

Corresponding Resistance to the Operation of Biopower in State Racism: An Application of Foucauldian Framework to Mark Zusak's Novel

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This paper explores the Foucauldian conception of powers and their corresponding resistance. Everyday resistance's nature and techniques as a response to the operation of sovereign power, the interdependent disciplinary and biopower, is discerned concerning the events that occur in the novel. It also brings out the way how biopower affected Germany's population and how the nature of power that resulted in its subsequent resistance to the Nazi regime was the cause of its failure.

Foucault explains the relation between power and resistance by stating that "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority about power" (Foucault 95-96). Jenny Edkins and Vernonic Pin-Fat in *Sovereign Lives* argue that in terms of sovereign power, there is no possibility of resistance because it is not a form of power but a 'relation of violence'. They arrive at this conclusion with the consideration that the relationship of power acts upon their action while the relationship of violence acts 'directly and immediately on others'. Since there is collaboration and obedience under sovereign power, this argument becomes invalid in the case of slavery (Camp 2004). However, in sovereign power, where there is a dramatic show of force, two types of resistance are possible. "Sovereign power is a form of power that demands absolute obedience and therefore the resistance that develops undermines the values, institutions and representations of the power or it can also be hidden or disguised" (Lilja and Vinthagen 3). Scott talks about dispersed resistance, which is in correspondence to the sovereign power. He explains that in everyday forms of resistance, there is safety in anonymity, and hence, they are usually "quiet, anonymous and disguised" (Scott 37). The disguised ways of resistance are practised through "challenging commands, prohibitions, punishments, monopoly of

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violence, fear, obedience, habits, claims of legitimacy or sovereignty" (Lilja and Vinthagen 5). The challenge to command, prohibition and punishment is carried out through acts of disloyalty. In Nazi Germany, there were laws passed on prohibiting the hiding of Jews with the punishment of the death penalty, protective imprisonment, and internment in a concentration or labour camp, the duration and conditions of which were arbitrary decisions made by the Gestapo (Beer 76; Dams and Stolle 70). However, there were many Germans who "were far from passive or paralyzed by fear or propaganda" (Wolfgram 202). The terror of the palpable changes in the country's policies frightened some of the population (Beer 269; Scarre 515), leading to covert or open resistance; the following characters and their actions could be considered as a form of resistance.

In the novel, the German character of Hans Hubermann displays disloyalty by challenging the law and hiding a Jew in his house. He also challenges punishment when a group of Jews get deported through Molching to the nearest concentration camp; he offers a malnourished older man a piece of bread. Liesel, when Max passes through her street, ignores the commands of the soldiers to stay behind and embraces him. Being aware that their acts would bring punishment, they carry it out and, in turn, challenge the punishment and command through disloyalty and non-compliance. Power of discipline is about training, examination surveillance and study; it is met by forms of resistance that,

Challenge through avoiding, rearticulating discourse or by destabilizing institutional control of behaviour. Here, we find other types of more 'everyday resistance' and discursive forms of challenges, as Scott outlined, which might be hidden, disguised or not typically open. This is because an open method of challenge is complex to sustain once discipline is a dominant feature in society and when institutional corrections are in place for those who do not conform. (Lilja and Vinthagen 9)

Scott discusses the form of resistance that challenges the power through avoidance; he terms it as *hidden transcripts*. The techniques of resistance under this form, as stated by Scott, include foot-dragging, escape, sarcasm, passivity, misunderstandings, disloyalty, slander, avoidance or theft. Disciplinary power concerns itself with surveillance for correction and punishment of behaviour. In the Nazi regime, the disciplinary power operated through the organizations of SS, SA, and Gestapo, which monitored and punished the individuals in the society who acted against the norms and ideologies of the Nazis, legitimized by the passing of laws. "Under the exclusive authority of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), 'protective custody' meant the arrest without judicial review- of real and potential opponents of the regime" (USHMM). Power is distributed to other members of the society to ensure complete surveillance; citizens of Germany could exercise their power through informing. When Liesel retrieves the book from the book-burning event, she dreads that the shadow that watched her with the book might

inform higher authorities and, in turn, bring punishment upon her. This is how the disciplinary power functions; it is all pervasive among the population to ensure discipline. Hence, the resistance it forms is subtle and small. The characters do not participate in open demonstrations of opposition or directly engage with the power, but they undertake techniques of everyday resistance to challenge.

