

Preface to Turkish Collection of My Interviews

James C. Scott



I am delighted that, thanks to Soner Torlak and Hayalci Hücre Publishing, my work will be available to Turkish readers.

The reasons for my delight are several. First, the work presented here represents, I believe, my writings since two earlier works, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (Yale Press, 1990) and *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*. (Yale Press, 1997) were translated.

Although I am a specialist in Southeast Asia, I am both surprised and gratified when my work seems to resonate with social scientists and historians elsewhere. Given the sophistication and size of the Turkish academic and intellectual establishment, the attention paid my work is especially gratifying. Time and again I have been very impressed with the Turkish graduate students coming to pursue a degree at Yale or for a post-doctoral fellowship; their level of conceptual sophistication, their breadth of reading, and their initiative and originality. Their performance speaks well of the training they have received.

My knowledge of Turkish history, let alone its current tempestuous political life, is deplorably slender. I delved into the 'modernist revolution'

under Ataturk insofar as it concerned the creation of permanent –usually Turkic– family patronyms. This was a process repeated as a form of statecraft nearly everywhere in the world but, in Turkey, it took place at lightning speed. (See “The Production of Legal Identities Proper to States: The Case of the Permanent Family Surname,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 44:1, (2002). More recently, I have been developing an account of the origins of sedentary agriculture and the very earliest states in the Middle East in which the early, pre-historic settlements in Anatolia play an out-sized role.

For these and other reasons I look forward to a closer engagement with the Turkish intellectual community in the near future and, in the meantime, with exchanging ideas via email. My one and only visit, on a family vacation to Turkey, was exceptionally memorable. We came, deliberately during the qualifying rounds of the 2002 FIFA World Cup when the Turkish population was hysterical with “football fever”. It was infectious and we have still not entirely recovered from the euphoria that prevailed. Since that heady experience we have made a practice of vacationing every four years in during the qualifying rounds in a country that has a team in the competition.

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**James Scott Interviewed by Alan Macfarlane
His Life, Education and First Books**

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*In this interview conducted by Alan Macfarlane, James C. Scott tells the story of his life, his education, the early thinkers who influenced him, how he became involved in political science and anthropology, how he came to write, and how he began to study peasant revolutions.**

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Born in New Jersey in 1936; father was a physician and he died when I was nine years old; there were three doctors in the town and the other two had been drafted into the armed services, but he was declared unfit as he had high blood pressure; he had a stroke in 1946; the effect on me was that we went from being relatively well-to-do to about the poorest people in the town; my mother came from a rather privileged background but had no resources, or sense of economy; I did not feel a sense of deprivation at all. I went to a small Quaker school but after my father died my mother couldn't afford to keep me there; I became the first scholarship pupil there - in return for working at weekends they waived my tuition fees; this school was my salvation, a surrogate mother and father to me, and I think that my academic achievements come in part from my desire to please my teachers; this school did things that a public

* For the two-part transcription of the interview on March 26, 2009, see http://www.alanmacfarlane.com/DO/filmshow/scott1_fast.htm and http://www.alanmacfarlane.com/DO/filmshow/scott2_fast.htm; for the two-part video of the interview, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cWgtrg_w7fs and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MP5bvOx4_pyM.

school couldn't have done; we had things like week-long work camps in Philadelphia where we would go to work with a black slum family, painting and plastering their house; we would go to dock worker meetings, Communist Party meetings, eat at settlement houses for people off the street, we would visit prisons, state mental institutions, so got a chance as twelve to fifteen year olds to see the underbelly of Philadelphia in a way that no Government school could have allowed; the Quakers had a lot of conscientious objectors at that time; they put in front of me every day people who had the capacity to stand up in a crowd of a hundred and be a minority of one; that kind of Quaker courage was infectious; I can stand up against a crowd but if you show me the instruments of torture I would betray anyone

Interest in subaltern studies comes from this experience; became a Quaker for a while but now lapsed; the Quaker doctrine of the light of God in every man and the history of Quaker social action, I admire; wrote a book 'Domination and the Arts of Resistance' which I dedicated to the school, Friends' School Moorestown, and dedicated my royalties to them as well as a mark of my gratitude; Alice Paul was one of eight key women in the struggle for women's suffrage in America, most of them Quakers, was a graduate of the school; the school created an award in her name and I was its first recipient; I have never been as proud of anything since

