

Hidden Transcripts... *Shared?* :

Passive Resistance in the Soviet Case

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· **Key words** : power, resistance, hegemony, passive resistance

[ABSTRACT]

This article questions the core assumption of the “passive resistance” theory in order to broaden its theoretical implication. Behind the theoretical threads of “passive resistance” lurks the ontological dichotomy between the powerful and the powerless, the dominant and the dominated, and so on. The dichotomy necessitates the *exclusiveness* of “hidden transcripts.” For instance, a slave does not share his secret transcripts with the master. The “sharing” is possible only with other slaves. That is why the transcript has to be “hidden.” However, I argue that there are certain circumstances under which a slave *shares* his hidden transcripts with the master. I will also demonstrate that they are not some bizarre anomalies. Instead, the “sharing” of hidden transcripts between the powerful and the powerless can occur as a widespread social phenomenon. By doing so, I intend to point out the complexity of power relations in which the “exclusiveness” of hidden transcripts coexists, albeit uncomfortably, with its “sharing” characteristics.

I . Introduction

The “passive resistance” school has broadened our understanding of power relations by challenging conventional social theories that prioritize explicit forms of social resistance such as riots, revolts, and revolutions.¹⁾ It has sufficiently demonstrated that clandestine and anonymous resistance is deeply inscribed into everyday practices of the powerless for whom explicit protests are extremely dangerous, if not suicidal. In this article, the core assumption of passive resistance is problematized to broaden its theoretical implication. Applied to a life in communism, the notion of passive resistance reveals peculiar aspects of power relations. Behind the theoretical framework of passive resistance lies the ontological dichotomy between the powerful and the powerless, the dominant and the dominated, the ruling and the ruled, and so on. On the basis of this dichotomy, the theory of passive resistance has further developed into the exclusive characteristics of “hidden transcripts.” For instance, a slave cannot share transcripts with his master. Instead, the “sharing” is possible only with other slaves. That is why the transcript has to be “hidden” in the first place.

The main goal of this study, however, is to argue that under certain circumstances, a slave shares hidden transcripts with his master. In addition, it will be demonstrated that they are not some strange anomalies which attract scholarly attention because of their rareness. Instead, I argue that the “sharing” of hidden transcripts between the powerful and the powerless can occur as widespread social phenomena. By doing so, I intend to point out the full dimension of power relations in which the “exclusiveness” of hidden transcripts coexists with its “sharing” characteristics. Since James C. Scott stands at the center of the passive resistance school, his work is used as its theoretical underpinning in the next section.

1) For some examples of the “passive resistance” theory, see John Gaventa, *Power and Powerless: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984); Vaclav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless* (London: Hutchinson, 1985); Timur Kuran, *Private Truth, Public Lies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

II. “Hidden Transcripts” as the “Weapons of the Weak”

Though developed from a different perspective, the works of Erving Goffman serve as a good introduction to Scott’s theory of passive resistance. Goffman’s main interest is “face-to-face” interactions in everyday life.²⁾ To analyze daily interaction rituals, Goffman adopts the theoretical framework of “theatrical performance” in which individuals participate both as performers and as audience. Individuals as “performers” try to present themselves in a certain way in order to project their preferred definition of the situation, whereas they as “audience” attempt to accommodate the projected images of others to facilitate interaction rituals. Importantly, what comes out through such interaction is not a genuine agreement but a “veneer of consensus” to which everyone present feels obliged to give lip service in order to maintain working relationships. Under such circumstances, it is natural that the image one tries to project as a performer and the gesture one makes as an audience can significantly diverge from one’s real thoughts and feelings. In other words, “misrepresentation” is a crucial part of daily interactions. Specifically, some aspects of thoughts, feelings and behaviors are “accentuated” to foster the projected definition of the situation while other aspects are “suppressed” as the latter might discredit the carefully constructed working consensus. As a result, if space is organized in such a way that the exclusivity of performers can be guaranteed from the audience, their “hidden” thoughts and feelings make a regular appearance in the “backstage” where the audience are not present.³⁾

Goffman emphasizes that his theory of theatrical performance can be applied to *diverse* settings of face-to-face interaction. By contrast, James C. Scott narrows his focus to “power-laden settings.” While spending two years in the remote Malaysian village of Sedaka, Scott noticed that appearances could be deceiving. Instead, a rich texture of village life is found among what is *not* apparent. Although the village’s public life is controlled by its wealthy members, the “backstage of village life” is a completely different story where the poor call a spade a spade without hesitancy. Instead of accepting the “official” views of the dominant, the powerless elaborate their own stories by

2) Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967), p. 11.

3) Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), pp. xi-9, pp. 58-66, and pp. 111-113.

refusing “to accept the definition of the situation as seen from above.” As a result, there are crucial differences between “onstage” and “offstage” practices of the ordinary village members.⁴⁾

The last theme is further developed in his *Domination and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Discourses and practices “onstage” are defined as the “public transcript” that reflects ordinary relations between the dominant and the subordinate. In fact, virtually all the normal encounters between the dominant and the dominated represent the encounter of their public transcripts. Public transcripts alone, however, do not tell the whole story since there are “hidden transcripts” that take place “offstage” behind suspicious eyes of the dominant. As the powerless leave the dangerous realm of “onstage” where heresy is punished, they drop “thick masks” to safely express their hidden feelings to families, friends, and colleagues.⁵⁾ As a result, to understand the complexity of power relations, one must consider the hidden transcript of the powerless that belies their calculated conformity in everyday life.

On the basis of such an observation, Scott criticizes conventional social theories that tend to prioritize “organized, large-scale, protest movements that appear... to pose a threat to the state.” This is problematic since those extraordinary moments are “few and far between.” Rebellions, revolts and revolutions are often too “dangerous, if not suicidal,” a veritable luxury for ordinary people. As a result, open and active resistance is not only rare but also temporary. As the notion of “hidden transcripts” suggests, however, it does not mean that the powerless are a dormant entity, lacking a political life of their own except for few revolutionary moments when long-term dormancy is replaced by a popular explosion. To suppose so is to miss “the immense political terrain that lies between quiescence and revolt.” Instead, it is more appropriate to recognize “the weapons of the weak” in the form of “passive resistance” that is deeply inscribed in their everyday practices.

4) James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), p. xvii, p. 25 and p. 240.

5) James C. Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 3-13.

III. *Shared* Hidden Transcripts

In a nutshell, the notion of “passive resistance” revolves around two conceptual pillars: “hidden” and “resistant.” The powerless elaborate various discourse and practices that are “hidden” from the suspicious eyes of the powerful. Although hidden, these discourses and practices retain significant implications of “resistance” against the ruling power.⁶⁾

Though influenced by contemporary anthropological approaches, Scott holds to the Marxian heritage of the class struggle. As a result, there is the assumed dichotomy between the powerful and the powerless, the ruling and the ruled, the dominant and the dominated, and so on in his theory. Such a dichotomy plays a critical role in the notion of passive resistance because it determines the “source” of domination and thus the “target” of hidden transcripts. The powerful are identified in the minds of the powerless as the chief cause of their misery. In response, the powerless elaborate transcripts targeted against them. As a result, their transcripts have to be “hidden” from those in power. To use a favorite metaphor of Scott, slaves articulate transcripts that are hidden *from* the master precisely because they are targeted *against* him. As a result, a slave does not share his hidden transcripts with the master. Instead, the “sharing” is possible only with his family, friends, and other slaves. This is why the transcript has to be “hidden” in the first place. In this sense, the ontological dichotomy between the powerful and the powerless constitutes the core assumption of passive resistance which necessitates the exclusiveness of hidden transcripts.

In this section, I question the “exclusive” characteristics of hidden transcripts to broaden their theoretical implication. To use the same metaphor, I intend to point out possibilities where the hidden transcripts of a slave converge with those of his master. In addition, it is my intention to demonstrate that such cases are not some peculiar anomaly. Instead, the “sharing” of hidden transcripts between the powerful and the powerless can occur as a widespread social phenomenon.

For empirical support, I use evidence from the Soviet period. Doing so should not distort Scott’s position. Although it was developed in a rural Malaysian context, Scott himself has advocated the relevancy of his theory to

6) James C. Scott (1985), *op. cit.*, pp. 29-36 and pp. 289-303.

a life in various social settings “including communism.” In his words, “public life in communist states in which the chasm between official ritual and the offstage political culture is often so large can tell us something about how a hidden transcript is elaborated [there].”⁷⁾ In this section, the “chasm” between official rules and offstage practices is analyzed in the three cases of a Party meeting, “gulag jazz,” and the shadow economy. These chasms, however, reveal that hidden transcripts were often shared between the powerful and the powerless.

