

historical complexities, ontological tensions, and dialogical connections among different Christianities and to reimagine Christianity as a field site that is always inherently plural.

As Ryle observes, all of her ethnographic field contexts speak in different ways to the current anthropological preoccupation with issues of historical continuity and rupture, to which she refers in the introduction. But by favoring ethnographic description and analysis over overt theoretical discussion, Ryle not only keeps her writing accessible to non-academics but also crafts an ethnography that models the diverse ways in which Fijians, and Pacific Islanders more generally, experience and represent continuity and change. One way that she achieves this is by juxtaposing quotes—especially in the introduction and final chapter—from an impressive array of sources (theologians, writers, poets, songwriters, academics) to convey the complexity of Pacific Island voices and perspectives.

Some readers—especially those unfamiliar with the region—may find Ryle's strategy of interweaving "representations of past and present" (p. 1) slightly disorienting and might prefer for these voices to be situated in the social and cultural contexts from which they are speaking. Such readers might also wish for a clearer sense of the structure of the work at the outset, as opposed to letting the structure emerge slowly. But other readers will appreciate the way that this authorial strategy helps to equalize Ryle's own voice with those of her conversation partners—academics and non-academics in the Pacific to whom this richly multivocal book may speak.

Ryle's title, *My God, My Land* (the translation of a well-known and once unambivalently embraced Fijian slogan), encapsulates what has become the fractious feeling among many Fijians that they are bound equally to their Christian faith and to their land. As Ryle traces in chapter 1, complex historical processes have united Christianity—in the form of the Methodist Church—with the land and the state in Fiji. The author shows how this union coalesced into an ethno-religious

nationalistic agenda that sought to exclude Indo-Fijians from the government in the coups of 1987. These divisive ideas remain in the form of a constitutional agenda pursued by the Methodist Church and Pentecostal churches that seeks reconciliation and unity among Fijians in a new Christian state, which is seen as a prelude to a more general multi-ethnic reconciliation in the country.

It is this turbulent recent history and the search for a more viable form of reconciliation and healing that informs the subject, the context, and, as I read it, the ultimate motivation behind Ryle's project. In the final chapter, accordingly, following extensive quotes from proponents of "different Christian approaches to processes of reconciliation at inter-personal, spiritual and political levels, and inter-ethnic, ecumenical and interfaith dialogue" (p. 201), Ryle concludes by giving her support to what she sees as the open, inclusive, and inherently relational Christianity articulated by "[l]iberal Protestant, Catholic and Anglican voices" (p. 230).

Michael W. Scott

London School of Economics and Political Science

SCOTT, James C., *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, 464 pp., preface, notes, glossary, index. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009. Hardcover, \$35, £20; Paperback, \$25, £16.99. ISBN 9780300169171.

Occasionally, a book comes along to unsettle our settled ideas of space and time and to offer us an alternative cosmology. James Scott's latest, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, is certainly such a book. Focusing on the "Southeast Asian massif"¹ of the highland region that Willem van Schendel (2002) has recently christened "Zomia," Scott explores the practice of "deliberate and reactive statelessness" by communities living on the margins of empires and nation-states (p. x). What if, he asks in a

Rousseauian vein,² certain groups have until very recently avoided the Fall that began with the origins of settled agrarian civilizations? This provocative question, on the one hand, challenges the Vico-inspired historicist narrative of human progress from hunter-gatherers and pastoralists through agrarian civilizations to modern industrial societies and, on the other hand, mocks the civilizers' boast of absorbing peripheral peoples and places into their orbits. On both counts, Scott's project stands out for its distinctive political theology that combines a romantic metaphysics with a tragic reading of history: whereas the former yearns for a nobler conception of time and space, the latter is rooted in a worldly realism that rejects salvationist utopias as fanciful.

