tell us a great deal about why states rise and expand as well as decline and collapse. There are no books that currently cover these themes in this depth and breadth, with such conceptual clarity, originality, and imagination. Clearly argued and engaging, this is a path-breaking and paradigm-shifting book." "Michael Adas, Rutgers UniversityÂ "Finally, a true history of what pressures indigenous peoples face from these bizarre new inventions called nation states. Jim Scott has written a compassionate and complete framework that explains the ways in which states try to crowd out, envelop and regiment non-state peoples. He could take out every reference to Southeast Asia and replace it with the Arctic and it would fit the Inuit experience too. We need real applicable history that works, that fits. Truth like this, it's too darn rare." "Derek Rasmussen, former community activist in the Inuit territory of Nunavut, advisor to Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.

The author of several books including *Seeing Like a State*, James C. Scott is Sterling Professor of Political Science, professor of anthropology, and codirector of the Agrarian Studies Program, Yale University, and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

A ReviewThe Art of Not Being GovernedModern Society in the 21st Century has adopted the perception that anarchist principles are beliefs that can only exist outside the concepts of civilization.

Hence, it is customary to equate such conditions to those peoples that embrace the freedom and liberties that exist outside of a defined Nation-State. Peoples that fall within that category are generally considered to be untamed barbarians, savages, anti-state or otherwise classified in similar derogatory terms which translate into being outside the norm. Conventional wisdom, at least in the minds-eye of 21st Century adherents is that those living outside State control are primitive, backward societies existing in the backwaters of ever advancing civilizations. In this book, author James C. Scott dispels many of these myths and suggests strongly that those people living outside the confines of statehood do so of their own conscious, deliberate actions to avoid the onerous dictates of those who would seek to enslave them. Obviously, his expertise is in the examination of societies in that portion of the world that he terms Zomia, i.e. those regions comprised of Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Thailand, Siam, Burma, Southern China and portions of India and Afghanistan). Obviously, as an anthropologist and political scientist, he is well qualified to comment with some authority on the subject. He does not however neglect to comment on similar conditions amongst other societies that have shunned civilization to avoid the onerous effects of confiscatory taxation, forced corvette labor, military conscription and enforced religious edicts. In the cited example of Zambia, he classifies the two groups simultaneously dwelling in the region as Valley people and Hill people. The distinction is primarily based on the altitude inhabited by the two distinct groups; the Hill people are further stratified by the approximately how many meters of altitude segregate various bands or groups one from another. The Valley people that occupy the lower terrain are principally identified as being fixed grain producing farmers that cultivate wet-rice (irrigated) crops. Hence they are much easier to identify, catalogue, and transformed into tax paying subjects owing allegiances to their rulers. Consequently, they are transformed into not necessarily willing members of the State and are considered part of a civilized society. The downside of this upward gain in status is the attendant increase in their exposure to exorbitant often confiscatory taxes, forcible servitude as corvee laborers, military conscription, and put at the risk of becoming fair game for slave traders in either the commercial sense or as enslaved by adjacent Nation-States. The Hill people, on the other hand, living at higher altitudes in much rougher terrain are best adapted to hunting and foraging, swindling, cultivation of root crops that are less observable by the tax authorities, and living in much smaller groups; all factors that greatly enhance their mobility. Therefore they can escape the less than tender mercies of the Valley people's rulers. While they may dwell within the boundaries of the territories established by the Valley rulers, a combination of the Hill people's impenetrable terrain and the other factors mentioned make them essentially non-statists. Scott theorizes that when conditions in the Valley deteriorated or became more onerous the Valley people would tend to

