

Introduction:

Signs of Europe: discourses, mythologies, politics of representation

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The theme of the *12th International Conference on Semiotics* (Thessaloniki, 1-3/11/2019, organized by the Hellenic Semiotic Society, the School of French Language and Literature and the Laboratory of Semiotics at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) was dictated by a flood of changes in the 21st century that, among other things, radically redefined what one might understand as “signs of Europe”. Sadly, the current situation (2023), political, social and economic, only reaffirms the radical fragility of signs, as well as the importance of tracking and tracing the shifting values within the European semiosphere.

Since Antiquity, Europe has been both a political geography, as well as a series of cultural mythologies. Imagined in several forms by scholars, artists and travellers, regulated with various strategic intentions by rulers and businessmen, home to the most radical forms of both particularism and universalism, exceptionalism and cosmopolitanism, (Mark 1998; Swedberg 1994), Europe has been consistently challenged by fragmentation, hegemonic expansionism, antagonism, and contestation, as well as by the recurring question of its identity as a ruthless colonizer or an exporter of humanist education and high culture (Wolf 1984; Davies 2011).

Since their inception, in 1979, the International Conferences of the Hellenic Semiotic Society, have addressed topics directly relevant to the concerns and challenges of the day. True to this tradition, this Conference aimed to reaffirm the importance of semiotics as an analytical-critical approach to socio-cultural phenomena and encourage the investigation and understanding of the semiotic practices involved in both the making and the current unmaking of the European integration project.

The European integration project has been conceived as a standstill in the tumultuous history of Europe, offering an internationally unique experiment in transnational governance and cooperation (Kaiser and McMahon 2020). However, the European integration narratives of reconciliation, solidarity and ‘unity-in-diversity’ have proved inadequate, bearing a controversial relationship to actual political realities. They were contested both from without, by geopolitical conceptions such as the Global South and emancipatory visions of the Global Justice movement, as well as from within, especially during the recent crisis of the Eurozone, of Brexit, of the politics of Fortress Europe, and of the unprecedented challenges to health systems and patterns of sociality during the COVID pandemic. Their survival -as well as any trace of the Enlightenment values of equality, self-determination and humanism in the political rhetoric- is becoming more and more uncertain., in the face of nationalism, racism, and the acceptance of war and escalating pauperization and ecocide across Europe.

This edited volume includes selected studies presented at the 12th *International Conference on Semiotics: Signs of Europe* and complements volume 6, issue 2 of *Punctum-International Journal of Semiotics*, edited by Gregory Paschalidis (2020), which was dedicated to the *Semiotics of Political Communication*, and in which are including important articles presented to the conference too. The volume is divided into six chapters: *media discourses, values and techniques of connectivity, grander narratives, representations and allegories, visual arts and their politics and social practices and their mythologies.*

I. MEDIA DISCOURSES

The first section hosts papers dedicated to *media discourses*. The first study in the section is titled “Does being a European mean being a citizen of the world? The interaction between European and global identities within a cosmopolitan media discourse” by **Anna Khalonina**. Khalonina investigates the specificity of contemporary cosmopolitan discourse in British and French media and particularly the interaction between European and global identities displayed in this discourse. Her research is based on discourse analysis and combines the theoretical basis of French discourse analysis with Critical Discourse Studies, as well as analytical categories from Contrastive Discourse Analysis. Khalonina argues that, while promoting cosmopolitan ideas, contemporary European media discourse remains an example of the realisation of the exclusivist, Eurocentric character of cosmopolitan identification.

The second study in this section is titled “Racist discourse in the press during times of crisis: The Greek 2012 elections and the Brexit debate” by **Christopher Lees**. Lees highlights how the Press in both Greece and the United Kingdom use a variety of linguistic devices, such as syntactic structures and pragmatic presuppositions which served the dissemination of racist discourse in the period leading up to and immediately after the Greek general elections of 2012 and in the years following the “Brexit referendum”

of 2016 in the United Kingdom. Lees finds that the topics in which reference is made to foreign nationals and immigration typically revolve around criminality, social unrest and threatened national security in the Greek case, and social problems arising from an increase in the population and changing demographics in the case of the UK. Moreover, foreign nationals are often negatively portrayed in the Press, while in both cases there are metaphors alluding to States as “containers” of “unwanted” populations; in other words, this rhetoric constructs an idea of national entities “protected” by means of borders that are now being “threatened”. He also points to how pragmatic devices such as collective implications and presuppositions are used to subtly present “the foreigner” in a negative light.