1. Typical Party Meeting

As the Communist Party stood at the core of the Soviet system, its membership with limited admission represented prestige and power. Indeed, the few chosen were the flesh and bone of the regime, enjoying a large share of privileges often unavailable to ordinary people.⁸⁾ So what happened when high-ranking Party members gathered to discuss, decide or approve important matters of concern? The following was an account of a typical CPSU meeting as described by a Soviet journalist:

It’s very hard to describe a Party meeting to someone who has never been to one. Five minutes before it begins, people will be out in the hall, joking with each other, making critical remarks, talking about how poorly the Arabs fight and waste all our military aid. Then comes the meeting. Out go their cigarettes. And these very same people raise their hands... denounce Israel and proclaim the victory of the Arabs. Or someone talks about the ‘Third Decisive Year of the Five-Year Plan’ and others will listen solemnly or repeat the same slogans, knowing it’s meaningless. It’s a game, of course, but you must play it.⁹⁾

There were two distinctive transcripts in this case: private discourses out in the hall before the meeting and public discourses during the meeting. In addition, the two transcripts were completely “hidden” from each other. No one dared to refer to the private discourse during the Party meeting. Likewise,

7) James C. Scott (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 22.

8) Ilya Zemtsov, *The Private Life of the Soviet Elite* (New York: Crane Russak, 1985).

9) Hedrick Smith, *The Russians* (New York: Quadrangle, 1976), p. 289.

no one used the public discourse out in the hall before the meeting. In this case, the context—that is, either out in the hall before the meeting or during the meeting in the hall—determined the mode according to which one of the two transcripts was employed in conversation. As long as the context remained unchanged, the chosen transcript was exclusively used, giving the other transcript a “hidden” status.

To use Scott’s concept, the context here referred to “power-laden situations.” Apparently, outside the hall before the meeting was the “offstage” where a thick mask was lifted by Party members. As Scott pointed out, the powerful also had “their own compelling reasons for adopting a mask.”¹⁰ A divine king in a “theater state” should live like a god in front of his subjects.¹¹ In his private moments, however, the divine king could reveal the more human side of himself to the family members. Likewise, a master should act appropriately in front of his slaves. During a private moment with his family, however, the master revealed a part of himself that was carefully hidden from slaves. In a similar way, the members of the CPSU in the case above led a dual mode of life. As the mouthpiece of the regime, they spoke Bolshevism in an appropriate manner during the party meeting. They murmured something completely different, however, when the mask was lifted in a private conversation. In this way, the discourse of “private I/We” out in the hall before the meeting was carefully hidden from the discourse of “public I/We” during the Party meeting.

What is interesting in this case was the very content of the hidden transcripts of the high-ranking Party members. They scorned the military performance of the Arabs in the Middle East, ridiculed the slogans of the Five-Year Plan, made jokes about official policies, and so on. Though they “listened solemnly or repeated the same slogans” during the meeting, the Party members murmured different things in private. That is, “It’s meaningless.” As one put it, “we said one thing at home, another at meetings” (*Arkhiv Samizdata* Doc. No. 4602). Or, one “constantly moved from one dimension to another” (*Arkhiv Samizdata* Doc. No. 897). The peculiarity of the situation was that these hidden transcripts of the powerful were, in fact, identical with

10) James C. Scott (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 10.

11) Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-century Bali* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).

the utterances of mere mortals who secretly expressed indifference or aversion to the official slogans, doctrines, and policies. As many scholars have shown, the murmur “It’s meaningless” would find much resonance among ordinary Soviet people.¹²⁾ As a result, a typical Party meeting above revealed the transference of hidden transcripts between the dominant and the powerless as if the former were somehow the latter at the same time.

The foregoing example of the party meeting packed with high-ranking officials was repeated innumerable times in the everyday lives of ordinary Soviet people (*Arkhiv Samizdata* Doc. No. 4905). When called upon, a worker or a peasant shouted whatever was required of him at the moment—“Workers of the world, Unite!” or “Socialism in one country!” The contradiction between the two slogans was of little significance as long as the powerful did not take issue with it. While sitting down or even in the midst of shouting, however, the worker was aware that “it’s meaningless.” In this way, the powerful and the powerless *shared* the same hidden transcripts. To use Scott’s metaphor of slavery, it was as if the master repeated the hidden thoughts of slaves which derided existing social realities of which the master himself was the main beneficiary.

2. *Gulag Jazz*

The conventional image of jazz as a slow and sultry sound in a room thick with cigarette smoke is sure to give the impression that communists must have tried hard to eliminate it. This is both true and false, depending on which period one is looking at. In reality, the history of jazz was much more complex because it had fluctuated with the whims of the Soviet regime. From early on, “the creation of a new culture” free from the “corrupt” spirit of the bourgeoisie was one of the foremost goals in the minds of some Bolsheviks.¹³⁾ In addition, general consensus was that the new culture should be proletarian in character. The consensus, however, stopped there. What was meant by “proletarian” culture? How could they achieve it? What would be the role of the regime in the process? All these questions broke down the precarious

12) For instance, see Sarah Davies, “Us against Them,” in Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 47-66 and Geoffrey Hosking, *The First Socialist Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 219.