migrate into the hills and renounce their claim to statehood. Hence, in frequent waves of migration the Hill People's population would increase somewhat in proportion to the severity of social/economic conditions in the valleys. These new immigrants would tend to settle at lower elevations and the established Hill People would move into bands of lands at higher elevations. The point being that by relinquishing their statehood, so-called civilized members of society would consciously and deliberately join the stateless barbarians to escape persecution by their rulers. He also notes that in the dying days of the Roman Empire a considerable number of ex-Roman citizens sought refuge and asylum amongst the ranks of the barbarians. So his observations as they relate to Zambia are apropos to similar conditions in many other parts of the world. Persecuted settled societal groups would become nomads or herdsmen, etc, etc. The balance of Scott's thesis is a detailed examination of how and by what means the residents of Zambia adapted their living conditions, their culture, their religions, and even their language patterns in order to avoid being absorbed by the State. This adaptation has been going on for a long time - a time-frame measurable in centuries - from pre-colonial times up to and including the colonization by European States. And, continues up into the present day and age. In today's 21st Century World there are fewer and fewer regions that are suitable uninhabited to lend themselves to those seeking to escape tyranny. In America, for example, and in many parts of Western Europe there are scant places where a liberty-minded or freedom-loving people can escape absorption and the States imposed enforcement and coercion that accompanies their forced adoption of state-hood. At best perhaps is the ability to distance ones self from the grasp of the State as much as possible. There is, of course, a rather radical solution which is finding favor amongst a growing number of individuals who are willing to become expatriates and migrate to other countries where onerous taxation, over-regulation and the erosion of liberties are less stifling. It could be expected that as monetary controls expand and the freedom of mobility are eroded the flight to more hospitable social/economic climes will cease to be a trickle and become a gush. R. David Read Abbeville, Louisiana May 5, 2012 Word count: 919

Oh, this is such an interesting book. Having traveled to Thailand and Cambodia, I wish I had read the book prior to visiting there. It is chock full of very interesting information about southeast Asia and the people who live there. What languages do they speak? What religions do they use? How do they deal with governments? I went back after finishing the book and made notes about what I had learned. These people are amazing. They want to avoid the use of force in their lives so they find ways to avoid those who want to use force. There is a lot to be learned from these people. The book

is well written and well worth reading. If nothing else, learn another way to deal with the intricacies of life.

James Scott is well-known among cultural anthropologists for this and other works which challenge some long-held assumptions and axioms about traditional social structures in pre-developed regions of the world. This book, however, is also very important for general readers of history and culture and a nonacademic audience. I leaned decades ago the general belief that minority and subordinate cultural groups surrounding or adjacent to dominant groups quite likely were driven to less-desirable and remote habitations in competition for land and resources. Scott illustrates convincingly that, in many cases, the dominant groups wanted those subordinate peoples close by to exploit them for labor, crops, taxes, and military recruitment, but that those groups commonly migrated away to avoid those same costs. In doing so, they purposely backtracked in what we would normally think of as normal cultural and technological evolution to more primitive standards, such as by going from settled farming and animal husbandry to swidden agriculture and foraging and hunting. In some cases, they even gave up literacy as less useful and less sustainable in their new lifestyles. While the dominant culture and its governors might have promised some stability and even military protection from bandits and raiders, the minority populations might have thought that, in balance, it was not a good deal. Ground-breaking and fascinating. Scott's book is based on his long researches in Southeast Asia, but his conclusions are applicable all over the world.

Professor Scott's history of stateless peoples in SE Asia is thought-provoking and relevant. Scott provides examples of peoples who persistently avoid the strictures and confines of the traditional state. This work is valuable for providing a glimpse into the lives of those who chose to truly "opt out." Given the pressures of the state, the days of these people are probably numbered; Leviathan continues on the march. In the concluding chapter, Scott nails the challenge facing humanity: "For virtually all my readers it will seem a very far cry indeed from the world they inhabit. In the contemporary world, the future of our freedom lies in the daunting task of taming Leviathan, not evading it." This is an important, approachable book and highly recommended.

I wish I could say this book teaches you how to not be governed, but no. It is a well-researched and quite readable historical/geographical narrative about Asian mountain people several dozen years ago, escaping from "the grid" of society and taxation. I presume that now, sadly, there are roads into all but the very remotest areas,

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