I did not know my mother's parents; the family had been socially prominent in Philadelphia two generations before my mother; their descendants appeared to have drunk themselves to death, so have completely died out; my mother's mother died in childbirth so she was adopted by an uncle and aunt; I heard fond stories about her uncle, but I never met him; a force in my life were my paternal grandparents; they were from West

Virginia, of Scottish-Welsh background; my grandmother was a classical Methodist striver for the success of all her children, with almost no money; my grandfather was a salesman to mining stores and could live anywhere in his territory; she decided they should live in Morgantown, they built a big brick house, and became a boarding house for junior professors at the University of West Virginia; all their five children went to that university; all her children disliked her but realized how responsible she was for their success in life; she had aspirations, at a later time she could have had a career of her own, but she wrote poetry and drove her children to distraction; I was the apple of her eye; she lived long enough to see me graduate for Williams College; I realized that it meant something to her for me to achieve some sort of academic excellence

I have an older brother who has had a working-class life; he went to another small Quaker school; though naturally left-handed they insisted that he write with his right hand, and this gave him a terrible speech defect which sapped his confidence; he didn't do well and ended up doing factory work; he was nine years older than I am, and fought in the Korean War; to show you the difference in our lives, he had not been in a plane in thirty years when I took him to Korea to visit the old battlefields; my mother had a problem with drink, and her background meant that she didn't have any skills; she had been completely dependent on my father and tried to commit suicide a month or so after his death; I did not know this at the time but I was sent to live with another uncle and aunt in West Virginia; I stayed with them for six weeks until my mother recovered; she managed to hold herself together and control her drinking until I went to college; at that point she more or less collapsed and was in and out of treatment; she died

when I was beginning graduate school; it certainly gave me the realization that women who didn't have an independent source of self-esteem and a skill were in trouble in terms of what they had to fall back on; it affected the idea of the kind of relationship I wanted to have; I know there are support groups for people who live in alcoholic families now, but there was nothing available to me; eventually I did what most people are advised to do in such situations; we would have crying and screaming confrontations, me trying to get her to give up drinking, all of which failed; after four or five years of this I realized that I could not change her behaviour and it was destroying me; I can remember withdrawing and seeing my mother as a sad victim, and with an objective eye, emotionally detached, myself; it saved me though it is not something I liked about myself

I was very close to my father; those were the days when doctors went around doing house calls; he had a red Roadster and took every opportunity to have me with him in the afternoons when I was out of school; I came to admire him; he was a bon vivant; he and my mother actually believed that the world is divided into large and small spirited people; one thing they bequeathed to me is an over-the-top large spiritedness; for all her alcoholism, my mother would have given away the house to the next beggar who came to the door; my father was an authoritarian personality as well; when my brother came back from his school knitting blankets for the poor Europeans after the Second World War, my father took him out of the Quaker school fearing he was going to become gay, and sent him to a military school; it was the worst possible thing he could have done for my brother; I can remember him treating a man for lip cancer; he saw the man on his tractor, smoking a pipe; father stopped the car and walked over

to him, climbed onto the tractor, took the pipe and broke it, and without saying a word walked back to the car

On hobbies: I was an avid stamp collector; my father was a supporter of Franklin Roosevelt, and out of loyalty to him I identified with the Democrat Party at an early age, and was actually involved in democratic politics; I had pork-barrel jobs working at the unemployment compensation; I actually had to work all the time; by the time I was eleven, my mother and I were loading lawnmowers into the back of the car and I was mowing people's lawns, doing their gardening, working for the Quaker school in the summer, working in the machine shop at nights on school days doing metal fittings; whenever it snowed, a friend and I would shovel snow; this pattern of working continued all the way through college; I came to agriculture and animal husbandry later, but I had earlier had experience picking corn and peaches etc., along with the Puerto Ricans who came to work in my part of New Jersey, where the land was very rich agricultural land; my mother had grown up on a farm outside the town; I did a lot of agricultural labour but it wasn't that that brought me to agriculture; I can't say that I enjoyed it but it was a necessary way of making money