13) Michel Ruywkin, *Soviet Society Today* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), p. 183.

consensus in such a way that the chasm between different views tested human imagination. As Richard Stites illustrated, the Soviet regime under Lenin was like a “gigantic laboratory of revolution” where different schools of thought ran their own “experiments.”¹⁴⁾

Jazz entered the Soviet scene under such circumstances. Whereas Europe was going through a “Jazz Age” during WWI, it was not until 1922 that jazz was introduced to the young revolutionary state. It was actually the Soviet government that explored the potential of jazz. The Commissariat of Public Entertainment sent L. Teplitskii on a mission “to the bars of Philadelphia” to master jazz techniques. Behind such an intriguing experiment was the idea that jazz was the music of the oppressed because it had originated from the tortured souls of slaves.¹⁵⁾ Initially small audiences were soon replaced by increasing popularity as jazz thrived under the tolerant mood of the NEP (New Economic Policy, 1921-1928). During the 1920s, jazz reached out beyond the audience of highbrow audiences, capturing the hearts of young workers in urban areas.

The NEP was a strange time for communists. A typical night scene at cabarets where gentlemen in fancy suits and ladies in silk stockings danced to the sultry sound of jazz symbolized “a shameful retreat from revolutionary ideals.”¹⁶⁾ As a result, the question “For what did we fight in the revolution?” was asked with increasing frequency as the 1920s progressed. Stalin skillfully exploited such a mood of frustration among high party officials and rank-and-file members in his battle against the Right Opposition in the late 1920s. The Stalinist Revolution of rapid industrialization and a wholesale collectivization had its cultural counterpart when the RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) initiated an assault on the tolerant cultural policies of the NEP. The so-called “Cultural Revolution” with the RAPP as its self-proclaimed mouthpiece was to uproot the “unhealthy appetites” of the decadent bourgeoisie.¹⁷⁾ Standing at the core of such unhealthy appetites, jazz

14) Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 46.

15) S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 77-97.

16) Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 127-128.

17) Richard Stites, *Soviet Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 64.

could not escape its militant critics. The decisive moment came in 1928 when Maxim Gorkii published an essay “On the music of the gross” (*Pravda*, April 18, 1928). Described as “totally bourgeois,” jazz—once the song of the oppressed—was now called “the music of the gross” in which alcohol, sex, and debauchery ran rampant.

A break came for jazz in the early 1930s. As the First Five-Year Plan came to an end and Party members declared “dizzy with success,” a mood of euphoria dominated the so-called “Congress of Victors” in 1934. The euphoric mood called for feasts but proletarian musicians had failed to produce appropriate music for the occasion. The gap was soon filled by an unprecedented explosion of jazz. Popping up everywhere, there were theater jazz, cinema jazz, joy jazz, tango jazz, and even circus jazz. The first half of the 1930s was the “Red Jazz Age” when many ordinary people were drawn into the new music.¹⁸⁾

Eugenia S. Ginzburg remembered one chilly morning in early December 1934, when she was awakened to learn of the assassination of S. Kirov, the rising Bolshevik leader at the time.¹⁹⁾ The chill soon turned into the Great Terror (1936-38) when “the dry guillotine” was soaked with the blood of the Bolsheviks themselves.²⁰⁾ Jazz took another downturn in this period as it became entangled in a political struggle. In 1936, *Izvestiia*, with N. Bukharin as its editor, took issue with *Pravda* that criticized jazz in harsh terms. The “jazz debate” between the two most prominent Soviet newspapers ended with *Pravda* as the victor. The politicization of jazz had serious consequences, however. Along with the prominent figures who defended jazz such as N. Bukharin, K. Radek, I. Medvev, S. Kolbasev, and I. Kabakov, many jazz musicians were either shot or sent to forced labor camps.

When Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the fate of jazz took another turn. As usual, a deductive logic could have taken the fate of jazz to two different directions. On the one hand, jazz could have been regarded as the music of the decadent bourgeoisie with Nazism as its worst manifestation. Such a view could be seen as a natural extension of the dark mood of the late

18) S. Frederick Starr, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-109.

19) Eugenia S. Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), pp. 3-5.

20) Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 265.

1930s when jazz was severely persecuted. On the other hand, one could argue for the necessity of jazz as *the* music to boost the morale of young soldiers engaged in the fierce struggle against the Nazi invasion. History took the second path. In addition, the wartime alliance with the United States boosted the status of jazz as “an expression of national solidarity with the Yanks.”

