

Everyday Forms Of Resistance

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A pestilent pernicious people ... such as take the oaths to the Government, but underhand ... labor its subversion.

Bishop Trelawny, 1717

The Hidden Realm of Political Conflict

Descriptions and analyses of open political action dominate accounts of political conflict. This is the case whether those accounts are presented by historians, political scientists, journalists, statesmen, or leaders of popular movements. Some of the most telling analyses of conflict are in fact designed precisely to explain under what circumstances groups in conflict resort to one or another kind of open political action. Thus, why some groups under certain conditions are likely to employ violent forms of political action – e.g. riots, rebellion, revolutionary movements – rather than less violent forms – e.g. petitions, rallies, peaceful marches, protest voting, strikes, boycotts – has occupied center stage. As a result of careful historical comparisons social scientists have begun to grasp how certain social structures, state systems, cultural values, and historical practices help shape political action.

The undeniable advances made along these lines, however, are fatally compromised by a damagingly narrow and poverty-stricken view of political action. There is a vast realm of political action, described below, that is almost habitually overlooked. It is ignored for at least two reasons. First, it is not openly declared in the usually understood sense of "politics." Second, neither is it group action in the usually understood sense of collective action. The argument to be developed here is that much of the politics of subordinate groups falls into the category of "everyday forms of resistance," that these activities should most definitely be considered political, that they do constitute a form of collective action, and that any account which ignores them is often ignoring the most vital means by which lower classes manifest their political interests. The balance of this essay is devoted to sustaining and elaborating this claim.

The Brechtian or Schweikian forms of resistance I have in mind are an integral part of the small arsenal of relatively powerless groups. They include such acts as foot-dragging, dissimulations, false compliance, feigned ignorance, desertion, pilfering, smuggling, poaching, arson, slander, sabotage, surreptitious assault and murder, anonymous threats, and so on. These techniques, for the most part quite prosaic, are the ordinary means of class struggle. They are the techniques of "first resort" in those common historical circumstances in which open defiance is impossible or entails mortal danger. When they are widely practiced by members of an entire class against elites or the state, they may have aggregate consequences all out of proportion to their banality when considered singly. No adequate account of class relations is possible without assessing their importance. That they have been absent or marginal to most accounts of class relations is all too understandable. The purpose, after all, of many such techniques is to avoid notice and detection. Resistance of this kind is ironically abetted by both elites and social scientists whose attention is largely concentrated on those forms of resistance which pose a declared threat to powerholders: social movements, dissident sects, revolutionary groups, and other forms of publicly organized political opposition. Such groups, of course, are also far more likely to leave the written records – manifestos, minutes, membership lists, journalists' descriptions, and police reports – that help ensure them a firm place in the historical record.

Here it may be useful to distinguish *everyday* forms of class resistance from the more typical forms of political conflict which dominate the historiography of the peasantry and other subordinate groups. The easiest way to highlight the distinction is to contrast paired forms of resistance. The first in each pair is "everyday" resistance in my definition of the term while the second is a more direct, open confrontation having the same objective. Thus in one sphere lies the quiet, piecemeal process by which peasant squatters or poachers have often encroached on plantation and state forest lands; in the other a public invasion of property that openly challenges property relations. Each action aims at a redistribution of control over property; the former aims at tacit, *de facto* gains while the latter aims at formal, *de jure*— recognition of those gains. In one sphere lies a process of cascading military desertion; in the other an open mutiny aiming at eliminating or replacing officers. In one sphere lies the pilfering of public and private grain stores; in the other an open attack on markets or granaries aiming at the redistribution of the food supply. The contrasts

illustrate that those who employ everyday forms of resistance avoid calling attention to themselves. Such techniques are relatively safe, they often promise vital material gains, and they require little or no *formal* coordination let alone formal organization – although they typically rely on a venerable popular culture of resistance to accomplish their ends.

In each of these paired comparisons, the presumed objective is similar. Both squatters and land invaders hope to acquire the use of property; both deserters and mutineers may wish to end a costly battle or war. The relative safety – and it is *only* a relative safety – of everyday forms of resistance has much to do with the small scale of the action. Squatters virtually seep onto the land in small groups, often at night to avoid calling attention to themselves; deserters are likely to slip away unnoticed when the opportunity arises. Each of these small events may be beneath notice and, from the perpetrator's point of view, they are often designed to be beneath notice. Collectively, however, these small events may add up almost surreptitiously to a large event: an army too short of conscripts to fight, a workforce whose footdragging bankrupts the enterprise, a landholding gentry driven from the countryside to the towns by arson and assault, tracts of state land fully occupied by squatters, a tax claim of the state gradually transformed into a dead letter by evasion.

It is not far-fetched to suggest that the difference between everyday forms of resistance and more open forms of political conflict may often boil down to tactical wisdom. Peasants who consider themselves entitled to land claimed by the state may choose to squat rather than to invade openly in force because they know that an invasion will probably be met with armed force and bloodshed. When, on the other hand, the political climate makes a more open occupation of land comparatively safe, something closer to a land invasion becomes plausible. Certainly, peasants and subordinate groups generally may find large-scale collective action inherently difficult owing to their geographical dispersion, ethnic and linguistic differences, a lack of organizational skills and experience, and so forth. It is no less likely, however, that their preferences in techniques of resistance may arise from the knowledge of surveillance, a realistic fear of coercion, and a past experience that encourages caution. If, as is sometimes the case, the same results may be achieved by everyday resistance, albeit more slowly, at a vastly reduced risk, then it is surely the more rational course. The invariably fatal results of slave uprisings in the ante-bellum U.S. South suggest that the long-term slave preference for flight, pil-

fering, foot-dragging and false compliance was largely a matter of tactical wisdom.

A skeptic might grant the argument made thus far and nevertheless claim that everyday forms of resistance do not belong in an account of class struggle because they are individual, not class strategies, and because they benefit individuals not classes. The first claim is largely untenable. It can be shown that most forms of everyday resistance cannot be sustained without a fairly high level of tacit cooperation among the class of resisters. This will become more apparent in examples described later. The second claim is true, but the personal benefit arising from everyday forms of resistance – providing it does not come at the expense of other members of the class¹ – can hardly disqualify them from consideration as a form of class conflict. Most forms of everyday resistance are, after all, deployed precisely to thwart some appropriation by superior classes and/or the state. If the resistance succeeds at all, it of course confers a material benefit on the resister. The disposition of scarce resources is surely what is at stake in any conflict between classes. When it is a question of a few poachers, arsonists, or deserters, their actions are of little moment for class conflict. When, however, such activities become sufficiently generalized to become a *pattern* of resistance, their relevance to class conflict is clear.

Consider the following definition that focuses on the process of appropriation:

Lower class resistance among peasants is any act(s) by member(s) of the class that is (are) intended either to mitigate or to deny claims (e.g. rents, taxes, deference) made on that class by superordinate classes (e.g. landlords, the state, owners of machinery, moneylenders) or to advance its own claims (e.g. to work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis these superordinate classes.

