

**Title—Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance**

**Author—James C Scott**

**Year—1987**

Categories: Resistance, Marx, Anthropology, Politics

Place: Malaysia

Time: 1960-1980

Argument Synopsis:

Scott's book asks the question of why peasants do not revolt in circumstances which otherwise would seem to justify radical action. He asks why poor villagers do not fight to overturn the economic and social order that keeps them poor or makes them more so. There has been much scholarly attention devoted to organized, large-scale, protest movements that appear, if only momentarily, to pose a threat to the state. Scott notes that for all their importance, peasant rebellions are few and far between. Due to this, Scott argues that it is more important to understand everyday forms of peasant resistance. He characterizes this as the constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rent and interests from them. Some examples include foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, and sabotage. Scott underscores how everyday forms of resistance do not make headlines.

His study is based on evidence from two years of fieldwork in a Malaysian rice growing village from 1978 to 1980. Although a political scientist by training, Scott conducts an anthropological study of this Malay village. Scott refers to the village as Sedaka but acknowledges that this is a pseudonym in order to protect the privacy of the villagers he observed for two years. He examines the local rice economy, its social organization, the values that support and create tensions in it, and the way that double cropping has undercut the old order and begun to extrude new social, political, and economic formations. Scott's book is a study of local class relations, thus peasant-state relations are notably absent. Specifically, Scott is interested in examining the effects of the Green Revolution, or double cropping, in Malaysia. The implementation of new agricultural technology in this village has caused inequality to widen dramatically—the richer get richer and the poor get poorer. His main argument is that the peasants are not ignorant of their situation, but their ability to see clearly also extends to fully seeing the odds against successful revolt. To put it another way, the peasants are aware that full scale rebellion is likely to fail so in order to protect their own safety and ability to provide for their families, peasants engage in smaller scale, everyday forms of resistance.

The book is organized into eight chapters. The chapters reveal how Malay peasants, by word and deed, cope with their situation and attempt to get back at those they think have treated them unfairly. The chapters contain detailed anecdotes about specific villagers. Scott highlights forms of physical resistance, such as theft and collective withdrawal of labor, as among the tools of the weak in their everyday resistance against the system keeping them poor.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Resistance by subordinate classes begins close to the ground, rooted firmly in the homely but meaningful realities of daily experience
- The goals of resistance are often modest and the means to achieve the ends both prudent and realistic
- Poor peasants appeal to traditional values and engage in covert forms of resistance to do everything possible to delay the implementation of new agricultural changes