

FASTING AS DISSENT: EXAMINING THE BODY DISCOURSES
AND PUBLICITY OF MAHATMA GANDHI AND
IROM SHARMILA

A Thesis
Presented
to the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Communication Studies

by
Arjun Buxi
Summer 2011

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ABSTRACT

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In this thesis, I explore the efficacy of hunger striking as a method of exposing the unjustness of a powerful, repressive State. I confront the exclusion of oppressed minorities from the arena of public debate based on the attributes that make them ‘different.’ As recourse, I argue that the minority dissident’s last resort for resisting the State is the creation of bodily discourses and a spectacle of his/her suffering. However, what are the effects of the minority hunger striker’s attributes of ‘difference’ on his/her fast? Conversely, what are the effects of fasting *on behalf of* a minority group? I attempt to advance some answers to those questions through a comparative analysis between Mahatma Gandhi and Irom Sharmila, who respectively fasted *on behalf of*, and as *a member of*, an oppressed minority. Through analysis of news media discourses,

documentary footage, and biographies, this thesis examines the implications of a hunger striker's battle for autonomy while imprisoned and subverted by the State, and his/her efforts to gain publicity and sympathy from an audience.

I demonstrate the limitations Sharmila faced as a female, ethnic minority hunger striker, and the implications of the State's counter-discourses upon a fast-unto-death. It is shown that by a problematic application of the law, force-feeding, and hospitalization, the State weakened Sharmila's spectacle of suffering, and framed her humanitarian crisis as a problem of 'national security'. As contrast, I present how Gandhi successfully framed his fast as confronting first and foremost a social problem, using a dual argument of political and social reform to successfully implicate both State *and* society for moral transgression. Though Gandhi enjoyed a more well known persona and achieved more tangible reform, Sharmila has gained some public support and spoke up against injustice. The sheer longevity of Sharmila's fast-unto-death (10 years and still going) demonstrates the efficacy of hunger striking in enabling a desperate, forgotten, minority citizen to continually and determinedly resist a State with his/her last resort, the body.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Oppression and Deliberative Democracy

In London, England, Kiarash Bahari is one of six Iranian refugees that face deportation back to their home country of Iran (Nutt, 2011). Faced with the grave risk of prosecution, imprisonment and possibly even execution should he be returned to Iran, Bahari is on a hunger strike as of this writing, pleading with the British Government for asylum. So afraid that he will be deported, Bahari has sown his mouth shut, refusing nourishment that would end his fast. In New Delhi, India, Anna Hazare fasted for 97 hours in March of 2011 against the perceived deep-rooted corruption in Indian Politics and bureaucracy, ending his fast with the passage of a bill in Parliament to promote transparency and accountability of public officials. Finally, in Bahrain, a young woman named Zainab al-Khawaja was recently on a 10-day hunger strike to protest the physical beatings upon her family by State armed forces during Bahrain's public protests, also in March 2011 (Booth, 2011).

A cursory glance at these very recent, or ongoing, incidents of protest in different parts of the world reveals a citizen's dissatisfaction with the State or its policies. The citizens described in these incidents have one thing in common: prior to the execution of their protests (and arguably afterward as well) their voices were going unheard in society. They lacked mechanisms to speak up against injustice and the power

to demand their rights. Deprivation of their voice and power stemmed from their inability to fully or even partially participate in public through the conventional means of verbal dialogue. This inability to participate is a source of their oppression, and their lack of political voice renders them a minority in society. Having been muted, they are vulnerable to society, to the norms of public engagement, as well as to the subversive power of the State.

With such striking imbalances in power and with mechanisms that perpetuate or exacerbate social inequity, there is a dire need to re-examine existing modes of public engagement. Specifically, one must investigate their ability (or inability) to be more inclusive of differences in thoughts, beliefs and even modes of expression. A prevalent modern model of government and political discussion today, deliberative democracy is a “theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk” (Fraser, 1992, p. 110). Such political discussion is conducted between participants as if they were equal, using “dispassionate and disembodied” (Young, 1996, p. 124) reasoned argument to discuss political issues and reach consensus. Thus, deliberative democracy *assumes* equality in political participation, promotes a rational approach to politics, and seeks achievement of a conclusion that is “a collective judgment rather than the aggregate of private preferences” (Young, 1996, p. 122).