Went to the Quaker school from second grade, at age seven, and stayed there until the end of high school; it was a tiny school; people that you have know from six until eighteen you know right down to the marrow of their bones; I know them a lot more than people I have been very close to as an adult; they know me too, and I find that very comforting; I avoid reunions, but the two times I have done so have been extremely satisfying in finding the essential persons behind all the wrinkles; have kept in touch with two or three, espe-

cially those who have had comparable lives; on the subject of higher education, I did not have a clue and nor did my mother; I happened to have a Latin teacher whom I liked and he had gone to Williams College; I decided to go there on account of him; the other alternative was to go to Haverford or Swarthmore which were closer, but I wanted to put as much distance between myself and my mother as possible and Williams gave me a scholarship; I don't regret having gone to Williams; I was an economics and political economy major and had the best small colleges economics faculty in the country; I got a fabulous education; I arrived thinking I was badly trained; my brother brought me to my first day of my freshman year and I realized I was completely inappropriately dressed; I remember sitting down in a room where people were talking about artists, writers and poets whom I didn't even know about; thought I was truly out of my league; remember calling my mother and saying that I would probably be home before Christmas; it was a rich kids' school and I was uncomfortable socially, also it was all men at the time; it took me about three years to decide I belonged intellectually and was doing rather well; here I might connect it to the reason why I am a South-East Asianist; I had an economics professor Emile Dupré, who set me the problem of why Germany, in the early years of the war, didn't run double or triple shifts in its factories; it happened to be after working night and day at Williams where I now felt I belonged, and I relaxed for the first time; I fell in love and ignored my senior thesis; I went to see the professor and he asked me what I had done; I tried to bamboozle him and he saw right through me; he told me to get out as I was not going to do an honours thesis with him; I realized I would have to find somebody else to adopt me; William Hollinger, who had

worked on Indonesia, said he wanted to know something about the economic development of Burma and that if I was prepared to work on it that he would adopt me; at that time I didn't know where Burma was, but I ended up doing an honours thesis on Burmese economic development; in the meantime I applied to Harvard Law School as I didn't know what I wanted to do, and was accepted there; then I won a Rotary fellowship to Burma so went to Burma for a year

At school I had piano lessons, but was not happy practising; I later took up the guitar, and am fond of listening to music but don't think I have a great deal of talent; I later took up pastel drawing, but envy people who at an early age either developed a musical or artistic skill; I do listen to music; my partner is a cellist, and I can listen to her playing Bach suites until the cows come home; my wife, who died twelve years ago, had a classical education and I was, I think, a civilization project of hers, and she was relatively successful; she brought me to opera, was an art historian and brought me to art; just living with her for thirty years or so was a kind of intellectual and artistic formation that was remarkable for me; I embraced all her enthusiasms and ended up becoming fond of the things that she was fond of; as a high school kid I was far too anxious about whether our family was going to sink financially or whether I would do all right at school; I was fond of sport, and was a goal keeper in soccer; as it was a Quaker school we did not play violent sports like American football; we had an undefeated basketball season and an, all but one game, undefeated soccer season; I continued to play basketball with my children; I am not particularly good at anything but tend to make up for it by persistence; I am now learning Burmese which I started at sixty-six; I am not a great language

student, but I find that sheer persistent application will get you any language

On religion, my father was a militant atheist; remember him seeing an elderly man dying of cancer; he would sit and talk with him for thirty minutes, trying to talk him out of his faith; it was a pleasant, even affectionate conversation, but my father didn't like the idea that this man was going to his grave with these illusions; my mother was an agnostic; however they did not have the courage of their convictions so insisted that I go to Sunday school somewhere, although not the Catholic church; I decided to go to the Presbyterian Sunday school; I actually liked singing; I then became an Episcopalian at a nearby church, and I got to know the Priest there and was fond of him; I was confirmed there, and became an altar boy; this continued for about two years; I was, thanks to the Quakers, completely taken up with Gandhi, and I asked at Sunday school whether Gandhi could go to the Episcopalian heaven; the doctrine then was that if you hadn't known about Jesus Christ you might have a chance to go to heaven; Gandhi knew about Jesus Christ and did not accept him as saviour, so therefore there was no place in the Episcopalian heaven for him; I walked out of the Sunday school with my friend; I was about fifteen at the time; I remained quite fond of the priest who didn't hold it against me, but that was the end of my being an Episcopalian; later, at the University of Wisconsin, I decided to join the Quaker meeting there; this lapsed, although I admire the Quaker social gospel; I don't have faith in any higher being; if I thought it important, I suppose I would be an atheist, but I don't much care about my lack of faith; I, don't admire Buddhism; I have seen it in action, and although I admire individual Buddhist figures, I see Burma on its back as a country;