Three aspects of the definition merit brief comment. First, there is no requirement that resistance takes the form of collective action. And yet *some* level of cooperation is generally evident in everyday forms of resistance since even the slave who pilfers or shirks depends on the complicitous silence of other slaves to escape detection. The same is, of course, true for the poacher who believes he and others like him have a right to the fish, game, and fuel of the nearby forest. Each depends for his success on a minimal level of group cohesion. Second – and this is a nettlesome issue – inten-

tions are built into the definition. This formulation allows for the fact that many intended acts of resistance may backfire and produce consequences that were entirely unanticipated. Finally, the definition recognizes what we might call symbolic or ideological resistance (for example, gossip, slander, the rejection of demeaning labels, the withdrawal of deference) as an integral part of class-based resistance. From a broader perspective this definition recognizes, as I believe any convincing definition must, the role that self-interested material needs must play in any realistic definition of peasant resistance. To do so affirms the fact that class conflict is, first and foremost, a struggle over the appropriation of work, property, production, and taxes. Consumption, from this perspective, is both the goal and the outcome of resistance and counter-resistance.² Petty thefts of grain or pilfering on the treshing floor may seem like trivial "coping" mechanisms from one vantage point; but from a broader view of class relations, how the harvest is actually divided belongs at the center.

Varieties of Practice, Unity of Purpose

The various practices that might plausibly be claimed to represent everyday forms of resistance are legion. To an outside observer it might appear quixotic to assemble them under the same heading. Their variety is nothing more than a mirror image of the variety of forms of appropriation; for every form of appropriation there is likely to be one – or many – forms of everyday resistance devised to thwart that appropriation. What gives these techniques a certain unity is that they are invariably quiet, disguised, anonymous, often undeclared forms of resisting claims imposed by claimants who have superior access to force and to public power. A brief analysis of four forms of everyday resistance will help illustrate this unity as well as delineate more sharply the circumstances that favor such resistance, the results it may achieve, the disguises it wears, the complicity it requires, and its limits. The examples are selected both for their representative diversity and for the complementary analytical light they shed on the phenomenon of everyday resistance.

Poaching

For roughly two centuries from 1650 to 1850, the most popular crime in England was almost certainly poaching. Although poaching is usually understood to refer to the "theft" of someone else's property in wild game,

fish, and perhaps firewood, it comprises a vastly greater range of practices. Cottagers, laborers, and yeomen might encroach on gentry or crown property to take turf, peat, heath, rushes for thatching and lighting, brushwood, clay, stone, chalk, coal, to graze their own livestock, pick medicinal herbs, or to till land. Both the objects and volume of poaching varied over time in keeping with the proximity of "poachable" resources, how hard-pressed the rural population was, the need for certain commodities, the risks of being apprehended, the likely punishment if apprehended, and the traditions animating the local community.³ The issue came to be of such concern to large landowners and the crown that in the 18th century, draconian laws were passed specifying capital punishment for poachers. More precisely, it became a capital offense merely to be caught in disguise (hence the name, the "Black" Act) in the woods, the assumption being that anyone so attired was a poacher.

For our purposes, the most important fact about poaching is that the activity itself was part of the traditional subsistence routine of the rural population, an activity embedded in customary rights. Poaching as a crime, therefore, entails less a change of behavior than a shift in the law of property relations. It is the state and its law which suddenly transforms these subsistence routines into everyday forms of resistance. The process has, of course, been repeated for most colonial societies in which the state redefined the forest as government property and then imposed a whole series of regulations and officials to enforce them. It was unlikely that the surrounding population would accept the logic by which unimproved, natural environments and their resources might suddenly be declared state property and willingly relinquish their traditional practices. Michel Foucault has, in the context of post-Revolutionary French history called attention to such state-created "crime."

It was against the new regime of landed property – set up by a bourgeoisie that profited from the Revolution – that a whole peasant illegality developed ... ; it was against the new system of the legal exploitation of labour that workers' illegalities developed; from the most violent such as machine breaking ... to the most everyday such as absenteeism, abandoning work, vagabondage, pilfering raw materials ... ⁴

In a comprehensive history of everyday forms of resistance, the section on poaching would no doubt be substantial. The nature of the forest (in other cases wastelands, commons, etc.) as a resource subject to competing claims is part of the explanation. Compare, for example, the relative ease of spiriting away firewood from a vast forest to the pilfering of grain from a well-guarded central granary. Any resource or good so geographically dispersed poses nearly insurmountable problems of enforcement. Forest guards, gamekeepers, are unlikely to make much of a dent on poaching when the possible sites of poaching and the potential poachers are legion. This means, in turn, that when a forest guard or gamekeeper does encounter a poacher, he is likely to be outnumbered. As E.P. Thompson describes it, the threats, beatings, torchings of cottages, and occasional murders of gamekeepers frequently intimidated them into inactivity.

The problems of enforcement, however, are not entirely attributable to geography and demography; they are due at least as much to tacit complicity, and, occasionally active cooperation among the population from which the poachers come. Consider the difficulties that poachers would face if local residents were actively hostile to them and willing to give evidence in court. Poaching as a systematic pattern of reappropriation is simply unimaginable without a normative consensus that encourages it or, at a minimum, tolerates it. Otherwise it would be a simple matter to apprehend offenders. The forms such coordination and cooperation might take are extremely difficult to bring to light. As Thompson notes,

There *might*, indeed, have been something in the nature of a direct tradition, stretching across centuries, of secret poaching fraternities or associations in forest areas.⁵

What is significant is that such coordination can typically be achieved through informal, rural social networks and that, when an "association" is formed its adherents have every reason – and often the means – to conceal its existence from the authorities and the historians.

Peasant Tax Resistance

If everyday resistance via poaching is the attempt to assert traditional claims to resources in the face of new property relations, tax resistance is a more defensive effort to defeat or minimize a direct appropriation. The successful resistance of the Malaysian peasantry to the state-collected Is-

lamic tithe (*zakat*) can provide a closer look at the importance of normative complicity, deception, the nature of the state, and the importance of long-run analysis.⁶

The Islamic tithe itself, like its Christian and Judaic predecessors, is a tax of one tenth of the gross harvest, collected in kind, intended to promote Islamic charity and education. Until 1960 tithe contributions were entirely local and voluntary; since then the provincial authorities have centralized its administration and mandated the registration of acreage and yields in order to enforce its collection. Opposition to the new tithe was so unanimous and vehement in the villages where I conducted research that it was a comparatively simple matter to learn about the techniques of evasion. They take essentially four forms. Some cultivators, particularly smallholders and tenants, simply refuse to register their cultivated acreage with the tithe agent. Others underreport their acreage and/or crop and may take the bolder step of delivering less rice than even their false declarations would require. Finally, the grain handed over is of the very poorest quality – it may be spoiled by moisture, have sprouted, be mixed with straw and stones so that the recoverable milled grain is far less than its nominal weight would suggest.

The unannounced achievements of this resistance have been impressive. A local, but probably representative sample, revealed that the grain actually delivered to the state averaged less than one-fifth of the ten percent mandated by the law. Most notable, however, is the public silence maintained by the protagonists in this struggle. There have been no tithe riots, no tithe demonstrations, no petitions, no violent confrontations, no protests of any kind. Why protest, indeed, when quieter stratagems have achieved the same results at minimal risk? Unless one compared actual yields with tithe receipts, the resistance itself would remain *publicly* invisible, for it is the safer course for resisters to leave the tithe system standing in name while they dismantle it in practice. This activity may not qualify as a form of collective action or a social movement but it has nevertheless achieved comparable results without affording the state an easily discernable target. There is no organization to be banned, no conspiratorial leaders to round up or buy off, no rioters to haul before the courts – only the generalized non-compliance by thousands of peasants.