The other form of resistance is mentioned as destabilizing the institutional control of behaviour. "Although prevailing interpretations maintain self-techniques and mechanisms, people also can modify themselves differently and/or resist the processes of internalizing power through alternative modes of self-making" (Lilja and Vinthagen 9). In the Nazi state, racism is normalized among the population through ideological propagation and pseudo-scientific theories. It perpetuated and intensified the general hostility towards Jews in Germany and other European countries. Peter Hoffmann writes that "National Socialism was not simply a party like any other; with its total acceptance of criminality it was an incarnation of evil so that all those whose minds were attuned to democracy, Christianity, freedom, humanity or even more legality found themselves forced into alliance" (Hoffman 20). A few characters in the novel define this institutional control of the thinking and behaviour of the population; they perform this act of resistance through alternative modes of self-making. The Germans were expected to share the view that the Jews were oppressing them, and the ideology attempted to create hatred towards the Jewish population. The characters of Hans Hubermann, Rosa Hubermann, Liesel Meminger, Rudy and Alex Steiner resist 'alternative modes of self-making' (Lilja and Vinthagen 9). Instead of hatred, they show a pragmatic approach towards the Jews by being compassionate, empathetic, showing indifference or living. They engage in constructing their identities as German individuals whose behaviour is not controlled by the institution; hence, the resistance lies in their self-making.

In the Nazi state, all three forms of power operate in their absolute sense. Mona and Stellan state that biopower is closely connected to disciplinary power and its disciplinary apparatus. In its functioning, it incorporates certain aspects of disciplinary power. Training and discipline are components employed as biopolitical strategies; they are used to manage birth, deaths, reproduction and illnesses of different populations (Lilja and Vinthagen 10). The same technique of avoidance as a challenge is used in resisting biopower, too. Hans Hubermann attempts to avoid directly confronting the Nazi party through false compliance. To escape the punishment or penalty through the sovereign power for being German in origin and not a member of the Nazi party, he applies for membership. "The Third Reich was a police state characterized by arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of political and ideological opponents in concentration camps" (USHMM). This ideological opposition from Hubermann could invite his death penalty, which in turn would alter the population of Germans in the state. Since the act is subtle and he tries to feign allegiance, he is spared and later recruited during the war. The discipline and biopower operating together monitor the behaviour of Hans, and

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committing 'treason' (Beer 74) against the state invites punishment of the death penalty through sovereign power; the punishment changes the death rate of Germans in the state. His character displays resistance by risking *Sippenhaft* (Donhoff 148) and getting labelled as amoral traitors (Bethge 34) along with his family members by other Germans, even post-war.

The relationship between resistance and the operation of power can also be traced to the character of Alex Steiner. He avoids open confrontation with the Nazi authority by false compliance too; he salutes at the Nazi parade though he is not politically inclined to their party and punishes Rudy for openly going against the ideologies of Hitler. He shows false compliance to protect himself and his family. He is disloyal to the state when he is glad that the Jewish tailoring shops are closed, not because Jews are the 'enemies' of Germans but for self-interest. However, in the second half of the novel, the power directly confronts Alex Steiner when members of the party visit the Steiner's to recruit Rudy into a German program. The biopower, which aims at creating German elites with the highest intellectual and athletic abilities in the future, confronts the Steiner family, and he can no longer employ hidden transcripts in resistance. Instead of Rudy, Alex Steiner is made to join the German army to fight in WWII. The disciplinary power monitors the population and selects candidates such as Rudy to be part of the program.

The sovereign power operates when Alex's life is exposed to the risk of Death at war, and its collaboration with the biopower is brought out when it affects its population (German) for a purpose that would 'benefit' the species as a whole. When the three powers operate together, there is only space for subtle, dispersed resistance. Confrontation from the powers turns off even everyday resistance.

Liesel directly confronts power when she is reunited with Max Vandenburg at Molching. The sight of him overwhelms her with emotions, and she rushes to take him in an embrace; this act of defiance carried out in public draws the attention of the soldier. When the confrontation is direct, she cannot employ any form of resistance under *hidden transcripts* as she had done earlier. In a disciplinary state where the power is distributed and vested in other organizations as well, it enables the soldier to take action during the incident. Sovereign power operates when Liesel is whipped as a punishment for her act against the 'norms' and embracing a Jew.