Buddhists may do valuable things in orphanages, but the sense that Quaker social action creates civil society and the passion behind it, I don't see in Buddhism; I find it an extremely individualistic form of religion and somehow wonder whether a different kind of Buddhism could bring about more successful results; I spent a lot of time in wats and abbeys, as it is a great way of seeing the country and these people have connections, but I not taken as so many Westerners are by meditation and so on

At Williams I was always on the lookout for father figures; I was taken under the wing of two people in the political science department; one was Frederick Schumann who wrote a book on international relations, and whose nickname was Red Fred; I found his left wing politics very satisfying; I took attendance at his large lecture classes as part of my student duties for which I was paid; he got to know me as a poor scholarship student who did well, so took me under his wing; another professor, Robert Gaudino, who died young, took the Socratic method seriously; in tiny classes that were filled with intellectual tension, in which you were expected to be deeply engaged, I can remember them being rather frightening; he was a kind of small genius; I don't think much of Straussianism generally, but he as a teacher was quite remarkable; there was a Williams in India programme that was started after I left, which took Williams undergraduates to live in a village for six months; after about five years of this enormously successful programme it was realized that the Williams' students knew more about India than they did about their own country; out of this developed a Williams in America programme in which undergraduates would prepare to spend a semester living with ordinary workers, or in a public institution; a brilliant programme as

none of these students would be able to say something facile about such people as they would have experienced that life; when I came back from the year in Burma, I was a student political activist and worked for the National Student Association in Paris for a year; I was elected an officer for another year, and then I went to graduate school; at that point, in 1961, I knew some Burmese but knew I couldn't go to Burma as it had closed up; I had been in Rangoon and had got involved there in student politics with a number of minority groups; after three months I got a death threat put under my door; I lived in the old staff chummyery at the University of Rangoon; the Rangoon University Students' Union was a hot-bed of politics, and as I am not brave in that way, within a week or so I moved to the University of Mandalay; I spent the rest of the year there working, initially on economic statistics; within a few months gave this up, and travelled the country, trying to learn Burmese; I feel that I bungled that year and the book that I have done now and the time I have spent in Burma, is an effort to do Burma justice; this is a theme of my life; my dissertation, 'Political Ideology in Malaysia', was not a good book though it pleased my professors; it did not please the specialists who knew about Malaysia, so 'Weapons of the Weak' was an effort to do Malaysia right after having bungled it the first time; Burma was my first time abroad and it was really hard; I lost about 30lb in the course of the year; it was an enchanting country and I would have been perfectly happy to devote the rest of my life to Burmese studies; if I had been able to study with the assurance that I could go to Burma that it probably what I would have done; my next choice was Chinese but I couldn't go to China; I then decided that if I studied Malay-Indonesian it gives you four countries as it is spoken, not only in

Malaysia and Indonesia, but in parts of the Philippines and Thailand as well; it was practical considerations like that which led me; I came to Yale to do graduate studies; I had been going to Harvard Law School but had postponed that for my year in Burma; after that year I realized I did not want to be a lawyer but wanted to be an economist; I applied to Yale economics department and they accepted me; then I had the chance to go to Paris; in the course of that year I realized that although I wanted to be an economist, Yale would want me to do a couple of years of advanced calculus; I had a chance to go to North Africa as part of a trade union delegation; I asked if I could do the calculus in connection with my first semester; James Tobin, who was Chairman then, said no; I appealed and he still said no; I asked if he would send all my things to the political science department to see if they would have me; they accepted me and I went to North Africa and became a political scientist rather than an economist; in Paris I was not a serious student but working for the students' union; it was a fabulous year, a kind of cosmopolitanization of Jim Scott; it gave me a familiarity with the huge international student community in Paris at the time; it also gave me an appropriately jaundiced view of political science which was then in the middle of its positivist, empiricist, moment of American political science though I was not aware of that at the time; I knew nothing about the behaviourist revolution and when I arrived at Yale this was complete news to me; I felt all these people were like Jesuits in the grip of a view of how intellectual progress could be made which I didn't share, but I needed to prove to them that I could master what they wanted me to master before feeling free to rebel; it took me about a year and a half before I was able to reject it.