However, one could argue that this model of public political engagement “carries implicit cultural biases that can lead to exclusions in practice” (Young, 1996, p. 122). Minority classes of society are either intimidated by the rules of argument or speak in a way that is perceived ‘disruptive’ by the majority members. The use of emotion, bodily gestures, and passion by cultural and gender minorities during discussion can lead

to their “devaluation and exclusion” (Young, 1996, p. 124) unless they take on the speech style of the majority class. Norms of speaking in society act as markers of privilege, and despite being touted as universal, can be culturally specific and exclusionary (Fraser, 1992).

This ‘selective access’ in deliberative democracy provides benefits to some citizens over others and denies the oppressed the right to speak simply because of how they communicate. Deliberative democracy fails to “[attend] to social difference, to the way that power sometimes enters speech itself” (Young, 1996, p. 123) through enactment of privilege in speaking patterns, and “[fails] to probe the larger flaws in the vision of democracy as the conversational engagement of everybody” (Peters, 1999, p. 106). The insistence on dialogue as the means of participation “undervalues those modes of public action that defy and interrupt conversation” (Peters, 1999, p. 106) such as ‘bearing witness’ to the public through “moral stuntsmanship...[and] outrageous acts of attention getting” (Peters, 1999, p. 106). Arguably, by not requiring formal education, training, or even adherence to norms or patterns of public participation, ‘moral stuntsmanship’ may give more public attention to a select group of people and their message.

Silenced by their fellow citizens in a democracy, minorities are rendered even more vulnerable to oppression when they find themselves at odds with repressive policies of a ruling State, and are “struck by the arrogance of power...offended by the arrogance of the rulers” (Simanowitz, 2010, p. 325). If they publicly protest these policies they may find themselves silenced through coercion or further repression, perhaps imprisoned, maybe even tortured (Hauser, 1999). Such dissidents are *unable to speak out* using the tools of deliberative democracy, and reasoned argument may not grant them freedom or

perhaps even an audience. The State may remove dissidents from the view of the public (Hauser, 2000) and deny them the liberties of ordinary citizens unless they recant their opposition to the State.

Using the Body for Political Protest

As a result of these (and other) limitations of deliberative democracy, some marginalized political dissidents have been known to deploy their bodies “as a rhetorical means of last resort, but also as *their most (perhaps only) effective weapon* to confront and best the State” (Hauser, 1999, p. 138, emphasis added). One way of using the body as a form of political protest is self-starvation or hunger striking, the “voluntary refusal of food and or fluids... [executed] on the doorstep of someone [that the protestor] felt had committed them an injustice” (Simanowitz, 2010, pp. 325-326). It is this weapon of hunger striking that I explore in this thesis, examining its efficacy for giving a voice to the oppressed to protest and be heard.

Silenced and perhaps imprisoned by the State, the helpless body of the hunger striker finds its voice in the voluntary subjection of suffering. It relies on “its ability to reconfigure the power dynamic between the powerless and the powerful” (Simanowitz, 2010, p. 325) by presenting its helplessness to the oppressor themselves. The slow, drawn out process of death by the hunger striker “makes public the very private act of dying and their suffering becomes a source of power eliciting strong emotions in supporters as well as observers” (Simanowitz, 2010, p. 325). States have been known to retaliate against such defiance by force-feeding the dissident (Butalia, 2007) or serially releasing and re-imprisoning the dissident to break the continuity of the act of starvation (Simanowitz, 2010). However, regardless of the outcome, the body of the protestor becomes a place

where the politics of freedom and free speech are played out, and it becomes a means through which the right to speak is fought for.