The glorious victory of WWII darkened the future of jazz. As the Cold War began, jazz with its distinctively American origin was labeled “the song of the enemy.” Many prominent jazz musicians such as E. Rosner, L. Piatigorskii, and A. Tsfasman were arrested and sentenced to prison camps. Even saxophones became suspect in this time of trouble. One day in 1949, jazz musicians in Moscow were ordered to bring saxophones to the State Variety Music Agency. Upon arrival, those “despicable instruments” were confiscated by the state.²¹⁾ In this way, jazz disappeared from the official cultural repertoire until the end of the Stalin era. In spite of repression, however, the public’s appetite for jazz had already grown so large that it was impossible to eliminate jazz by simply putting a ban on it. While the Soviet regime was powerful enough to ban jazz officially, it was not powerful enough to force its people not to listen to jazz even in private. As a result, the regime found repeatedly that its people “loved what they were supposed to laugh at.”²²⁾ Either through private collections or through the illegal purchase of jazz recordings in the shadow market, people sought out the forbidden sound of jazz. In this way, jazz became one of the “hidden transcripts” of the powerless.

The secret admirers of jazz, however, included more than mere mortals. Many powerful party members as well as state officials, who should have led the drive against jazz, were themselves fanatic jazz fans. It was under such circumstances that the peculiar phenomenon of “gulag jazz” appeared. When prominent jazz musicians were exiled to remote labor camps in the late 1940s, they were snatched up by powerful Gulag officials who were eager to hear the sound of talented musicians. As a result, the best of the Soviet jazz in the late Stalin years was enjoyed in Siberian labor camps. In his *The Gulag Archipelago*, Alexander Solzhenitsyn described a surrealistic scene in which a horrified musician just arriving in a camp witnessed the sudden reversal of his fortune when high camp officials treated him as “a VIP in a separate little

21) S. Frederick Starr, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-216.

22) Richard Stites (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 133.

house of his own, with two orderlies to help him.”²³⁾

The experience of Eddie Rosner, probably the most popular jazz musician at the time, was illustrative. When he arrived at the notorious Kolyma camp in 1947, Rosner was called into the main office of the camp, equipped with a new instrument, and ordered to form a quartet. The director of the Kolyma camp, who had heard Rosner during the war years, was eager to have such a prominent musician “as his guest.” As Rosner’s gulag ensemble entertained high camp officials and their ladies, its fame soon reached the ears of Alexander Derevenko, director of the entire eastern gulag system. Upon hearing the news, the gulag director was outraged, not because his subordinates disobeyed the official ban on jazz but because they were enjoying better sound than he was. As a result, Derevenko personally arranged matters so that *his* gulag ensemble could benefit from the talent of Eddie Rosner.²⁴⁾

So the sound of jazz snared the powerful as well as the powerless. While jazz disappeared from the “public transcript” when it was officially disgraced, it appeared in the “hidden transcript” of the dominant as well as the powerless. As in the typical Party meeting described above, the powerful murmured the same thing as the powerless did behind their thick masks. As a result, hidden transcripts were shared between the dominant and the powerless as if the former were somehow the latter at the same time. In spite of “sharing,” their transcripts still remained “hidden.” After all, no one, whether the powerful or the powerless, would dare to perform or listen to jazz on public occasions. Instead, they retreated to the secrecy of private life to taste the forbidden fruit. So the camp chief listened to the sound of gulag jazz and mere mortals enjoyed their private collections, while shouting out loud official slogans banning jazz as “the song of the gross” or “the song of the enemy.”

3. *Shadow Economy*

While the contents of hidden transcripts converged between the powerful and the powerless in the previous examples, they were *not* actually shared

23) Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, Vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 498.

24) S. Frederick Starr, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

between them. Although the high-ranking officials in the foregoing meeting and the mere “greengrocer” in Havel’s famous example (see below) uttered the same (“It’s meaningless”), they did so *separately* in private moments. Likewise, gulag directors and mere mortals listened to the forbidden sound of jazz *privately* in separate moments. Obviously, it was too dangerous for mere mortals to reveal their real feelings in front of the powerful even though the latter entertained the same thoughts in their own lives. In some cases, however, hidden transcripts were actually shared between the powerful and the powerless. Such was the case of the shadow economy.

The official Soviet economy based on the central planning system had serious problems. First, “the tyranny of the Plan” implied that the state decided what was to be produced and thus consumed.²⁵ It was an economic manifestation of a dictatorship that imposed its economic preferences on people. Second, the “economy of shortage” implied that even those goods and services which the official economy promised to deliver were, in fact, delivered only in short supply.²⁶ As a result, people suffered from chronic shortages of practically everything. Finally, poor quality control inherent in the central planning system due to the “success indicator” problem meant that the official economy often produced goods of low quality.²⁷ All together, the command economy was such a disastrous failure that it was even called an “anti-economy.”