The tacit coordination that abets this resistance depends on a palpable “climate of opinion,” a shared knowledge of the available techniques of evasion, and economic interest. A *purely* economic interest account of such

resistance, however, is inadequate. For one thing, the peasantry has a host of principled reasons for evading the tithe. There are gross inequities in its assessment (cultivators of crops other than rice, non-cultivating landlords, businessmen, officials, and wealthy Chinese all escape the tithe), its collection (irregularities in weighing and crediting), and above all, in its distribution (not a single sack of grain has ever come back to the village for poor relief). A skeptic might regard such arguments as rationalizations designed to put a principled facade on crass calculations of advantage. If this were the case it would be hard to explain why most villagers still voluntarily give "private" tithe gifts to poor relatives, neighbors, religious teachers, and harvest laborers. In other words, there is convincing evidence that it is not so much parting with the grain alone that is resented so much as the unjust manner in which it is appropriated. The same consensus about fairness that sustains resistance to the official tithe simultaneously impels most peasants to make tithe gifts within the village and extended family.

The success of tithe resistance, or any resistance for that matter, is contingent on relationships of power. In this context, there is little doubt that the authorities could extract more of the tithe if they were determined to prosecute thousands of cases, raise the penalties for non-compliance, and appoint more enforcement personnel. It might not be cost-effective as a revenue measure, but it could be done. It is, however, not done because the ruling party faces electoral competition for the Muslim vote and the political costs of alienating many of their rural electoral allies would, it judges, be prohibitive. Two aspects of the dilemma faced by the government are worth emphasizing. First, the effective resistance of the official tithe was initially made possible by the peasantry's tacit use of its political weight, in the knowledge that the government would hesitate before proceeding against them. It is for similar reasons that peasants avoid taxes and default on agricultural loans under regimes which depend on their active support in one fashion or another. The second, and ironic, aspect of the resistance is that once it has become a customary practice it generates its own expectations about what is permissible. Once this happens it raises the political and administrative costs for any regime that subsequently decides it will enforce the rules in earnest. For everyday resisters there is safety in numbers and successful resistance builds its own momentum.

Resistance of the kind described here may be pursued for centuries over a terrain of power that favors now the authorities and now the peasantry. Thus, for example, peasant resistance in France to the Catholic tithe,

abolished only after the revolution, provides an account of varying techniques of resistance over more than three centuries.⁷ Those who have examined this record have been struck by the techniques, persistence, and long-run success of resistance. Although there were indeed occasionally tithe strikes, riots, and petitions, it is clear that the less visible forms of evasion were of greatest significance in reducing the actual tithe collection to manageable proportions. LeRoy Ladurie and Gay, surveying the evidence, advise historians to "study the ingenuity of peasants faced with disaster and explain why for centuries the tithe remained at a level which was just tolerable."⁸

Marc Bloch has taken the case for the significance of everyday forms of resistance and expanded it to the history of agrarian class relations generally. Bloch would direct our attention *away* from the rebellions which hold pride of place in the archival record and toward the non-spectacular forms of class struggle. As he wrote:

Almost invariably doomed to defeat and eventual massacre, the great insurrections were altogether too disorganized to achieve any lasting result. The patient, silent struggles stubbornly carried out by rural communities over the years would accomplish more than these flashes in the pan.⁹

Desertion

Accounts of poaching and tithe evasion inevitably suggest that everyday forms of resistance are a matter of nibbling, of minute advantages and opportunities which can have little effect on overall relationships of power. Acts which, taken individually may appear trivial, however, may not have trivial consequences when considered cumulatively. From a state-centric, historical view, many regime crises may be precipitated by the cumulative impact of everyday forms of resistance that reach critical thresholds. This is perhaps most strikingly evident in the case of desertion from armies.

As Armstead Robinson has carefully documented, everyday forms of resistance played a key role in the collapse of the Confederacy during the U.S. Civil War.¹⁰ Incensed by laws which exempted many sons of plantation owners from conscription, impelled to save their families from the subsistence crisis of 1862, and, in any case, having little stake in defending slavery, the poor, hill country white yeomanry deserted the Confederate Army in great numbers. Robinson estimates that as many as 250,000

deserted or avoided conscription altogether – a figure that is five times higher than the number of whites from the Confederate States who actually served in the Union Armies. Their refusal to participate in what they termed “a rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight” was decisive in Lee’s defeat at Antietam and in eastern Tennessee. As a southern clergyman noted, “our army has melted like a snow wreath, and chiefly by desertion.”¹¹ Defections from the ranks were compounded by massive shirking, insubordination, and flight among the slave population which deprived the Confederacy of the food supplies and revenues it needed to prosecute the war successfully. Neither the defections nor the shirking and flight could have been sustained unless there had been a consensus that sustained it and prevented the authorities from bringing it to a halt. These “mutinous” activities were not part of a rebellion; they were not organized or coordinated by anyone –and yet their aggregate impact was deadly, if not more so, than any large open movement of sedition might have been.

Comparable cases abound. How is it possible, for example, to explain the collapse of the Czarist army and the subsequent victory of the Bolsheviks without giving due weight to the massive desertions from the front in the summer of 1917 and the accompanying – unorganized – land seizures in the countryside? Few, if any, of the rank-and-file participants intended a revolution, but that is precisely what they helped precipitate.¹² R.C. Cobb’s account of draft resistance and desertion in both post-revolutionary France and under the early Empire are, in the same vein, compelling evidence for the role of everyday resistance in bringing down regimes.¹³

Quite apart from military desertion, the social historian could profitably examine the role of petty tax resistance in producing, over time, the “fiscal crisis of the state” which frequently presages radical political change. Here too, without intending it, the small self-serving acts of thousands of petty producers may deprive a regime of the wherewithal to maintain its ruling coalition and prevail against its enemies. Short of revolution, there is little doubt that massive peasant non-compliance has often been responsible for major shifts in agrarian policy in the Third World.

Agrarian Resistance to State Socialism.

The property relations prevailing in a society closely determine the political shape the struggle over appropriation will take. In a liberal regime of private property in land, the struggle will typically pit the direct produ-

cers, whether smallholders, laborers, or tenants, against the owners of the other factors of production (landowners, moneylenders, banks, etc.). Conflict with the state, when it occurs, is likely to focus on its fiscal and monetary policy or, at more radical moments, on the distribution of property in land. Under state socialism, by contrast, all the vital decisions about commodity prices, the prices of agricultural inputs, credit, cropping patterns, and – under collectivization – the working day and the wage, are direct matters of state policy. Conflicts that might have been seen as private-sector matters, with the state not directly implicated, become, under state socialism, direct clashes with the state. The peasant meets the state as employer, buyer, supplier, moneylender, foreman, paymaster, and tax collector.