To be heard, the hunger striker requires not only the “unshakeable belief in a powerful cause” (Simanowitz, 2010, p. 329) but also the shining spotlight of media attention to bring the message of the hunger striker to the intended audience. The striker’s message is conveyed through the brutal images of a body wasting away or using words to create a picture in the minds’ eye. However, it is the knowledge and perception of the protestor’s hunger strike obtained through media publicity that “elicit[s] public concern or sympathy” (Simanowitz, 2010, p. 329). The body, as an artifact that is available to all despite age, gender, religion, or socio-economic status, presents an intriguing area of study, particularly in its ability to create a political statement through the exhibition of pain (Hauser, 1999). Discourses that surround the body are considered crucial to its successful articulation and propagation, thus it requires speech to make its intention and meaning clear (Arendt, 1958; Hauser, 1999) and must be framed in order to be interpreted by the public. With the use of spectacle and pain as demonstrative proof, both through images and expression of bodily pain in political protest, oppressed minorities reach out to “the public’s consciousness to transform the way people view their world” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 1).

This rhetoric of the body and its accompanying discourses, called ‘Body-rhetoric,’ or ‘embodied rhetoric,’ pertains to the use of the body as a rhetorical tool, a means of making an argument, and a site for the critique of power through powerlessness. Its use in mass protests has been previously explored (Cisneros, 2008; Weber, 2002) as a means for achieving large-scale social change and racial equality (Biggs, 2004) and in

critiquing tyrannical regimes that oppress dissenting citizens (Simanowitz, 2010).

Cisneros' (2008) depiction of *La Gran Marcha*, a protest by Hispanic immigrants against immigration policy in the U.S. showed the need for, and ability of, even minimally educated individuals to be able to present their argument in embodied form. Body protest allows one to make a democratic point, as each individual, regardless of social status or privilege, possesses the body to argue with. As a supporter of the muted, the minority, and the weak, body rhetoric presents itself as a vital component of participation in democracy, and this highlights the necessity for its further study.

Thus in this thesis I explore the efficacy of hunger striking as a method of exposing the unjustness of a powerful, repressive State. By examining the body as a means of argumentation, by focusing on discourses of power that are created through the spectacle of pain, and by analyzing the media discourses that present the faster's body to the public, I posit hunger striking as a communicative act. In the preceding paragraphs, I presented the problems with conventional political dialogue in society, and while placing this discussion in the context of history, it is not a historical discussion. Similarly, while this is clearly an analysis of politics and society, I do not merely analyze hunger strikers in a psychological or sociological manner, I am interested what they *do* with hunger striking, or what they *cannot* do with it. Thus, I present questions of power and analyze the discursive means by which helpless hunger strikers can subvert their political oppressors, examining their methods and outlining the implications of their actions.

In other words, while I examine the political problems of a society, and must engage with political and sociological histories or narratives, the focus is clearly on the individual's creation of meaning through pain, and creation of dialogue through

helplessness. A hunger striker conveys pain to the audience as a proof of suffering and injustice, and this is a bodily or visual proof in rhetoric that is described as the *rhetoric of display* (Hauser, 2006). With the creation of meaning and posing of a bodily argument, the use of the visual as argumentative proof, and the negotiation of power between the dyad of oppressive State and helpless hunger striker, I seek to explore the communicative implications and outcomes of hunger striking.

As a framework, I will explore the act of hunger striking through two specific issues: autonomy and publicity. Attempts by a repressive regime to silence, harm, or remove the body of the hunger striker from public view politicize it by showing the threat that the body poses to the regime. A power dynamic is created then between the politically weak hunger striker and the powerful regime, and both must battle each other trying to control the body of the protestor. The incarcerated prisoner fights back through self-starvation, preferring the possibility of death to that of political domination by the regime. *How do the State's attempts to control a hunger striker's body affect the fast itself?* Beyond imprisonment and containment, methods such as force-feeding the hunger striker (Butalia, 2008) either intravenously or through the nose or stomach (Simanowitz, 2010) allow the State to prevent the death of the hunger striker.