These shortcomings formed the basis for the prospering unofficial “shadow” economy which reduced, neutralized and reversed the deleterious effects of the failing central planning system. As a result, there was a “chasm” between official principles and offstage practices with respect to the Soviet economy. A closer look at this chasm, however, revealed again that both the powerful and the powerless were deeply involved in the operation of various shadow economy practices. As a result, the “economic” hidden transcript was also

25) Michael Binyon, *Life in Russia* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), p. 15.

26) Janos Kornai, *Economics of Shortage* (New York: North-Holland, 1980), p. 27.

27) For the problem of “success indicators,” see M. Loeb and W. A. Magat, “Success Indicators in the Soviet Union,” *American Economic Review* (March 1978); Jeffrey B. Miller, “The Big Nail and Other Stories: Product Quality Control in the Soviet Union,” *ACES Bulletin* 26-1 (1984); Alice C. Gorlin, “Observations on Soviet Administrative Solutions: the Quality Problem in Soft Goods,” *Soviet Studies* 33-2 (1981); and K. Cholewicka-Gozdziak, “Price and Quality of Consumer Goods: the Comecon Experience,” *Soviet Studies* 31-3 (1979).

shared between the powerful and the powerless in the Soviet experience. Below are several examples.

1) During the Break between Court Sessions

Throughout history, buying something and reselling it at a profit have been a natural part of life. In the Soviet Union, however, it was called “speculation,” a criminal offense accompanied by a serious penalty if one was caught. The negative stance of the state toward speculation, however, failed to win the hearts of the Soviet people. Instead, they regarded it as a necessary part of daily lives. Under such circumstances, a typical scene at the Soviet court took a strange turn. Outside the court, judges and prosecutors bought boots or dresses from speculators. When the same merchants were brought on speculation charges, however, they displayed few qualms about sending them off to the camps. Meanwhile, the most intriguing scene happened during a court break. As one Soviet lawyer described, the court secretary led the charged speculator to the judge’s chamber. There “everyone present, including the public prosecutor, would examine the merchandise with interest and discuss the items’ relative merits and prices.”²⁸⁾ At that moment, the stern prosecutor and the strict judge became mere consumers plagued by chronic shortages, while the charged criminal acted as an astute businessman studying the needs of consumers for future business. In this way, their economic transcripts, still hidden from a public display, were carefully shared.

2) The Powerful Drive Off While the Powerless Carry It Away

In some cases, the role of the shadow economy was so important that the Soviet regime eventually incorporated it into the official system by legalizing it. Such was the case of “garden plots” where people grew various agricultural produce in a tiny garden around their house. As far as their size was concerned, garden plots should not have mattered much because they represented only 2-3 percent of the entire cultivated land.²⁹⁾ What troubled the state, however, was the fact that they reflected and nurtured the profit-

28) Dimitri K. Simes, *USSR – The Corrupt Society: The Secret World of Soviet Capitalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), p. 269.

29) Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values of the Soviet People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 191.

motivated mentality that communism was supposed to eliminate. In spite of a cold response from the state, garden plots survived for a simple reason: namely, private plots were too efficient. For instance, garden plots with only 2-3 percent of the Soviet arable land produced 35 percent of the meat, 65 percent of the potatoes, 42 percent of the fruits and berries, 53 percent of the eggs, and 36 percent of the milk in the 1970s (*Ekonomika Selskovo Khoziaistva* No. 6, June 1972). As a result, while the state was bustling about the socialized agricultural sector, mere mortals were busy taking care of their tiny garden plots that produced “the potato that feed us” (*Khronika Tekushchikh Sobytii* No. 54, October 4, 1979).

The powerful, however, were also deeply involved in garden plots. For instance, at the Crossroads State Farm in the Rostov region, personal livestock and garden plots were illegally enlarged. Such illegal practices included “even our executive” who maintained his private livestock free of charge on state fodder. In this way, a hundred tons of fodder were stolen each year. So people there—farm officials as well as lay farmers—led a dual life. “On the job you are a worker but when you come home, you become a private entrepreneur.” In this dual mode of life, the maximum was devoted to the personal farming and the minimum to “the state-owned land.” There were even cases where state livestock were left without water due to a lack of pipes. Although plenty of pipes were supplied to the state farm, they were already “used as fencing around private garden plots.” In this process, “neither in Rostov nor in the district center of Konstantinovskii did anyone express surprise” at such practices. Everyone from the top to the bottom was so engaged in illegal practices that they had become a part of everyday life. As a result, N. Konchenko, secretary of the Komsomol unit of brigade, saw only one difference. The top farm manager Kandalov “drove off” with his booty while mere mortals “carried it away” (*Komsomolskaia Pravda*, April 7, 1960). So the powerful “drove off” and the powerless “carried away” while both share the same hidden transcripts: namely, the stealing of state fodder in this case.