The term 'anarchist' in the book's title is critical for understanding the author's aims and methods. It describes not only Zomian strategies of "political resistance" and "cultural refusal" (p. 20), but also the intellectual imperative to avoid "seeing like a state" (Scott 1998) by paying heed to the historical agency of stateless peoples. For Scott, the Hmong, Karen, Kachin, and Akha are not pre-modern vestiges but rather fugitives fleeing states and, arguably, civilization itself. Because fiscally illegible peripheries, formed via a historical "pattern of state-making and state-unmaking" (7), experienced "weak" or "dual sovereignty," they afforded highland populations "great autonomy" from taxes, conscription, *corvée*, and slavery in the plains (p. 60). Unlike the "heavily taxed, rice-growing peasantry," Zomians adopted an alternative subsistence strategy—denounced by civilizing state elites as wasteful "slash-and-burn"—namely, shifting agriculture (p. 77). Likewise, instead of opting into the elaborate hierarchies of political centers, Zomians designed "more flexible and more egalitarian" social structures (p. 18), offering a "bandwidth of identities" to choose from (p. 281). More controversially, Scott speculates that Zomians may have renounced literacy insofar as the "shape-shifting, pliable form of custom, history, and law" made possible by oral traditions appear to be analogous

to other state-repelling strategies, such as a shifting cultivation and the construction of flat, culturally fluid communities (p. 260). This analogy is richly suggestive, although perhaps too neat.³ Also, what if some or most highland communities enjoyed a less oppositional relationship to states? Would it weaken Scott's argument? Or is a political theology, by definition, incapable of being falsified? The answers, I suspect, depend less on further fact-finding than on one's ontological priors. Nonetheless, Scott proposes that what is true of Zomia is also more or less true of other "state-resistant spaces," such as the Mesopotamian Marsh, the Great Dismal Swamp in the US, the tropical forests of South America, and the Cossack frontier of Inner Asia (pp. 130–133, 169–171).

The penultimate chapter, titled "Prophets of Renewal," caps off Scott's argument. Zomians, he argues, "seem to have a vocation for prophets and rebellions" (p. 284). These millenarian rebellions, as Norman Cohn (1957) and Vittorio Lanternari (1963) observed long ago, express the hope of the marginal and the oppressed for a better, more just world. Instead of simply seeing them as failed rebellions, Scott urges us to carefully consider their "radical bias for hope" despite the odds against them (p. 293). This is because "[i]f ... we are interested in popular aspirations and subaltern politics, we will rarely find them dressed in completely secular clothing" (p. 294). Might this be *the* key to Scott's intention in writing this book? Is this how his own political theology can also harbor the romance of hope and yet keep its eyes fixed firmly on the tragic realities of subaltern existence? Can we hope without being deluded by fanciful utopias or disheartened by failures? Indeed, this may be the essence of a theodicy that disregards the line separating the sacred from the secular. After all, Scott says, "when is politics not, at some level, a theological debate about moral order?" (p. 294). The charisma of cosmopolitan prophets matters less than the claim of popular sovereignty by marginal peoples, an "as if" state that turns the status quo upside

down (pp. 308–309; cf. 295–297). Yet the political theology embedded in Scott’s anarchist argument matters as much here as the claims to recognition by the anarchist communities of Zomia.

Uday Chandra
Yale University

Notes

1. This is Jean Michaud’s (2003) term to denote the highlands of South and Southeast Asia east of the Himalayas.
2. I refer here to the famous narrative of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (*Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les homes*) or his ‘Second Discourse’.
3. As Scott (1998: 213–216) notes, much of his conceptual framework rests on a reworking of Edmund Leach’s (1954) classic opposition between Shan and Kachin social organization.

References

- Cohn, Norman. 1957. *The Pursuit of the Millennium: A History of Popular Religious and Social Movements in Europe from the Eleventh to the Sixteenth Century*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Lanternari, Vittorio. 1963. *The Religions of the Oppressed: A Study of Modern Messianic Cults*. New York: Knopf.
- Leach, Edmund R. 1954. *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Michaud, Jean. 2003. *Historical Dictionary of the Peoples of the Southeast Asian Massif*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- van Schendel, Willem. 2002. “Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20 (6): 647–668.