The relationship between the powers and resistance can also be studied by viewing the relationship/power dynamics between Rudy Steiner and Franz Deutscher as an allegorical representation of the resistor and the state. The actions of Franz Deutscher at the Hitler Youth can be interpreted as the working of the three types of powers in the Nazi regime through the state force. Rudy's reaction and quiet retaliations can be considered acts of resistance carried out by the Germans. Franz Deutscher is described by Death as "the irate Hitler Youth leader" and "an ultimate name for the ultimate teenage Nazi" (Zusak 288), embodying the characteristics of an obedient Nazi. His tyrannical way is exposed when he punishes Tommy Muller to run six laps for not

properly recognizing the commands and marching, despite knowing the fact that Muller has an ear infection. Initially, as a form of resistance against disciplinary power, they challenge the command given by 'foot-dragging' and running the laps slowly. The second incident happens at the Hitler Youth when Franz Deutscher questions Rudy on Hitler's date of birth. An attempt made by the disciplinary power to incorporate and enforce institutional behaviour. Rudy, however, retaliates with sarcasm, a technique of resistance, when he deliberately gets the date wrong and names the dates of Christmas and Easter. He gets punished by Franz Deutscher through the operation of the sovereign power when they openly confront each other at Munich Street, and Franz Deutscher gives Rudy a haircut after badly wounding him in a fistfight. In order to 'correct' his behaviour, this act of punishment is undertaken by Deutscher as he repeatedly asks Rudy to name the correct date of Hitler's birth while pouncing; this displays the exercise of disciplinary power again.

Mona and Stellan, after stating the duality in the operation of disciplinary power and biopower, conclude that "the resistance against disciplinary forms of power, for example, strategies that aim to undermine punishment, surveillance and corrective techniques would have an impact on the biopower as well if they are applied on a large scale, with more people, as a national or an international movement" (Lilja and Vinthagen 10). The resistance that the Germans exhibited in the Nazi regime was scattered and unorganized. Mommsen writes that resistance in Germany was 'resistance without the people'; it was a resistance to the institutions within the power structure, and the number of Germans who engaged in resistance to the Nazi regime was considerably small (Mommsen 259). The resistance that arose among the Germans during the Nazi regime did not affect the power structure because it was dispersed and subtle. "In Germany, unlike in occupied countries, the formation of resistance fell primarily on individuals relying on their consciences and on small, informal groups" (Klemperer 4). From Klemperer's statement, it can be inferred that resistance in other Nazi-occupied countries was successful because of the nature of power wielded by Nazi forces in them. Most of the resistances carried out were not dispersed; organized resistance was made possible due to the difference in the operation of power in the other European countries. "In Eastern Europe, where the Nazi rule was more oppressive, a large percentage of people were in organized resistance movements, commonly called *The Underground*" (Tebinka 153).

In the novel, the characters of Hans Hubermann, Liesel Meminger, Rudy and Alex Steiner exhibit resistance; however, in their acts, there is no unity. The everyday forms of resistance are undertaken by the characters individually. The family of Hubermann hides Max in their house and does not uncover this secret for fear of receiving punishment for their act of defiance. The characters do not discuss or carry out these acts together, nor do they attempt to organize the resistance with other Germans.

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The nature of the resistance that is displayed is in correspondence to the nature of the power; since all three powers were operating in Nazi Germany, the only form of resistance available to the people was dispersed resistance. If the Germans engaged in open, confrontational resistance, they were executed by the state, so it did not affect the power either. "Socialists, Communists, trade unionists, and others clandestinely wrote, printed and distributed anti-Nazi literature; many of these rebels were arrested and imprisoned in concentration camps" (USHMM). Hence, the failure of resistance in the Nazi regime is due to the dispersed nature of the resistance, which in turn is because of the united operation of the sovereign power, disciplinary power and biopower. Thus, the centrality of the biopower that governs with sovereign and disciplinary power in the Nazi regime harms its people and results in Germans resorting to everyday forms of resistance. In addition, the nature of power and the form of resistance it enabled caused the inevitable failure of the resistance of Germans against the state. It can be concluded that unless the resistance is carried out by institutions within the power structure, the nature of resistance that the powers operating together enable will inherently ensure its failure.

However, the cause for the failure of Nazism in Europe was not German resistance but "Upon Germany's defeat, Hitler's suicide, and the Allied occupation of the country in 1945 at the end of World War II, The Nazi Party was banned, and its top leaders were convicted of crimes against peace and against humanity" (Augustyn), as related in the novel. Thus, the paper concludes that the nature of resistance corresponding to the power in Nazi Germany was covert, yet, it could be considered as a form of resistance that the power allows through the characters of the Hubermann family and their acts of defiance in the novel.

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