The third paper in this section, on the “Code of woman: transformation of femininity strategies in Russian mass culture” is by **Lyudmyla Zaporozhtseva**. In her article, the author tries to build a meta-model of cultural analysis based on the notion of semiosphere by Yuri Lotman and ideas of interpretive codes by Williams. The model becomes a basis for a case study of communicative strategies of femininity in the Russian mass media. An extended corpus of texts demonstrates transformations in several aspects, namely, the treatment of body and appearance, of relationships, and of the treatment of children. Zaporozhtseva demonstrates that there is a shift from body shaming to body positivity, a trend towards self-acceptance, and a proliferation aesthetics of diversity of appearance types. Her analysis notes a shift from a universal type of beauty towards a more unique, even grotesque, beauty, and towards a notion of beauty as a process. She also finds that there are more and more images demonstrating the consciousness and the need to defend one’s own borders, including psychological borders.

The next paper in the section, by **Nikoleta Panagaki, Argiris Archakis and Villy Tsakona**, is about “the representation of refugees in TV news clips” [Η αναπαράσταση των προσφύγων σε τηλεοπτικά αποσπάσματα της επικαιρότητας]. The authors investigate, in the context of critical discourse analysis, the way refugees are represented in television news clips and the extent to which this representation approaches or deviates from the official State discourse. They focus on two clips that reflect the views of citizens and local actors on the settlement of refugees in their area or the attendance of refugee children in their children’s schools. Their research has shown that TV texts reproduce the State discourse either by representing refugees as a “threat” or by placing them on the margins of society by projecting the hegemonic majority-refugee relationship.

The section concludes with **Anna Iegorova’s** “Conceptualizing Europe in Ukrainian News Media Discourse”. Iegorova examines the subtle connection between European and Ukrainian identities and analyses a large corpus of data collected from Ukrainian weekly news items starting from the so-called Revolution of Dignity (November 2013) until November 2019 and offers insights into the features of how Europe was conceptualized in the Ukrainian news media of the period up until before the cur-

rent war. She concludes that the perception of Europe and separate European member states in the Ukrainian news may vary, depending on a constantly fluctuating political situation. She also argues that the images produced may also vary, depending on the media company producing them, which raises the question of media company' ownership.

II. VALUES AND TECHNIQUES OF CONNECTIVITY

The second section of the volume concerns *values and techniques of connectivity*. **Dimitra Sarakatsianou** and **Loukia Kostopoulou** examine “the European Union cohesion policy in an audiovisual text: A semiotic analysis of thematic structure and colours” [Η πολιτική συνοχής της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης σε οπτικοακουστικό κείμενο: Σημειωτική ανάλυση της θεματικής δομής και των χρωμάτων]. Their research aims at examining a Greek audiovisual text which is available on the official website of the European Commission, a kind of “narrative of Europe” that informs Greek citizens on the cohesion policy of the E.C. through the analysis of the syntagmatic structure of the narrative and the exploration of color schemes. The authors find that the emphasis is on results, on the implementation of current policies of cohesion, and on the efficient allocation of resources for these policies. As concerns colour, the authors find that the colour in the video's background plays the role of a *non-narrative narrator* directing the plot of the narrative and also that of a *mediator* decoding verbal messages, therefore the colour is a *retochrome* and is used to imply specific meanings.

The second paper in the section, by **Thomas Bardakis**, explores “the notion of Europeanness in the school textbooks of Modern Greek Language and Social and Political Education in the third grade of lower secondary education: A semiotic approach has a teaching and a learning aspect” [Η έννοια της ευρωπαϊκότητας στα διδακτικά εγχειρίδια Νεοελληνικής Γλώσσας και Κοινωνικής και Πολιτικής Αγωγής Γ' Γυμνασίου: Μια σημειωτική προσέγγιση]. Bardakis is interested in the notion of Europeanness in visual messages in the school textbooks of Modern Greek Language (2018) and of Social and Political Education (2018) in the third grade of lower secondary education. According to his study, the values advocated by the European Union are promoted in the context of building and perpetuating solid relations between the EU member countries.