The lifeline of a hunger striker is the ability to make an audience aware of their political struggle through the means of publicity. After gaining the audience's attention through the spectacle of self-starvation, a hunger striker needs to garner the sympathy of an audience. This must be obtained by using discourse to implicate the State as oppressive and unjust, and also responsible for the life or death of the hunger striker. Discourses compete here, with the State trying to label the hunger striker as selfish,

suicidal, or uncooperative (Pratt & Vernon, 2005), but with the hunger striker seeking the label of martyr, as one that died for a cause greater than them. Given the ramifications of this battle of publicity, *what are the implications of the State's counter-publicity measures upon a fast-unto-death?* This battle can be crucial, and the successful labeling of a dead hunger striker as martyr by the people he/she fought for can ignite a movement against the State (Hauser, 2000), rendering the dead striker a symbol for the movement. It is in the interest of the state to interrupt the fast (Gaikwad, 2009), to prevent it from gaining a public audience or public sympathy (Pratt & Vernon, 2005), and to stymie its attempts to create a moral base of support by self-induced suffering (Simanowitz, 2010).

The Objects of Analysis

Having discussed how the individual attributes of 'difference' or the 'particularities' of minorities limit their political participation, one would have to consider how the particularities of a minority affect the outcome of their hunger strike. If one were to assume that the particularities would have a limiting effect, then a different possibility entails the minority-oppressed group having a majority member of society fasting on their behalf. With the previously mentioned frameworks of the battle of autonomy and the battle for publicity, one can examine how the outcomes may differ if the hunger striker is a minority, or majority, member of society. Then, *what are the effects of the minority hunger striker's attributes of 'difference' on their fast? Conversely, what are the effects of fasting on behalf of a minority group?* To answer these questions about the efficacy of hunger striking, this thesis takes the form of a comparative analysis of two distinct hunger strikes, one by Mohandas Gandhi on behalf of an oppressed minority group, and the other by Irom Sharmila, who belonged to the ethnic minority.

Irom Sharmila stands as has been on a fast-unto-death for 10 years (“10 Years On,” 2010), since November 2000, protesting the indefinite presence of Indian Armed Forces in her home state of Manipur in northeast India. The prolonged, indefinite nature of her fast, and her membership of the ethnic minority group that she fasts on behalf of help answer crucial questions about the efficacy of fasting, specifically related to the individual attributes she possesses (her ethnicity and gender) that make her ‘different’ from the social majority.

She opposes the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) that grants “anyone of any rank in the army or a paramilitary force under its operational command to shoot, arrest or search without warrant; and to kill on suspicion alone” (Joshi, 2006, p. 1). This legislation is believed to encourage high-handedness on the part of the armed forces (Gaikwad, 2009) resulting in the rapes and deaths of many civilians. Sharmila protests the *carte blanche* authority that leaves members of the military and paramilitary without a system of checks and balances. The imposition of this act stemmed from the State deeming Manipur unable to assure law and order and peace for its citizens, labeling it a ‘disturbed’ or ‘troubled’ state (Gaikwad, 2009). Sharmila opposes the AFSPA and is on a hunger strike to demand its repeal, the withdrawal of Central armed forces from the state of Manipur, and the restoration of peace and safety to her people.

Sharmila’s body has been entrusted to the watch and possession of the local law enforcement agencies in Imphal (the capital city of Manipur). Refusing to willingly accept food, she is housed in Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital for the purpose of care and life sustenance, yet her presence and life are monitored by the law enforcement arm of the State. For deciding to refuse food, the Indian Government accuses Sharmila under the

law of attempting to commit suicide (under Section 309 of the Penal Code). This ‘attempt’ to commit suicide is punishable for one year by law, leading to the annual arrest and release of Sharmila from custody. Each time she is released, she continues her hunger strike and is arrested once again, creating a cycle of incarceration. As of this writing, she has been imprisoned yet again, a mere week after having been released (“Sharmila Freed But,” 2011).