Bob Lane was my thesis supervisor; he had had sixteen hour interviews with working class New Haven people about how they thought about politics; he had a kind of literary flair; I think his book was called 'Political Ideology' but it was a good book; I liked the technique of deep and searching interviews of that kind; I worked with high political civil servants in Malaysia; I interviewed some sixteen of them, each for several hours, and put together 'Political Ideology in Malaysia'; I think it was a good example of someone who wants to imitate his professor; the dissertation was highly thought of and immediately published but reviewed badly by and large; I realized I was easily flattered by people who were closest to my work and had no distance from it; I had the basis for a class action suit against political science for having bungled my education and mesmerized me in this way; I realized then that I did not want to do any work that was essentially based in a narrow, hyper-specialized, discipline; I then did some work on corruption and wrote a book called 'Comparative Political Corruption'; that was before the 'Moral Economy of the Peasant' which kind of launched me

I was following a minor American form of political science and filling in the grid created by somebody else, without a great deal of imagination; in the mean time, the effect of all of this, the year in Paris - I was married when I began graduate school, so the civilization project had begun to kick in - so by the time I finished my dissertation I partly knew that this was not what I might aspire to; that particular empiricist, positivist, political science, A.J. Ayer inspired, among others, produced work of survey research that doesn't hold up as being very distinguished any longer; I read Riesman and C. Wright Mills, and was particularly influ-

enced by the latter; my education begins, as someone who doesn't depend on the discipline so desperately, when I start to teach at Madison, Wisconsin, in 1967; I am a South-East Asianist, the Vietnam War is at its height, there are demonstrations every day at the university with tear gas etc., and I find myself teaching courses on the Vietnam War with 800 students; I taught with a friend who was a China specialist, Ed Friedman - we taught a course on peasant revolution; we would give a lecture and sixty or seventy students who thought we were insufficiently progressive, would go away after the lecture and write a rebuttal of our lecture which they would hand out to all the students at the next class; this continued for the whole semester and was quite extraordinary; I got into deep trouble as an anti-war person at Wisconsin, and there was a dean who wanted to get rid of me; I had gone to Wisconsin as I knew it had protected its people against McCarthy, and in the end it sort of saved me; at that point it seemed to be the most important thing I could do with my time, to understand peasant politics, peasant revolution and wars of national liberation; this was completely stimulated by the current political situation, but I was determined to make something seriously intellectual of it; Barrington Moore was at that point extremely important because he at least tried to understand these different routes to modernity and the way in which commercial agriculture was created and agrarian elite classes; Friedman and I wrote the introduction to a rather more recent edition of Barrington Moore's work; that was a point where my intellectual agenda was increasingly less dependent on political science; most of my colleagues don't consider me to be a real political scientist, and if you ask people who didn't know what I was, most would say I was an anthropologist; I like the

idea of not being a member of any discipline

I was very much involved with anthropologists against the War; when I worked for the National Students Association it turned out, after I was elected to be International Vice-President, I was delivering some resolutions we had passed at our annual student meeting on Haiti and other places, in Washington; I was asked to go to a meeting with someone who turned out to be a CIA agent, who wanted me to write reports for them; at the time I don't think I was ideologically opposed to that but I refused; it turned out that during my period working for the National Student Association, all my reports were sent by the president, who had been recruited by the CIA, to them; I wasn't paid, but I was in effect a CIA agent; I had some sense of being a little cog in a machine I didn't much care for, so the idea that anthropologists should be involved in counter-insurgency - an issue that has come up again - it was clear to me that this must never happen; I knew some of the people - David Wilson and the Tribal Research Center in Thailand - so I was very heavily involved in this, and in the protests against Sam Huntington's ideas on relocation of people in Vietnam too; there were huge demonstrations at the Association of Asian Studies over Huntington's work, and I was very much a part of this; there were at least five or six years at Wisconsin devoted to intellectual work, both against the war in Vietnam and also practical speaking; I met Eric Wolf a couple of times but before meeting him, I met his wife Sydel Silverman; I think 'Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century' and his little book on 'Peasants' are excellent; if you look at my book that is coming out in September it starts out with Pierre Clastres' argument about people with history and people without, and it can be seen as homage to Eric Wolf; I think 'Europe and the People

without History' is a great book; I think he did an admirable job, taking the same political situation that I faced and doing a kind of scholarship that transcended just the particular moment