Panagiotis Katsaros continues with a semio-linguistic study of “indicative signs of hate speech in contemporary Europe: the case of diminutive suffixes in Modern Greek and Italian” [Ενδεικτικά σημεία εκφωνήσεων με ρητορική μίσους στη σύγχρονη Ευρώπη: η περίπτωση των υποκοριστικών επιθημάτων της νέας ελληνικής και της ιταλικής.]. His paper concentrates on the theoretical model of *morphopragmatics* and attempts to explore the extent to which diminutive suffixes can be a strategic choice in modern Greek and Italian through speech act and speech situations for upgrading the illocutionary force of the intolerant intentions of speakers. Katsaros finds that the theoretical tool of mor-

pho-pragmatics enables to address in a comprehensive way the problems of detecting hate speech, since not only offensive words but also words used in our everyday vocabulary, e.g., in diminutive form, may appear in speech. He also stresses that the criteria for classifying an expression as hate speech are subjective and require particular care and precision in order for these criteria not to infringe the principles of freedom of expression.

In “Coining 2 Euro myths in united Europe”, **Panayotis Xouplidis** attempts a visual socio-semiotic approach of the common side of the Greek €2 coin which depicts the geographical image of Europe, and its national flipside, which depicts a scene from a mosaic in Sparta showing Europa being abducted by Zeus, in the form of a bull. Xouplidis argues that this imagery is a carefully planned coexistence of supranational and national imagery on metal money signs and reinforces political identities within the European Union. Xouplidis concludes that Europa’s myth about Europe becomes the Euro’s myth about the EU, a monetary myth for a continent’s prosperity disguised as a maiden’s myth from ancient Greece.

III. GRANDER NARRATIVES

The third section involves *grander narratives* within the semiotics of Europe. The section opens with a joint paper by **Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou** and **Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos** on “The Lord of the Rings: An imaginary geography of Europe”. In their study, Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou and Alexandros-Phaidon Lagopoulos examine Tolkien’s original fictional geography of reshaping Europe. Then they analyse the distribution of the semiotic values in the spaces of Middle-earth and how the spatial level reflects the logic of the narrative as a whole. Finally, they attempt to identify Tolkien’s views on the political structure of his fictional Europe. They conclude that the various peoples of Middle-earth are not seen as subjects of the king, but rather as close allies and confederates. This federalism, they suggest, represents a pretty good metaphor for the principle behind the EEC of Tolkien’s times.

Lia Yoka, in the second paper of the section, traces the history of the 20th century European emancipatory and oppositional social movements and their relationship to art movements as represented in three important art exhibitions in Europe. Dissecting “political narratives of modern art in the European museum”, **Lia Yoka** follows a trajectory of the artistic Left, from the “alternative colony” of *Monte Verita* in Harald Szeemann’s exhibition that challenges formerly established narratives of the European avant-gardes, through to the “organized artists’ front” presented in a well-received *Novembergruppe* exhibition that reevaluates the oeuvre of artists who are considered abstract or obscure, to the Eastern bloc artists (both official and dissident) of the Cold War period, who are organically placed within the narrative of European modern art for the first time in a recent ZKM exhibition by Peter Weibel.

The third paper of the section by **Miguel Fernández Belmonte** discusses the results of his *in situ* study on “The House of European History: Shaping contradiction” examining the House of European History”, an exhibition project inaugurated in Brussels in 2017. Belmonte is interested in museological and museographical characteristics of the permanent exhibition of the House of European History (as displayed in 2019). He concludes that neither the institutional mission nor the declared vision of the House of European History are satisfactorily communicated in its permanent exhibition.

Alexandros Teneketzis’s article “Imagining Europe: Myth, Memory, and Identity in the German Historical Museum, 1989-2019” explores how a cultural institution interprets and displays the idea of Europe. It examines the political use of Europe in the cultural field and in public history, as well as how symbols and artefacts address an ambiguous and divided historical past, in order to accomplish social and political cohesion in Germany and Europe. Teneketzis is also concerned with how the arts and museology, at different times and during periods of crisis, can become part of the public sphere and public history, through a museum’s exhibition policy and how the interpretation of Europe is reflected in the permanent exhibition of the German Historical Museum. During the last decade there has been a change in the museum’s interpretation and visualization of the idea of Europe, downsizing its role and emphasizing German history itself. Attention is now focused on the German past, without direct European references and without online presentations of Europe, except for when the German topic addressed has an unavoidable European dimension.