Given the state-centric orientation of political studies, it is hardly surprising that everyday forms of resistance should seem so rife under such regimes. Part of this is simply an optical illusion created by the state having assumed the role of direct owner of the means of production and direct appropriator. Part is not illusion at all. Though it may occasionally improve his welfare, the aim of state socialism is invariably to reduce the autonomy of a stratum previously classifiable as *petite bourgeoisie*. The loss of autonomy by itself has been a source of ferocious resistance. State farms and collectives often break the direct link between production and consumption typical of petty bourgeois producers and this in turn creates a new terrain of resistance. For the small peasant, a reduction of labor in production is likely to be reflected on the dinner table whereas, for the laborer of the state farm, a withdrawal of labor effort is not necessarily reflected directly in consumption. Finally, a major reason why everyday forms of resistance are so common in state-socialist forms of agriculture is because such systems allow little else in the way of opposition. Controlling directly the means of coercion, the state typically forecloses open protest, except in utter desperation, and the formal bodies that purport to represent the interests of agriculturists are, as often as not, transmission belts for instructions from the authorities.¹⁴

Over the long run, and frequently at tragic costs to themselves, everyday forms of resistance can provoke a fiscal crisis that leads to a change in policy. The massive economic reforms implemented beginning in 1978 and associated with the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping are a case in point. From one perspective, the dismantling of the collectives, the inauguration of the "family responsibility system," the encouragement of petty trade

and markets, may be viewed as a rational centrally-made decision to encourage growth by far-reaching reforms. While such a view is not precisely wrong, it entirely misses the fact that everyday forms of peasant resistance over nearly two decades were instrumental in forcing this massive policy change.¹⁵ Following the policy-induced famine of the Great Leap Forward which claimed between 10 and 20 million lives by current estimates, it appears that the desperate peasantry, assisted often by local cadres, redoubled its resistance against fearful odds. A host of strategies emerged which included the underreporting of land, misreporting of cropping patterns and yields, making exaggerated claims about thefts and spoilage of grain, illegal procurements, hoarding of grain for local welfare funds and so on. In addition, since one's working day belonged to the collective and since this work was heavily taxed (through pricing and delivery regulations), the re-appropriation of time from the collective for private economic activities became a significant means of resistance and survival. The goal of most of these stratagems was to minimize the grain which the local brigade or commune would have to hand over to higher authorities. Underreporting and other techniques were frequently encouraged by local team leaders and cadres who had learned the bitter lessons of compliance with planned targets.

If he [the team leader] reported too honestly on our income to the brigade, then the orders that would come down each year would be for us to turn over more to the brigade. And that would mean less income for the team members. So the team leader would just tell them what he had to; he wouldn't let them know the real situation.¹⁶

The aim of China's peasantry in denying grain to the authorities was subsistence and survival. When all these petty acts were aggregated, however, their consequence was, by 1978, a procurement stalemate between the state and rural producers. Population growth and sluggish yields owing to low procurement prices meant that per capita consumption was steady or declining. Unless production was reorganized, the state could only invest more in industry and administration by risking serious disorders. Local and occasionally provincial authorities were tacitly encouraging the resistance both to revive local production and to protect local consumption needs.

Many of the "reforms" instituted in 1978 were nothing more than the ex-

post facto legalization of practices that peasants and local cadres had been quietly pursuing. Although their objectives were seldom more than "working the system to their minimum disadvantage" their persistence contributed greatly to an abrupt reversal of economic policy, the historical significance of which is still being played out.¹⁷

Such tacit conspiracies of a good part of the countryside against the encroaching socialist state are by no means confined to China. Thus when Hungarian peasants defended their interests in the late 1940s and early 1950s against subsistence-threatening crop deliveries to the state, they avoided any direct confrontations.¹⁸ Although they farmed their own smallholdings (or in cooperatives that were formally independent) the system of forced deliveries imposed a *de facto* serfdom upon them, determining what they might plant, how much they had to deliver, and the price they would receive. One stratagem that might lessen their burden was the underreporting of cultivated acreage. Whenever land came under a new jurisdiction (e.g. inheritance, transfer to cooperatives, confiscation from "kulaks") a fraction of the land mysteriously disappeared; by 1954 it was estimated that 1.3 million acres of arable – equivalent to the cultivated surface of one of the nation's largest counties – had evaporated in this fashion.¹⁹ It was *impossible* to recover. Black markets for production concealed from the state grew apace. Birth certificates were forged so that more of the local population was above age 65 and thus eligible for quota reductions. Local authorities abetted these evasions since any reduction in the local quota made it that much easier for them to fulfill the plan targets. Livestock was, administratively speaking, spirited away as well.

The kulaks transferred their animals to the small peasants, small peasants to their relative in the cities. They had special techniques for hiding sheep in the well, for slaughtering pigs at night by the light of a floating wick, for milking the cows secretly, for keeping chickens and even pigs under the bed.²⁰

The net result of these defensive strategies from below was declining procurements. By 1954, the least successful procurement year, there appeared no way to extract more from an increasingly bold and recalcitrant peasantry. As Rev notes, it may not quite be correct to say that the peasantry overthrew the government in 1956 but it is reasonable to claim that the liberalization after 1954 came about primarily as a result of peasant resi-

stance. The subsequent economic and social reforms enacted in Hungary, and, for that matter in Central Europe generally, he claims, are little more than the legalization of the practices of resistance given a new policy guise by professional reformers.²¹ The parallels with China are striking. This achievement, once again, was not won by open political opposition but rather through the aggregated acts of millions of agriculturalists. Although there was no secret conspiracy among them, they knew they were not alone. Like other Central European peasantries, they shared a tradition of centuries of resistance and they knew that a generalized resistance reduces the risk to which every single resister is exposed. Even so, the cost was not negligible; by 1953 the proportion of peasants who had been imprisoned and sent to internment camps exceeded 20 percent of the total village population.²²

There is no assurance, however, that everyday forms of resistance and the procurement crises they can provoke will lead to concessions by the state. Nowhere is this so apparent as in the history of the Soviet Union. In 1921, the peasantry had fought the Leninist state to a bitter and costly standstill which was followed by the liberalization of the NEP period. By 1929-30 cultivators had, by hiding, privately selling (e.g. grain requisitioned for delivery) or destroying their produce and livestock, brought the Stalinist state to a similar procurement impasse. They themselves were on the brink of starvation. This time the response was Stalin's decision to fully collectivize. The deportations, executions, and famine which followed cost, at a conservative estimate, ten million lives.²³ When the prize-winning author Sholokhov wrote reporting impending famine and complaining about the brutalities of collectivization, Stalin replied caustically about the forms of "quiet" resistance practiced by the peasantry.

nd the other side is that the esteemed grain growers of your district (and not only of your district alone) carried on an "Italian strike" (sabotage!) and were not loath to leave the workers and the Red Army without bread. That the sabotage was quiet and outwardly harmless (without bloodshed) does not change the fact that the esteemed grain growers waged what was virtually a "quiet" war against Soviet power. A war of starvation, dear Comrade Sholokov.²⁴

By using the full might of the Soviet state, by sending urban party cadres to supervise collectivization (many being replaced when they champi-

oned peasant interests), executing or deporting to labor camps those who resisted collectivization, and seizing grain regardless of the consequences for local subsistence, the authorities prevailed. The results for production were ruinous but the Soviet state now controlled more of that production as well as the life of the producers. Although public use of the term "famine" was strictly forbidden in this period, one candid official made it clear what kind of war was being fought.