3) Meat Magician

It was well known that workers at meat stores brought out meat and other related products for illegal sale as well as their own consumption. Since every

ounce of meat was recorded according specified rules, how could they cover their tracks? A carcass was converted into food products through a complex process. The weight of the finished output, however, was “very different” from the original weight. The “miracle” began when the carcass was placed on a conveyor for cutting. In places where a soiled spot should be gently excised, workers cut off “a kilogram or two of good meat.” In this way, a perfectly fine peace of meat “lost weight” at slaughterhouses while workers gained considerable weight as they walked home with bulging pockets (*Pravda*, December 15, 1981).

The powerful did the same things as the powerless, only better. Consider G. N. Pogosov, director of the Belgorod-Dnestrovskii meat packing combine. He would bring out large amounts of hams and sausages for illegal sales. Some of his miracles surpassed the most ingenious magic. They say monks used to turn carp into pigs by making the sign of the holy cross. Pogosov did better. He turned percentages into sausage and sausage into living cows. According to state norms, the amount of meat was calculated at 47.5 percent of live weight. In reality, however, the Berezino slaughterhouse ran with 49 percent or more. The additional meat was then turned into sausage which was not recorded in official accounts. That was how percentage became sausage. When a considerable amount of sausage had accumulated, it was then converted into cattle. As a result, Pogosov would from time to time sell *his* cows coming to life from percentages (*Moskovskaia Pravda*, February 7, 1953 and *Pravda*, June 7, 1979).

So far, we have analyzed some cases where both the powerful and the powerless were deeply involved in the shadow economy. As Dallin put it, the underground economy was winked at “by a conspiracy of tolerant silence which extends from the highest governmental officials and the secret police down to the poor housewife who needs an extra cake of soap.”³⁰⁾ The initial trigger of this “conspiracy” was the economy of shortage. When the official command economy failed to meet the demand of the Soviet consumers, the latter initiated a flow of significant social undercurrents that moved silently as individuals sought to satisfy their frustrated needs in all possible ways. In turn, these silent undercurrents created a great opportunity for sizable profits

30) David J. Dallin, “The Black Market in Russia,” *The American Mercury* 69-312 (1949), p. 678.

and private gains. As a result, there soon emerged a group of enterprising shadow operators who utilized the existing situation to their advantage with ingenious ideas to make profits. As a result, the social undercurrents accelerated with increasing momentum. At some point along their path, however, the shadow dealers had to deal with the fact that desired goods and resources were beyond their grasp due to the principle of socialist property. As a result, it was inevitable that the “sacred” principle of socialist property should be violated in one way or another. Simply put, socialist property should be secretly privatized and illegally marketized. “It could hardly be otherwise.”³¹⁾ At this point, the practice of the shadow economy had to compromise those officials in influential positions who could pull strings for the allocation of necessary resources and products. As a result, while the majority of ordinary individuals appeared as consumers of the shadow economy, those in powerful positions entered as its resource suppliers, distributors, and even producers. In this way, the powerful and the powerless *shared* the economic hidden transcripts of the shadow economy, revealing “a common interest” against official rules.³²⁾ In addition, the collusion between the two further facilitated the dynamics of the shadow economy since influential officials, who were supposed to bark at those illicit practices, often looked the other way because they themselves were deeply involved in various aspects of the shadow economy as one of its main beneficiaries.

IV. Theoretical Implication

As Michel de Certeau points out, it is necessary to look beyond traditional theories of power relations that prioritize “explicit” forms of power and resistance. A theoretically more sound approach is to focus on implicit, clandestine and anonymous—that is, “everyday”—forms of power relations as well as blatant ones. As a result, we need a theory that is “at once analogous

31) Gregory Grossman, “The Second Economy: Boon or Bane for the Reform of the First Economy?” *Berkeley-Duke Occasional Papers on the Second Economy in the USSR*, No. 11 (1987), p. 23.