IV. REPRESENTATIONS AND ALLEGORIES

The fourth section concerns the broad analytical level of *Representations and allegories* in literature and film. **Eleni Gini** reads “Juan Mayorga: *Nocturnal Creatures* or the Stranger in the Nightmare Landscape of a Creeping Threat” [Χουάν Μαγιόργκα: *Νυκτόβια Ζώα* ή ο ξένος στο εφιαλτικό τοπίο μιας υπέρπουσας απειλής]. The author relies mostly on the French semiotic tradition and arrives at three main findings: First, that this work constitutes a dramatic exercise, a kind of metonymy for how one being can turn another into its slave without any apparent element of violent, tangible subjugation. Second, that *Nocturnal Animals* uses the complex tool of language to illuminate the axiom that speech is action, to affirm the performative power and function of simple verbs in theatrical writing and acting. Thirdly, that the text demonstrates a complex anthropological truth: on the one hand, that the *uncomfortable* provokes the need for control, and on the other hand that *fear* sustains enclosure and loss of freedom.

The second paper, by **Athanasia Manazi**, concerns “Signs of the crisis in Europe: The case of the *La casa de papel*” [Σημεία της κρίσης στην Ευρώπη: Η περίπτωση του *La casa de papel*]. Manazi investigates the place of the series within popular culture, namely its influence in the form of intertextual references from other works about resistance to op-

pressive regimes, and how the signs created for the TV series (most notably Dali's mask) were adopted as a means of expressing political beliefs. For Manazi, the producers of the series intended to address the issue of the European Financial Crisis and therefore found fertile ground with the Spanish Indignados, whose *indignation* they expressed through the series. Also, the author makes an interesting observation that the great commercial success of the series and the fact that the Netflix distribution platform is part of popular culture should not lead us to consider the series in the light of a simple evolution of the popular novel. It has all the hallmarks of a myth.

Loukia Kostopoulou explores "Europe between Utopia and Dystopia: Jean-Luc Godard's *Socialisme* (2010)". She delineates the characteristics of a genre which emphasizes the notion of utopia/dystopia in Europe in reference to Godard's late film *Film Socialisme* (2010), where both the concept of utopia in digital film, and the issue of utopia in Europe are raised. *Film Socialisme* is Godard's first film that was shot in digital format. The film is a triptych, and the second part raises the question of Europe's deconstruction. In the film allusions to authors, concepts, philosophers, filmmakers, abound. The analysis focuses on the synergy of semiotic systems and explores the cinematic techniques employed to convey the notion of decay. Kostopoulou concludes that the concept of *dissonant resonances* does not apply solely to the montage of *Film Socialisme* but it applies also to the broader *problematique* of the cinematic genre.

The last article of section is also dedicated to Godard. **Nicos Terzis** finds "*Week-end* (1967), an epitome of bourgeois modernist cinema deconstructing Europe via reconstructed metaphoric signs of its traumas". *Week-end* is a metaphorical critical portrait of everyday terrors and unresolved contradictions and traumas in French capitalist society of the 1960s and exhausts the boundaries of the bourgeois cinema of the spectacle, epically signaling its end. For Terzis, the film appears prophetic even today as nothing of what it reveals as traumas has yet been cured.

V. VISUAL ARTS AND THEIR POLITICS

The fifth section specializes on the *visual arts and their politics*. **Panagiotis Mpikas** researches the "Politics and British/European identity in Mark Wallinger's artistic work and exhibition strategy" [Πολιτική και Βρετανική/Ευρωπαϊκή ταυτότητα στο καλλιτεχνικό έργο και την εκθεσιακή στρατηγική του Mark Wallinger]. The author studies three characteristic works by the artist, in which issues related to British and European identity as well as the political situation in the post-9/11 world dominate. He then explores the meaning of these works as public works, within the specific political trajectory of the artist's exhibition practices.