A ruthless struggle is going on between the peasantry and our regime. It's a struggle to the death. *This year was a test of our strength and their endurance.* It took a famine to show them who is master here. It has cost millions of lives but the collective farm system is here to stay. We've won the war.²⁵

This official declaration of victory serves to emphasize that direct confrontations of power nearly always favor the state whose coercive power can be more easily mobilized and focused. A far longer historical view of this war of attrition in state appropriation might, however, yield a less straightforward assessment. Contemporary collective farm workers, reacting to near subsistence wages in the state sector, respond by shirking, by the concealing of production, by sideline activities - often using state property - by diverting labor to their personal plot. Once again, the producers pay a high cost for this resistance. They work a second work-day on their private plots for a marginal return that is nearly zero and which is "a colossal exploiter of children, the aged, and the invalid."²⁶ To an outside observer it appears that a petty bourgeoisie is attempting to reconstitute itself, but in such cramped conditions that the results look like the self-exploitation described by the Hammonds for English weavers or by Chayanov for Russian artisan/flax-growing peasants of an earlier date. The effects of this resistance reach Gorbachev in the form of aggregate production statistics from a perennially weak state farm sector. It could not occur, however, without the tacit or active complicity of petty officials all the way down to clerks, drivers, agronomists, foremen, and technicians who seldom resist the temptation to treat their small corner of state power as private property. Non-cooperation by the producers is something of a daily plebescite on the confiscation of their labor in the state sector but it cannot, by itself, *force* a reorganization of agriculture along less exploitive lines. What the producers can do, though, is to determine what will not elicit their active cooperation and productive effort.

Evading the Written Record

The perspective urged here suggests that the historiography of class struggle has been enormously distorted in a state-centric direction. The events that claim attention are the events to which the state, the ruling classes, and the intelligentsia accord most attention. Thus, for example, a small and futile rebellion claims attention all out of proportion to its impact on class relations while unheralded acts of flight, sabotage, theft which may have far greater impact are rarely noticed. The small rebellion, the doomed slave uprising, may have a symbolic importance for its violence and its revolutionary aims, but for most subordinate classes historically such rare episodes were of less moment than the quiet unremitting guerilla warfare that took place day-in and day-out.

Everyday forms of resistance rarely make headlines. But just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, thousands upon thousands of petty acts of insubordination and evasion create a political and economic barrier reef of their own. And whenever, to pursue the simile, the ship of state runs aground on such a reef, attention is typically directed to the shipwreck itself and not the vast aggregation of actions which make it possible.²⁷ It is very rare that the perpetrators of these petty acts seek to call attention to themselves. Their safety lies in their anonymity. Peasants succeed in their small stratagems to the extent that they do not appear in the archives. This is not to say that their resistance leaves no traces; it is rather that the traces must be teased out of the record by the historian who knows what he or she is looking for. Changes in the volume of grain deliveries from certain districts, mysterious declines in livestock holdings, failures to realize conscription quotas, demographic shifts that may indicate flight, complaints by authorities and landowners about an increase in shirking and/or pilfering may point to a key area of political activity in which vital territory is being gained or lost by antagonistic classes. Even here the evidence is most likely to signal significant changes in the level of resistance, not the slower, grinding, background resistance which is likely to go unnoticed.

It is also comparatively rare that officials of the state wish to publicize the insubordination behind everyday resistance. To do so would be to admit that their policy is unpopular and, above all, to expose the tenuousness of their authority in the countryside – neither of which most sovereign states

find in their interest. The nature of the acts themselves and the self-interested muteness of the antagonists thus conspire to create a kind of complicitous silence which may all but expunge everyday forms of resistance from the official record.

This anonymity contributed to an earlier view of the peasantry as a class that vacillated between abject passivity and brief, violent, and futile explosions of rage. It is, of course, true that the "on-stage" behaviour of peasants during periods of quiescence yields a picture of submission, fear, and caution. By contrast peasant insurrections seem like visceral reactions of blind fury. What is missing from the account of "normal" passivity is the slow, silent struggle over crops, rents, labor, and taxes in which submission and stupidity are often no more than a pose – a necessary tactic. The public record of compliance and deference is often only half of the double life that W.E.B. DuBois understood all subordinate groups were obliged to lead.

Such a double life with double thoughts, double duties ... must give rise to double works and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretense or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism.²⁸

The "explosions" of open conflict which typically dominate the official record are frequently a sign that normal and largely covert forms of class struggle are failing – or, alternatively, have succeeded so well as to have produced a political crisis. Such declarations of open war, with their mortal risks, generally come only after a protracted struggle on different terrain.

What Counts as Resistance

It can and has been objected that the activities grouped under the term everyday resistance hardly merit attention. From this point of view they represent trivial coping mechanisms that are either non-political forms of self-help or, at best, prepolitical. I take this to be basically the position of Eric Hobsbawm, Eugene Genovese and others.²⁹

The case against moving everyday forms of resistance closer to the center of the analysis of class relations rests on the claim that these activities are marginal because they are 1) unorganized, unsystematic and individual; 2) opportunistic and self-indulgent; 3) have no revolutionary consequences and/or 4) imply in their intention or logic an accommodation with

the structure of domination. An argument along these lines necessarily implies that "real resistance" is organized, principled, and has revolutionary implications.

The question of opportunism and self-indulgence was treated earlier. It is sufficient to recall that if class domination is a process of systematic appropriation, then the measures devised to thwart that appropriation constitute a form of resistance. All class struggle must necessarily join self-interested material needs with conflict.

Turning to the consequences and intentions of everyday forms of resistance, it is certainly true that the "resisters" rarely intend to make a revolution and their actions do not openly challenge existing power arrangements. It can also be demonstrated convincingly, however, that the motives of peasants and even proletarians who are part of revolutionary movements are rarely, if ever, aiming at revolutionary objectives.³⁰ Revolutionary action, in other words, is typically undertaken by rank-and-file actors who do not have revolutionary aims. Beyond this, however, actions such as pilfering, desertion, poaching, and foot-dragging do imply, by the very fact that they avoid open confrontations, a certain accommodation with existing power relations. This position has some merit. It is rather like the claim that the poacher, by his secretiveness, recognizes the norm of law-and-order. The poacher in his case might be contrasted with, say, a revolutionary appropriation in which property is openly seized in the name of justice. To dismiss poaching with this argument, however, is to overlook entirely the vital role of power relations in constraining forms of resistance open to subordinate groups. The mortal risks involved in an open confrontation may virtually preclude many forms of resistance. If only open, declared forms of struggle are called "resistance," then all that is being measured may be the level of repression that structures the available options. More than one peasantry has been brutally reduced from open, organized, radical activity at one moment to sporadic acts of petty resistance at the next. What has changed in such cases is typically *not* the aims of the peasantry but the effectiveness of domination.

There is, however, an additional problem deriving from a restricted conception of what constitutes organized activity. While much of everyday resistance is comprised of individual actions, this is not to say that these actions lack coordination. A concept of cooperative activity, derived largely from formal, bureaucratic settings is of little assistance in understanding actions in small communities with dense informal social networks and

rich, historically deep, subcultures of resistance to outside claims. It is, for example, no exaggeration to assert that much of the folk culture of the peasant "little tradition" amounts to a legitimation, or even a celebration, of precisely the kinds of evasive forms of resistance described earlier. In this and other ways (e.g. tales of bandits, tricksters, peasant heroes, religious myths, carnivalesque parodies of authorities) the peasant subculture helps to underwrite dissimulation, poaching, theft, tax evasion, evasion of conscription and so on. While folk culture is not coordinational in any formal sense, it often achieves a "climate of opinion" which, in other more institutionalized societies, might require a public relations campaign. One of the striking things about peasant society is the extent to which a whole range of complex activities from labor-exchange to wedding preparations, to rituals are coordinated by networks of understanding and practice. It is the same with boycotts, with techniques for evading taxes and forced crop deliveries, with the conspiracy of silence surrounding thefts from landlords. No formal organizations are created because none are required; and yet a form of coordination is achieved which alerts us that what is happening is by no means merely random individual action. Nor is it too much to suggest that the historical experience of the peasantry has favored such forms of social action because they are opaque to outside surveillance and control.³¹