I have never met Sidney Mintz though I have read everything that he has written, I think; I recently taught his 'Sweetness and Power' - I run a programme on agrarian studies at Yale - Piers Vitebsky was just there, we have everybody and anybody who works on agrarian issues with the exception of Mintz; stayed at Wisconsin for eight years; a dean who had been head of the political science department, Leon Epstein, and within a month of my arrival we had almost all night full faculty meetings on the Vietnam War and the demonstrations on campus; he decided I was a dangerous radical and wanted to get rid of me; thanks to my friend Ed Friedman, who said I should act like a Jew and become the perfect colleague so that the only thing against me was my politics; suggested I read everybody's papers and go to every meeting; I did this and I got tenure there; when I was leaving (I had an offer from Yale), my chairman at Wisconsin asked me to let them respond; Leon Epstein was still dean, and my counter-offer from Wisconsin was my proposed Yale salary minus \$100, so his hand was obvious to the very end; I was very happy at Wisconsin - it had an agricultural school, I was working on peasants, Madison was a magnificent community, so I would have been happy to stay there; I left it to my wife to decide, and all her relatives in the East wanted her to move; it was then that my farming career began as we moved into rural Connecticut and kept sheep and goats

When I went to Yale I was hired by political science; they had read the draft of 'Moral Economy of the Peasant' which was then in press and happened to have

money that was to be used for South-East Asia; I do not think I would have been hired had there not been this money; when I went to Wisconsin, anybody who worked on the Third World was considered to be appointable, but by 1976 when I went to Yale that was no longer true; the reason that 'Moral Economy of the Peasant' became known is because someone decided to devote another book to attacking it (Popkin's - 'The Rational Peasant'); I think my book read well because, like most of my books, there is one point that I hammer away at; 'Moral Economy' was an argument about rational choice, that the problem of peasants was the danger of going under and its consequences were catastrophic; as agriculturalists they choose different crops, planning schedules, soil conditions etc., and spread their bets in a series of prudent economic strategies; they don't maximize their yield in the way that modern capitalists would, but minimize the danger of going under; my argument was that they also had a whole series of social arrangements that do the same thing - about the sharing of harvests, the forced charity within the village so that big men have to distribute surpluses - so had a set of arrangements that were organized again, not to maximize production but minimize social danger to individuals in the community; these gradually broke down with capitalist markets and the colonial tax systems; historically, traditional governments were weak enough so they actually couldn't collect taxes very successfully in a bad year as peasants could resist them; in the colonial period you had cash taxes and fixed revenue demands that didn't fluctuate with the harvest; the result was even a small crop failure resulted in existential crisis for the peasantry; eventually I wanted to study peasant rebellion; everyone was concerned with those issues and the fact that Popkin wrote a book criti-

cizing my book meant that it was an ideal teaching vehicle for people who wanted to teach this conflict; my book begins with Tawney's metaphor of the peasantry situation being like a man up to his chin in water so that even a ripple is sufficient to drown him; the title of my book was 'The Subsistence Ethic and Peasant Politics' or something like that; then I was convinced by having read 'Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' by Edward Thompson to use "moral economy" in the title; I think it was a mistake in the long run because it suggested to people who didn't read the book carefully that I had a series of altruistic peasants who were not operating rationally; underlined by Popkin calling his book 'The Rational Peasant'