The second paper of the section, by **Themis Veleni**, deals with "Representations of the myth of the Rapture of Europe in modern Greek art before and after Greece's accession to the European Union" [Αναπαραστάσεις του μύθου της Αρπαγής της Ευρώ-

νης στη νεοελληνική τέχνη πριν και μετά την ένταξη της Ελλάδας στην Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση”]. The article examines works by Greek artists that represent the myth of the Rapture of Europe, focusing on the historical conditions of the works’ creation in relation to the narrative function they serve and to the semantic codes they constitute. Veleni concludes that the construction of the myth of the EU with verbal, visual and other patterns, emerges as a necessity in times of crisis, producing new cultural units on top of received schemata and either reinforces the narrative of cultural continuity or criticizes and subverts it.

The Greek myth of Europa’s rape is further discussed in the next paper of the section. **Despina Gialatzi** discusses “Europe’s rapture as sign of Europe: Ideological dimension of the myth the article” [Ευρώπης αρπαγή και σημείον Ευρώπης: Ιδεολογική διάσταση του μύθου]. Gialatzi focuses on the European currency as a sign. Using Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies*, she asks if there really is a united Europe, whether the ancient Greek myth is enough to unite the peoples of the old continent in a new identity, or whether the ancient myth can be fulfilled by a modern myth. The author concludes that there is a semiotic path from the mythological tradition to the iconization of the myth with the relief figures on the coin, to the family matrix of the European Union and from the foundation of a united Europe to its re-“symbolicisation”, now captured on the cover of a book during the years of the Greek economic crisis.

The next article is by **John Tzortzakakis** who studies “Signs of Sublimity in The Antiquities of Athens” and suggests a semiotic model of narrative-making mechanisms in the framework of 18th century travel literature. Employing the example of the *Choragic Monument of Lysicrates*, being part of first volume of *The Antiquities of Athens* (1762) by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, he demonstrates that two different and distinct semiotic sign systems contribute to the production of a single narrative. Reading the description of the Monument, he notices a linguistic and a pictorial narrative, since the Monument is discussed both linguistically and pictorially. The author concludes that, informed by *The Antiquities of Athens* through the example of *The Choragic Monument of Lysicrates* and through the lens of its contemporary philosophical theory of the *sublime* as expressed by Burke, the 18th century narrative seeks to establish that the architectural monuments of the Greek Antiquity combined both the *beautiful* and the *sublime*.

VI. SOCIAL PRACTICES AND THEIR MYTHOLOGIES

The fifth section of the collective volume concerns *social practices and their mythologies*. The first paper examines “Shifting meanings and common perspectives: maternity care practices and birth spaces in Greece and in Europe”, where **Myrto Chronaki** explores maternity care and its social significations, from hospital birth into the midwifery model emerging in Europe. The theory of the social production of space, the concept of ritual, the philosophy of the midwifery model, and feminist concepts of agency form the

theoretical framework of her research, revisited through the lens of semiotics. The author concludes that established maternity care in Greece, just as in Europe, is characterized by a common medicalised approach. However, there is a trend for a change of attitude in perinatal care of women and babies towards a less medicalised and interventive approach. The research suggests that this alternative conceptualisation is the result of focused and dedicated action of many agents, scientific collaborations, voluntary, vocational, and professional associations, and individuals across Europe.

The second paper in the section, by **Konstantinos Michos**, on “Envisioning and visualizing nanotechnology in the European Union”. Based on the EU report *Nanotechnology: the invisible giant tackling Europe's future challenges*, Michos investigates the use of the visual elements and their success in the creation of a specific view of nanotechnology. Michos groups the verbal elements of the document in semantic isotopies that facilitate a comparison with the narrative used by the visual elements to provide useful insight into the discourse of nanotechnology, as well as into the communication and promotion of science breakthroughs in general. Michos, by studying the various kinds of nanotechnology-themed texts, has shown that all of them face similar obstacles, since researchers from various disciplines are concerned that nanotechnology is failing to deliver upon its promises. Thus, the narratives employed over the years have exposed a gap between the European and global marketing and feasibility of nanotechnology projects.