Everyday forms of resistance are, it should be clear, not a peasant monopoly. Anyone who has analysed the measures taken by landowners in the face of an announced land reform to evade its application to their holdings by dispersing titles, bribing officials, changing cropping patterns will recognize the pattern. Here it is worth noticing that, as in the case of peasants, everyday resistance is being used against a party of greater formal power: in this case the state. Generally, then, *such resistance is virtually always a stratagem deployed by a weaker party in thwarting the claims of an institutional or class opponent who dominates the public exercise of power.*

Several objections could be made against so inclusive a definition. The term, it might be claimed, ought only to be applied to classes at the bottom of the social stratification. By itself, this objection carries little weight since such an analytical concept should, in principle, be applied to any behaviour that meets its definitional criteria. Two more serious and related objections remain. The first is that classes higher in the social stratification typically have a variety of other political resources that allow them to influence elites and officials. Thus the middle and upper classes in a liberal

democracy have a variety of channels, including political campaigns, lobbying, and legal assistance by which they can influence power. For the peasantry and other subordinate groups, through much of history, everyday forms of resistance have been the only resort short of rebellion. A second issue is the question of the intention behind the resistance. Implicitly, the definition presupposes a situation in which those who use everyday resistance find the claim or exaction they are resisting *unjust* and yet are intimidated by the fear of retaliation from any open, public protest of that injustice. It is this sense of injustice that is responsible for the tacit cooperation that develops among the resisters. Evidence of intention is, naturally, hard to come by when there are strong incentives to conceal one's intentions. But when it is a question of both a systematic, established pattern of resistance undergirded by a popular culture that encodes notions of justice and anger encouraging that resistance, *and* a relation of domination that seems to preclude most other strategies, then, it almost certainly satisfies the definition.³²

Subordination and Political Dissimulation

The control of anger and aggression is, for quite obvious reasons, a prominent part of the socialization of those who grow up in subordinate groups. Much of the ordinary politics of subordinate groups historically has been a politics of dissimulation in which both the symbols and practices of resistance have been veiled. In place of the open insult, the use of gossip, nicknames and character assassination; in place of direct physical assault, the use of sabotage, arson, and nocturnal threats by masked men (e.g. Captain Swing, the Rebecca Riots, Les Demoiselles); in place of labor defiance, shirking, slowdowns, and spoilage; in place of the tax riot or rebellion, evasion and concealment.

All of these forms of political struggle can be conducted just beneath the surface of a public realm of deference, compliance, and loyalty. No public challenge is ventured; no field of direct confrontation is volunteered. To be sure, such forms of struggle are best suited to those realms of conflict where the problems of control and supervision by authorities are greatest. The state finds it far simpler to collect an excise tax on imported luxury vehicles coming to the major port than to patrol its borders against smuggling of grain or to collect an income tax from its peasantry.

The advantages of everyday forms of resistance lie not merely in the

smaller probability of apprehension. Their advantage lies at least as much in the fact that they are generally creeping incremental strategies that can be finely tuned to the opposition they encounter and that, since they make no formal claims, offer a ready line-of-retreat through disavowal. Tenant farmers who are in arrears on their rents to a landlord are in a different position from tenant farmers in arrears to the same extent who have declared also that they are not paying because the land is theirs by right. State authorities and dominant elites will naturally respond with greater alacrity and force to open defiance which seems to jeopardize their position. For this reason, subordinate groups have attempted, when possible, to assert their resistance on the safer terrain of undeclared appropriation. Their stratagems minimize the maximum loss. Squatters, for example, unless they have political support, will typically move off private or state lands when faced with force, only to return quietly at a later date. What everyday resistance lacks in terms of gestures and structured claims, it compensates for by its capacity for relentless pressure and the safety and anonymity it typically provides its users.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of normal resistance – both symbolic and material – by subordinate groups is the pervasive use of disguise. The disguise is of two main types, with many intermediate possibilities. First and most common is the concealment or anonymity of the resister. The poacher, the pilferer, the deserter, the tax evader, hopes that he and his act will be undetected or passed over. Similarly, the propagators of rumor and gossip are, by definition, anonymous; there is no apparent producer but scores of eager retailers. The use of disguises is often not just metaphorical but literal. Peasant and early working class protest in Europe provides innumerable examples of collective action where the message was clear but the messengers disguised. In the Captain Swing “disturbances” in the 1830’s it was common for farm laborers to come at night in disguise with torches and insist on the destruction of threshing machines. Everything about the protest was quite specific except for the *personal* (not the class) identity of the protesters. The tradition of lower classes wearing disguises in order to speak bitter truths to their superiors is, of course, firmly institutionalized in carnival and a variety of other rituals of folk culture.

By contrast, a great deal of symbolic resistance by peasants and other subordinate groups reverses this arrangement. Instead of a clear message delivered by a disguised messenger, an ambiguous message is delivered

by clearly identified messengers. Many of the folktales of peasant and slave culture fall into this category. The enormously popular trickster figures among such groups (e.g. Till Eulenspiegel, Brer Rabbit, the mouse-deer of Malaysian culture) are taken both as disguised forms of aggression and implicit strategic advice. Because they are veiled, however, they do not offer the authorities a clear-cut occasion for retaliation. Slave spirituals stressing Old Testament themes of liberation and justice or what have been called the "World Upside Down" broadsheets (e.g. woodcuts depicting a serf being led on horseback by his lord) might be seen in the same light. And it has always been common for peasants, when making threats against elites or authorities to deliver those threats in the form of euphemisms. Thus, for example, arsonists threatening wealthy farmers or aristocratic landholders in the early eighteenth century France would use known formulas for their threats: "I will have you awakened by a red cock!," "I will light your pipe," "I will send a man dressed in red who will pull everything down."³³ The meaning of the message was, of course, perfectly transparent, but the use of euphemism offered an avenue of retreat.

Many forms of resistance in dangerous circumstances are intended to be ambiguous, to have a double meaning, to be garbled so that they cannot be treated as a direct, open challenge and, hence, invite an equally direct, open retaliation. For this reason it would be instructive to devise a theory of political masking by subordinate groups. An analysis of the pattern of disguises and the forms of domination under which they occur could contribute to our understanding of what happens to "voice," in Albert Hirschman's meaning of that term, under domination. Open declarations of defiance are replaced by euphemisms, metaphors; clear speech by muttering and grumbling; open confrontation by concealed non-compliance or defiance. This brief exposition of everyday forms of resistance is hardly the place to develop a theory of political disguises but the table below is intended to suggest one possible line of inquiry.

Form of Domination

Material Domination

(appropriation of grain, taxes, labor, etc.).

Forms of Disguised Resistance

Everyday Forms of Resistance

e.g. poaching, squatting, deserting, evasion, foot-dragging.

Direct Opposition by Disguised Resisters

e.g. masked appropriations, carnival.

Denial of Status

(humiliation, disprivilege, assaults on dignity)

Hidden Transcript or Anger, Aggression, and a Discourse of Dignity

e.g. rituals of aggression, tales of revenge, creation of autonomous social space for assertion of dignity.

Ideological Domination

(justification by ruling groups for slavery, serfdom, caste, privilege).

Development of Dissident Subculture

e.g. millennial religion, slave "hush ar-bors," folk religion, myth of social banditry and class heroes.