Apart from Thompson, I admire Marc Bloch - very taken by the Annales school of a larger scale history what was not just a history of events; also A.V. Chayanov who was following the Austrian and German traditions of household budgets, work routines, and labour surveys, did these Zemstvo studies in Russia in the early twentieth-century that established the social organization of the household; he was the first person to absolutely establish a set of family cycle strategies, the consequences of having many children who can't get work, and the way the structure of the farm changes over time; thought he had developed an empirical basis of a solid kind under a series of speculations for the first time; I found it extremely useful in the 'Moral Economy'; I was often asked after publishing that book where I had done my fieldwork; in fact it was a library work, mainly on Burma and Vietnam; these were two places where there were rebellions and the object was to work up to these and explain them; by that time I had read a lot of anthropology about peasants, including Eric Wolf's work; I was convinced that, as most of the

world were peasants, then I would spend the rest of my life studying them; for this the only way to prevent writing some really stupid things is to know one place like the back of your hand so you can test generalizations against a real place; I have never been able to understand generalizations without seeing them working with real people; the most important book for me was 'Weapons of the Weak' which was written on the basis of two years in a village, and I had never worked so hard before or since; this was in Malaysia; I had what I thought then was a very clever idea, that I would do my fieldwork in the village, then go off and write a synopsis of my argument, and then I would come back to the village and speak this to villagers, then I would write down what they had to say; the last chapter of my book would be an early review by the villagers themselves; I did this, except that in the last four months where I was explaining what I thought I knew to people, they corrected me in so many ways that I was faced with the possibility of writing a rather stupid book and giving them all the intelligent things to say in the last chapter; I ended up abandoning this model and rewrote the book; I know people who write ethnographies of people who would both like to read them, and recognise themselves; it is the kind of anthropology to which I aspire; on Levi-Strauss's suggestion that the subjects could not see themselves in the way the researcher might, should ask why they don't recognise themselves; John Dunn has written a fine article on doing history and social science under realist assumptions which addresses the problem of the relationship of the subjects of social science to the description of their action that social scientists reach; I practice what John Dunn preaches

I had written about rebellions and since I am not a particularly brave person I decided that I would like to

do fieldwork in what was the biggest rice growing area of Malaysia, in the State of Kedah; Malaysian politics was not remotely revolutionary in that period, but rather like the 'Captain Swing' rebellions in the 1830's in England, they were introducing combine harvesters, people were losing their jobs, and there was conflict in the countryside; since it was possible to ensure there were no riots, there was a whole series of strategies of class contestation that took place below-the-radar; there was arson and sabotage, burning of crops and killing of animals, but also strategies of slanders, boycott of feasts; it occurred to me that for most people who were not living in open political systems in which they were free to organize and protest, that most of the class resistance in the world is this below the radar form, what I call everyday forms of resistance; my objective was, with slavery and serfdom and this situation, to try to understand a kind of politics which most people in modern, organized, democratic systems don't understand; that is the most common form of politics for subordinate groups, that is what got me into subaltern studies; it was rather pleasing to see it being taken up by people who had not particularly read the book; one of the dangers of a good title is that people can wave it as a wand without actually having read it very carefully; it travelled as a slogan pretty far and wide and I thought often traduced it; the thing that I am proudest about in that book is the really careful effort to work out Gramsci's idea of hegemony as it would work in a peasant setting like that; in Gramscian terms I was talking about a situation of domination so technically, in a sense, hegemony doesn't apply; what I wanted to show is that for an anthropologist or an historian, in situations of domination you get a surface of political conformity, consent and performance, in which the subalterns were

tugging their forelocks and producing the formulas expected of them; under such situations, what I call the public transcript, is organized by the effects of power to produce the appearance of hegemony, and that we must never necessarily take this as the establishment of hegemony unless we are able to recover, what I call, the hidden transcript - what subordinate groups say among themselves when they are outside the immediate effects of this power; I would be in situations where rich and poor villagers were together and everything would look like it was hegemonic, then I would be among rich people and there would be a different transcript as there were no poor to impress, and then I would spend time among the poor and after a long period of doing field labour with them I would get their view of things; I thought that social science meant triangulating in terms of ideological effects these three different transcripts; can be applied in many situations

On writing, when I am doing original composition I use a pencil and eraser and a block notebook; I probably write every sentence about three times; it is one of those things in which you have found a formula which you think works you are terrified to vary it from fear; I have continued to do this; I think that I write more slowly than anyone I know - eight or nine years generally between books - and I am working pretty hard in between; however, the advantage is that I work so hard the first time to get that sentence out; to plan - it will take me months until I am happy with the outline even before I start writing; it means that the revisions that I have to do are probably less catastrophic than they are for many people; my revisions tend to be fiddling here and there or actually dropping out or in whole chapters; I don't like to read my stuff again, I find my attention wanders, so I would rather work hard the first time to

try to get it right so I don't have to go back over my own prose; I think that cutting and pasting late on it is hard to keep the continuity and narrative drive you had the first time you were writing it; I think there are lots of ways to write successfully and I don't even recommend my way