Christos Kousidonis contributes a study of “Porsche Cayennes and other material indices. Constructing narratives on the Greek membership to the EU”. Kousidonis argues that the Porsche Cayenne became the centre of a narrative revolving around commercial products attaining a symbolic status during the recent Greek economic (banking, financial and national debt) crisis. His paper focuses on the development and use of instrumental narratives structured on the Cayenne and the pawnshop. Kousidonis concludes that during the Greek crisis the Cayenne became charged with yet another shift in signification, the connotation now being careless spending, heavy suspicion of tax evasion, and morally and socially irresponsible behaviour. On the contrary, the media narratives on the pawnshop and pawnbrokers, although clearly sustaining the politics of distraction from the real problem of poverty, avoid embracing the stereotype of careless spending and flamboyant lifestyle embedded in the Cayenne narrative.

The fourth paper of the section, by **Anastasia Toliou** looks at “France's World Cup win as a new mythology of contemporary French society in crisis Europe” [H κατάκτηση του παγκοσμίου κυπέλλου ποδόσφαιρου από τη Γαλλία ως νέα μυθολογία της σύγχρονης γαλλικής κοινωνίας στην Ευρώπη της κρίσης]. Against the methodological background of Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*, Toliou attempts to interpret the sign of the victory of the French national football team in July 2018 in contrast to the military salute of the black boy on the cover of *Paris Match* magazine in 1955. The author confirms how pio-

neering and insightful Barthes was in predicting that racial and stereotypical discrimination would not stop.

The final paper, “From *κουρείον* to barber shop”, by **Aspasia Papadima**, argues that, following its accession to the European Union in 2004, Cyprus underwent several transformations in its visual language, which have been noticeably influenced by intercultural trends. Based on empirical research, using primary as well as secondary data, she examines the shift in the local typographic landscape. Papadima concludes that the abrupt increase of modern barbershops in recent years reflects an equally fast and mostly uncritical adoption of Western trends, involving hasty adjustments not only to physical appearances and general aesthetics, but also to key cultural indices such as habits and behaviour, language, and visual communication.

Concluding remarks

The studies in this volume confirm that the European semiosphere has entered a process of sealing its external borders¹, which makes it difficult for foreign cultural texts to move inwards and to be productively adapted. How can we understand this in the light of Tzvetan Todorov’s position that “European civilization [...] is ‘allocentric’ rather than egocentric [...] The center is elsewhere, which opens up the possibility for the Other to become, someday, central” (Todorov, 1992 [1982]: 109) It is true that signs are (still) translated and transposed in the European semiosphere at a much faster rate than in other semiospheres, with the exception of the “North American” semiosphere, formerly the basic “customs clearance” and mediator of cultural values (Sonesson 2003). Nevertheless, the rhetoric of European humanist values remains somehow constant within the European educational semiosphere and seems to be a criterion for its accessibility.

This insulation of the “European semiosphere at large” has been particularly evident after the war in the Ukraine. Certain European cultural systems were either institutionally banished or pushed out of this (idea of a) European semiosphere due to revisionist nationalism². As editors of this volume we are fully aware that everything positive, life-affirming and socially emancipatory in the European cultural value system is not only a product of collective cultural contributions by all peoples and societies in Europe’s geographies, but has also been crucially inspired by non-European cultural systems (especially indigenous American cosmologies and practices that European colonists came in-

1. Lotman (2005: 2008) mentions that “[i]nsofar as the space of the semiosphere has an abstract character, its boundary cannot be visualised by means of the concrete imagination”.

2. Hedetoft (2000: 114) argues that “nationalism was once a partly realistic, partly progressive movement, which filled a vital function in civilization’s history and the accommodation of contradictory material interests. now, sadly, it can only be described as a collective fantasia of despair”.

to contact with³, as well as Southeast Asian and African ideas of communitarianism and respect towards nature⁴. The Moscow-Tartu School of Semiotics is an obvious academic case in point, as is the evidence from the global literature that is rewriting European history and redefining European self-conceptions as we speak.

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3. Graeber and Wengrow. (2021) convincingly refute the best-selling accounts of world history (and European humanist exceptionalism) by Francis Fukuyama, Yuval Noah Harari, and Jared Diamond, and challenge the origin of the "social contract" in Rousseau and Hobbes. See also Mignolo (1995): 69.

4. Scott (2009) offers a study of the Zomia highlands and the century old practices of advanced cultural and social organization and "state avoidance".