Gestures, Resistance, and Rebellion

To understand better the context and function of everyday forms of resistance it may be helpful to contrast them to political gestures. The poacher, who hopes to escape notice, may further his aim by making a public show of deference and devotion to those on whose property claims he is secretly encroaching. A practical act of resistance is thus often accompanied by a public discursive affirmation of the very arrangements being resisted – the better to undermine them in practice. When the act of everyday resistance is *meant* to be noticed – meant to send a signal – as in the case of arson or sabotage, then the resisters take special care to conceal themselves, often behind a facade of public conformity.

We may contrast this pattern with acts of resistance in which the emphasis is reversed. If everyday resistance is "heavy" on the instrumental side and "light" on the symbolic confrontation side, then the contrasting acts would be "light" on the instrumental side and "heavy" on the symbolic side.³⁴ A few examples may help sharpen the contrast. During the Spanish Civil War anti-clerical supporters of the Republic invaded churches and cathedrals in order to disinter the remains of priests, bishops, cardinals, and nuns who were buried in the crypts.³⁵ Their exhumed remains were then spilled onto the steps of the churches by the crowds to be publicly seen by the population – most particularly by the enemies of the republic. It would be hard to imagine a more powerful act of anti-clerical symbolism, a more extreme act of public desecration and contempt. To this day the episode is remembered and invoked publicly by the Right in Spain as an example of left-wing barbarism. What is notable about the revolutionary

exhumations in Spain is that they approached the limit of pure symbolic action. No property was redistributed, no one was murdered,³⁶ nor was the balance of military force altered in any apparent way. The objective was rather to publicly exhibit the outmost contempt for the Spanish church, its symbols, and its heroes. As a declaration of war, symbolically speaking, revolutionary exhumations belong at the opposite end of a continuum of forms of resistance from the low-profile poacher.

A huge realm of political conflict belongs to the same genus of public, symbolic confrontations. The wearing of black armbands to commemorate a political martyr, hunger strikes, not to mention the cultural confrontations invited by various counter-culture groups are precisely intended as discursive negations of the existing symbolic order. As such, they fail unless they gain attention. If everyday resistance represents disguised forms of struggle over appropriation, then revolutionary exhumations represent public, open forms of confrontation over the symbols of dominant discourse. Both forms of action are integral to political conflict.

Most "everyday resisters" are rather like opponents of a law who estimate that it is more convenient to evade it or bribe their way around it rather than to change it. In the case of the peasantry, of course, the state and its laws are typically inaccessible, arbitrary, and alien. The notion of collective public action to change the structure of, say, property law or civil rights, is confined largely to the literate middle class and the intelligentsia.

Directing attention to the strategic reasons for the symbolic low profile of everyday resistance may cast some light on how changes in the forms of political action occur. First, it is undeniable that everyday resistance is less threatening to public domination precisely because it avoids an engagement at that level. If squatters invaded private or state lands publicly, and declared their *right* to use it as they saw fit, they would, in effect, be declaring that they were not squatters and, instead, directly challenging property arrangements. This is more menacing to political authority and it is exactly what the Diggers did during the English Revolution when the balance of power temporarily freed them to act openly. Everyday resistance, then, *by not openly* contesting the dominant norms of law, custom, politeness, deference, loyalty and so on leaves the dominant in command of the public stage. Inasmuch as every act of compliance with a normative order discursively affirms that order, while every public act of repudiation (e.g. failure to stand during national anthems in the United States) represents a threat to that norm, everyday resistance leaves dominant symbolic structures intact.³⁷

If, however, the perceived relationship of power shifts in favor of subordinate groups, everyday resistance may well become a direct and open political challenge and surreptitious or disguised symbolic dissent may become a public renunciation of domination. Aesopian language may give way to direct vituperation and everyday forms of resistance to overt, collective defiance.

The prehistory of many large rebellions and revolutions might be retrospectively recast along these lines. A pattern of quiet resistance both symbolically and materially suddenly becomes generalized, massive and open as the political situation presents new possibilities that previously seemed utopian. The French peasantry who burned chateaux and abbeys in 1789 were presumably not perfectly allegiant retainers to their kings and lords in 1788. The shifts in power that make possible new forms of resistance may often originate outside the immediate domain we are considering as in cases of world-wide trade slumps, defeat in war, and so on. They may also originate in the very process of resistance and counter-resistance. Balzac, though his disapproval is apparent, captures the process with respect to poaching and gleaning.

Do not imagine that Tonsard, or his old mother or his wife and children ever said in so many words, "we steal for a living and do our stealing cleverly." These habits had grown slowly. The family began by mixing a few green boughs with the dead wood, then, emboldened by habit and by a calculated impunity...after twenty years the family had gotten to the point of taking wood as if it were *their own* and making a living almost entirely by theft. The rights of pasturing their cows, the abuse of gleaning grain, of gleaning grapes, had gotten established little by little in this fashion. By the time the Tonsards and the other lazy peasants of the valley had tasted the benefits of these four rights acquired by the poor in the countryside, rights pushed to the point of pillage, one can imagine that they were unlikely to renounce them unless compelled by a force stronger than their audacity.³⁸

Balzac, it should be added, observes that many of these new "rights" were entrenched by peasants taking advantage of the Revolution and the political vacuum that followed it.

Everyday forms of resistance may be thought of as exerting a constant

pressure, probing for weak points in the defenses of antagonists, and testing the limits of resistance. In the case of poaching, for example, there may be a fairly stable tension over time between poachers and gamekeepers. But when, say, it turns out that over the past few months the taking of rabbits is much less frequently punished or prevented, the volume of poaching and the number of participants is likely to swell to a point where a custom or even a right to take rabbits threatens to become established.³⁹ Alternatively, any number of events might impel poachers to run more risks – e.g. a crop failure, an increase in meat prices, higher taxes – so that their boldness and numbers overwhelm the existing capacity of those who enforce game laws. There is strength in numbers, and poaching that becomes generalized to whole communities may, as Balzac notes, require new levels of coercion to re-establish the old balance.⁴⁰ The hydraulic metaphor implicit here of water of variable pressure, straining against a (moveable!) retaining well having certain strengths and weaknesses is necessarily crude but, perhaps, suggestive.

Much the same approach might be applied to symbolic defiance. Slaves, serfs, tenant farmers and workers say in public pretty much what their masters, lords, landlords, and bosses expect them to say. Yet, there are likely to be hidden transcripts of what subordinates actually think that can be recovered in off-stage conversation in slave quarters, veiled cultural performances (e.g. folk-tales, carnival). These hidden transcripts may be pictured as continually testing the line of what is permissible on-stage. One particularly intrepid, risk-taking, angry, unguarded subordinate says something that just touches or crosses the line. If it is not rebuked or punished, others, profiting from the example, will venture across the line as well, and a new *de facto* line is created, governing what may be said or gestured. In revolutions, one is likely to see unbridled anger – the entire hidden transcript – spoken openly and acted openly. It is unlikely that we can account for the *content* of this action by reference to outside agitators, their ideology, or even the aspirations engendered by a revolutionary process. The revolutionary actions might well have been prefigured in their practices of resistance and in their off-stage discourse. What had changed was above all the conditions which had previously confined the public expression of these actions and sentiments.