32) Steven J. Staats, “Corruption in the Soviet System,” *Problems of Communism* 21-1 (1972), p. 44.

and contrary to” the Foucault perspective.³³⁾ That is, it is necessary to pay attention to micro practices of power relations *without* necessarily privileging the status of power in the process. Here lies the main contribution of the “passive resistance” theory. By introducing an everyday metaphor of power relations, Scott has successfully demonstrated how the effects of the micro-physics of power are constantly filtered by capillary forms of resistance in the daily rituals of the powerless, for whom open, direct and blatant forms of confrontation are too dangerous. Seen from such a perspective, the powerless are *not* a dormant entity, lacking a political life except for rare revolutionary moments when their long-term dormancy is somehow replaced by a popular explosion. Between everyday quiescence and extraordinary moments of uprising lies the immense political terrain in which dominant modes of ideas, discourses, and practices are constantly *de-naturalized* by “hidden transcripts” of the powerless in their everyday forms of resistance.

Hidden transcripts are supposed to be “exclusive” in Scott’s theory. They are “elaborated among a restricted ‘public’ that *excludes*—that is, hidden from—certain specified others.”³⁴⁾ In the notion of passive resistance, the assumed dichotomy between the powerful and the powerless plays a critical role because it determines the “source” of domination and thus the “target” of hidden transcripts. The powerful are identified in the minds of the powerless as being responsible for their oppressive and miserable situation. As a result, the powerless develop private transcripts that are “hidden” from the powerful because they are targeted against the latter. In Scott’s favorite metaphor, a slave cannot share his hidden transcripts with the master. Instead, the “sharing” is possible only with his families, friends and other slaves. In this sense, the ontological dichotomy between the powerful and the powerless constitutes the core assumption of the passive resistance theory that necessitates the exclusive character of hidden transcripts.

As shown throughout the article, however, cases do exist where hidden transcripts are shared between the powerful and the powerless, converging in their contents. The Soviet experience also shows that “shared” hidden transcripts are not some peculiar anomaly. Instead, it occurred as a widespread

33) Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), pp. xiv-xv.

34) James C. Scott (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 14. Emphasis added.

social phenomenon. As a result, it poses an interesting puzzle for the theoretical framework of “passive resistance.”

To deal with this puzzle, we must *diversify* the source of domination in our understanding of power relations. In the notion of passive resistance, the source of domination is distinctively mono-dimensional. The powerful—and *only* the powerful—are seen as causing the oppression of the powerless. As a result, they become the main target of hidden transcripts elaborated by the powerless. As Michel Foucault points out, however, the source of domination can be complex in various dimensions, engulfing both the powerful and the powerless in the process. In other words, domination, oppression and repression can be *subject-less*, like a fog that pervades throughout society.³⁵⁾

To illustrate this point, consider the “greengrocer” example of Vaclav Havel. In a communist system, Havel noted, a manager of a vegetable shop places the slogan “Workers of the World, Unite!” in his window along with the onions, carrots and other vegetables. Obviously, he does not believe the slogan and most customers do not even notice it. The manager, however, still displays the slogan because it is necessary to do so “to get along in life.” In other words, he does so because everyone else is doing it and thus not doing so could bring some trouble. In this process, *everyone* in the system is doing something of this sort, “not only the greengrocers but also the prime ministers.” By acting in this way, individuals “conform to the system, fulfill the system, make the system, [and] *are* the system.”³⁶⁾ As Lisa Wedeen emphasizes, this is the power of “as if” politics.³⁷⁾

In this gridlock, individuals—whether powerful or powerless—become objects, subjects and instruments of the power that pervades the entire system like a fog. As a result, the real source of domination in this mode of power relations is not some specific individuals but the system itself. Domination in this mode is not something that one group or class imposes on another as Marxists would often assume. Rather, the appropriate metaphor to understand such a situation is the Weberian “iron cage” into which everyone—the powerful as well as the powerless—is born, even though they benefit and

35) Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* (New York: Pantheon, 1977), pp. 26-32.

36) Vaclav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), pp. 28-37.

37) Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 67-69.

suffer from it in different degrees.³⁸⁾ It is under such circumstances that the hidden transcripts of the powerful and the powerless can converge as those transcripts are addressed not to each other but to the system itself as the source of oppression. For instance, influential Party members ridicule official slogans out in the hall before a Party meeting just as a greengrocer does so in his daily routine of displaying vegetables. Though shared, their transcripts still maintain a “hidden” status. In the end, the official solemnly repeats the slogan during the party meeting, just as the greengrocer faithfully displays in his window “Workers of the World, Unite!” In these cases, the shared transcripts of the dominant and the powerless are “hidden,” not from each other but *from the system itself*. Since the system is the main source of domination and oppression, it becomes the main target of the hidden transcripts which are now shared by the powerful and the powerless alike. Because they are not targeted against each other, those hidden transcripts could be shared between mere mortals and those in power. At the same time, those shared transcripts had to be hidden from the system in this process because they are targeted against the system as the source of oppression, repression and domination.

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38) Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Harper-Collins, 1991), p. 181.

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