In 1991 I had decided to work on peasants and started a programme on agrarian studies; when we moved from Madison to Connecticut we decided we either wanted to move right to the middle of the city or all the way out in the countryside as we did not want to live in the suburbs; I had always wanted to keep animals so got a few chickens, sheep and a goat; when I was about to go to Malaysia to do 'Weapons of the Weak', the farm across the street, of forty-six acres, and which we admired, came up for sale but we did not have the money; we went off to Malaysia and when we came back we found that the farm hadn't been sold and was being offered again at a much reduced price; we made a bid and bought it; it had a good barn and I decided I wanted to raise sheep; I learned how to shear - had about twenty-five sheep for about twenty years and did all my own shearing, sold the lambs to the Greeks and Italians; I put in good fences, and raising sheep does not take more than a half hour night and morning, with a month during lambing when you have to be around, a few days shearing, but I would have wasted that time doing something else; I find it really wonderful to have an activity every day which requires your body and arms, but leaves your head alone; you can just day-dream, think up ideas, I find it actually creative; I have changed my breed of sheep over time to one where I could minimize the number of lambs that I lost; for the last three years I only lost one lamb; I organized my flock for the health and survival of the lambs, not for

quantity; I wake up from bad dreams in which I have failed lambs rather than failed people

'Seeing Like a State', is a different sort of book from others that I have written; I ran the programme in agrarian studies for eighteen years from 1991 and this book was published in 1997; you could say that the book grew out of the seminar I gave myself in this programme; agrarian studies has an outside speaker every week so is pretty intensive; I also teach a course on the comparative study of agrarian societies with other faculty members - it is the biggest graduate course at Yale; we had an endless succession of people who were talking about development in the Third World, the history of Western agriculture, failed development projects etc.; over time, this idea of legibility - Ian Hacking gets into this a little bit - in which the state, in order to manipulate the society has to know it, and does so through statistics, cadastral surveys, the creation of a kind of legible society that can then be manipulated and be the object of policy changes; I tried to understand how forms of creating legibility also create rigidities and failed development projects; there are a couple of chapters in general about understanding legibility; there is the case of Lenin versus Luxemburg on the role of the vanguard party and how much can be directed from the centre; there is a study of Brasilia as a one-off city in the wilderness, and Jane Jacobs as the great critic of the high modernist city; then there is Julius Nyerere and Tanzanian villages, and a little bit on South-East Asia; then a couple of chapters on industrial agriculture, and another on knowledge that can't be learned from a book where I tried to work out where this kind of knowledge is more valuable than knowledge that can be codified; this is where Hayek and Michael Oakeshott get to be interesting.

Current book is about Burma but also Zomia; the argument of the book is that all people who live in the highlands are seen by lowland people as a primitive remnant, Thai's would say "our living ancestors"; my argument is that almost all these people in the hills, which were virtually empty until about 1500, have run away from state-making projects in the valleys; these are not people who were left behind but are people who are state-evading people, running away from taxes, forced labour, wars, epidemics etc.; they become ethnified in the hills over time and their agriculture - swiddening etc. - is an effort to evade appropriation; everything about them which makes them look primitive, including their literacy - I argue that they had a literate minority at one time and rejected it as it suited them better to make up their genealogy and itinerary; I argue that all the things that make these people look primitive are, by and large, state evading strategies; that is why Piers Vitebsky's work on reindeer people, on non-state people who have tried to keep out of the way of the state, has become very interesting to me, including gypsies etc.; I think I have remained relatively faithful to the desire to work on the peasantry; what has surprised me is the anarchist turn that I have taken; the reason I taught a course on anarchism a couple of times in the last ten years is that I found myself saying things in class, and then reflecting that it was what an anarchist would say; it happened enough that I thought I should take it seriously; it was a great experience for me as once you announce such a course you get the undergraduate left; at Yale, I get all of them in my class, and I find them in many ways the most interesting, and I think they have educated me as much as I have them.

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