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NOTES

- 1 From whom the appropriation is extracted makes all the difference in the world. A poor peasant who extends his field by ploughing furrows into another poor peasant's land or secretly harvests some of his neighbor's grain is surviving at his neighbor's expense. So is the sharecropper who obtains his share-tenancy by outbidding other would-be sharecroppers and agreeing to hand over more of the harvest. Everyday forms of class resistance must, by definition, have at least the intention of improving the balance of appropriation for members of the subordinate group.
- 2 See Utsa Patnaik, "Neo-Populism and Marxism: The Chayanovian View of the Agrarian Question and its Fundamental Fallacy," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1979), pp. 398-99.
- 3 See E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (New York: Pantheon, 1975) *passim* and Thompson, "Poaching and the Game Laws in Cannock Chase," in Douglas Hay, eds., *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century England* (London, 1975), pp. 189-253. See also John Brewer and John Styles, eds., *An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1980).
- 4 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 274.
- 5 Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters*, p. 58.
- 6 For a far more detailed analysis see my "Resistance Without Protest and Without Organization: Peasant Opposition to the Islamic Zakat and the Christian Tithe," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (July 1987), pp. 412-36.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, *Tithe and Agrarian History from the 14th Century to the 19th Century: An Essay in Comparative History*, translated by Susan Burke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 27.
- 9 Marc Bloch, *French Rural History: An Essay on its Basic Characteristics*, translated by Janet Sondheimer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 170. Note Bloch's implicit characterization of the "patient, silent struggles" as in some sense *more organized* than the great insurrections.
- 10 Armstead L. Robinson, *Bitter Fruits of Bondage: Slavery's Demise and the Collapse of the Confederacy: 1861-65* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming), Ch. 5.
- 11 *Ibid.*, Ch. 8.
- 12 Marc Ferro, "The Russian Soldier in 1917: Undisciplined, Patriotic, and Revolutionary," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (September 1971), pp. 483-512.
- 13 *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest, 1789-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 96-97.
- 14 In the cases considered below we are also dealing with Marxist parties which have a decided view of the role of the peasantry in the revolutionary alliance with the proletariat. As Lenin observed, "petty bourgeois proprietors are willing to help us, the proletariat, to throw out the landed gentry and the capitalists. But after that our roads part."
- 15 See Daniel Kelliher, *Peasant-State Relations in China During Rural Reforms: 1978-1984* (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1985) on whose argument I rely heavily here. For other parallels see Goran Hyden, *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania* (London: Heineman, 1980) and Christine Pelzer White, *The Role of Collective Agriculture in Rural Development: The Vietnamese Case*, Research Report

- 3592 (Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 1984), mimeo.
- 16 From an interview with an emigre ex-team leader in Hong Kong reported by Vivienne Shue in *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).
- 17 The phrase comes from Eric Hobsbawm, "Peasants and Politics," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 1, No.
- 18 Istvan Rev, "The Advantages of Being Atomized: How Hungarian Peasants Coped with Collectivization," *Dissent* (Summer 1987), pp. 335-49.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 338.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 342.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 344-45.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 342.
- 23 See, particularly, the analysis of the human toll in the Ukraine in Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
- 24 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 232. For more on the patterns of peasant resistance to "dekulakization," forced requisitions, and collectivization see the careful judgements of Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System* (New York: Pantheon, 1985).
- 25 M.M. Khateyevich, quoted in Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*, p. 261. Emphasis added.
- 26 See the remarkable descriptions recently translated from the *samizdat* manuscript of Lev Timofeev (a pseudonym), *Soviet Peasants: (Or the Peasants' Art of Starving)*, translated by Jean Alexander and Alexander Zaslavsky, edited and with an introduction by Armando Pitassio and Victor Zaslavsky (New York: Telos Press, 1985), p. 80.
- 27 The search for public scapegoats is, of course, quite common as a means of coping with such failures. But it is rare that the search for scapegoats touches large numbers of people as it did with the "wreckers" and "kulaks" in the U.S.S.R. in the late 1920s and early 1930s or the "kulaks" in Hungary during collectivization.
- 28 W.E.B. DuBois, "On the Faith of the Fathers," pp. 210-25, in DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (New York: New American Library, 1969), pp. 221-22.
- 29 Inasmuch as I have made the case against this position in much more detail in *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), I confine myself here to a few schematic comments.
- 30 The main exception, and it is undeniably an important one, is the case of millennial movements whose objectives are revolutionary. See ch. 8 of *Weapons of the Weak* for a more elaborate exposition of the case made in this paragraph.
- 31 And not just the peasantry. In this context see the fine article by William M. Reddy, "The Textile Trade and the Language of the Crowd of Rouen, 1725-1871," *Past and Present*, No. 74 (February 1977), pp. 62-89. Reddy argues that it was precisely the *lack* of organization in crowd behavior that was helpful and that the crowd came to value and use spontaneity in the knowledge that it was the most effective, least costly, means of protest. The cultural understandings were so well developed that any just grievance could, he claims, bring together a crowd without any planning or organization, let alone formal leadership.
- 32 It would be difficult, though perhaps not impossible, for middle-class tax resistance to satisfy the same conditions.
- 33 Andre Abbiateci, "Arsonists in 18th Century France: An Essay in the Typology of Crime," translated by Elborg Forster, in Robert Forster and Orest Ranum, eds. *Deviants and the Abandoned in*

- French Society: Selections from the Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, vol. IV (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1978), p. 158.
- 34 It goes without saying that symbolic actions can have large instrumental consequences and vice versa.
- 35 Bruce Lincoln, "Revolutionary Exhumations in Spain, July 1935," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (April 1985), pp. 241-60.
- 36 In the course of the Civil War in Republican-held areas many thousand clerics were, in fact, killed—either killed by angry crowds or executed for anti-Republican activities.
- 37 For moral norms, the importance of public confirmation or repudiation is magnified. Take, for example, the common norm of a religiously sanctified marriage as the only legitimate basis for family life. Compare, then, a pattern of unsanctified, common law marriages that are widespread but unannounced and undeclared as public acts, to a social movement against sanctified marriage that openly repudiates the norm itself. The latter is, of course, a more immediate threat to the norm although the former pattern may well, by accretion, eventually bring the norm into question.
- 38 Honoré de Balzac, *Les Paysans* (Paris: Pleades, 1949).
- 39 In his account of poaching in the Hampshire forests, E.P. Thomson reports that when Bishop Peter Mews, who had had a particularly antagonistic relationship with his tenants over their rights, finally died, the tenants took full advantage of the brief vacancy before a new bishop was appointed. "The tenants," he writes, "appear to have made a vigorous assault on the timber and deer"; Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters*, p. 123.
- 40 The process I am describing of cumulative non-compliance is a form of social action familiar to any motorist faced with speed limits. If the official speed limit is 55 miles per hour, no one is concerned about being fined for driving 56 m.p.h. Well, what about 57, 58, 60, 65? Let us imagine that, on the basis of experience, motorists know they can "get away with" 60 m.p.h. The flow of traffic is then likely to move at this speed; the police can't arrest everyone so they single out only the most egregious violators of these informal norms. Once a 60 m.p.h. practice is established, the process continues. A few (intrepid, rushed, wealthy?) drivers are always testing the limits and threatening to establish a new "tolerated" informal limit. Responses are of course possible; the state may choose to raise the speed limit lest its formal regulations become an object of derision or it may redouble its enforcement. Like all social action, such patterns to be more accurate would have to be thoroughly reflexive. Thus, one might ask, wouldn't a *clever* state, knowing all this, set the official speed at 55 m.p.h., planning on the fact that the actual traffic flow will be roughly 65 m.p.h. This is true but fails to be sufficiently reflexive, for the calculations of such a state are based on assumptions about non-complicity which have been inferred by actual patterns of past resistance.