She lies hooked up to a feeding tube forced down her nose, which provides her with just enough nourishment to keep her alive, but not enough to afford her the strength and comfort to feel normal and healthy. Thus, she experiences the paradox of a care that involves itself in the preservation of her every breath and pulse while at the same time her right of freedom and movement is curtailed by the police and armed forces that watch over her. The state vigorously denies her the choice or the right to die by force-feeding her liquid food through her nose or intravenously (Butalia, 2007). In other words, Sharmila is being denied the right to allow herself to starve and die. In this case, *how does the State’s attempts to control Sharmila’s body affect the outcome of her fast?*

In contrast to Sharmila, I simultaneously analyze the hunger strike of Mahatma Gandhi in 1932. Gandhi stands as an important example of hunger striking, having executed between 17 and 20 hunger strikes during his political career (Simanowitz, 2010). Other than the sheer number of fasts he executed, the suitability of Gandhi as an object of analysis stems from his rare position as an individual who fasted for an oppressed group that he did not belong to. He was then not personally affected the oppression of the minority group, rendering him an effective foil for the analysis of Sharmila.

Gandhi's fast may be placed in context of a previously established persona, built through previous successes in social protesting. Gandhi's education and social class played a role in making him the public figure he was. Being a male child in a well-to-do Indian family, as was the custom of the time Gandhi was sent to England to study to be a barrister in 1887 at the age of approximately eighteen years (Sheean, 1955). Though Gandhi was not a particularly successful lawyer, his search for employment took him to South Africa at a small law firm. There, it was common for poor, indentured Indian workers to be racially discriminated against, under the prevailing apartheid times. It was with these conditions that Gandhi developed cultural capital, as the most educated and verbally articulate of his community, and came to deploy his knowledge of the law to promote social protest (Kytile, 1969).

Rather than submit to the galling, tyrannous and Un-British requirements laid down in the above Draft Ordinance, every British Indian in the Transvaal shall submit himself to imprisonment and shall continue to do so until it shall please His Most Gracious Majesty the King Emperor to grant relief. (Huttenback, 1973, p. 27)

In the Transvaal district of South Africa, government officials passed the Asiatic Act in 1912, forcing people of Indian origin (who were mostly indentured laborers) to register with the government to control their movement and nullify non-Christian marriages (Kytile, 1969). As a young lawyer, Gandhi had made previous attempts to bring attention to the plight of Indians in South Africa through pamphlets and speeches. This launched a rage of mob fury against him, leading to riots, quarantining of his ship at the dock, and chants of "We'll hang Gandhi on the old sour apple tree" (Kytile, 1969, p. 61). Thus, Gandhi organized two thousand poor laborers to break the law by marching unregistered into the Transvaal district, with the local government having been

courteously informed by Gandhi of their intentions to break the law. The vulnerable bodies of those thousands of Indian workers trudging through the streets—men, women and children on their mothers' backs—their markedness of skin color on full display. Told not to resist arrest or fight back, they were imprisoned, sent to work in their old jobs in the mines, and whipped if they refused.

Years later, Gandhi participated in the *Champaran* incident, named after the village it took place in. In the subsistent agrarian community, poor landless indigo cultivators who tilled the lands for richer landowners were sorely treated by their landlords apart from being forced to give up three-twentieths of their crop as taxation (Sheean, 1955). Alerted by a disgruntled farmer of the region, Gandhi assembled a troop of lawyers and volunteers and reached the village, where the indigo-planters met him in droves to share their grievances with him. This infuriated the plantation owners, whom Gandhi had politely informed of his plan of action—consistent with his concept of respect for the adversary (Cannon & Krolick, 1984; Nojeim, 2007)—and it resulted in Gandhi's arrest. Curiously enough, Gandhi pled guilty to all charges made against him in court, and simply asked for the sentence. Shaken, the British courts and Government ordered the case to be thrown out, as the incident had generated too much publicity already (Sheean, 1955).

Thus, Gandhi demonstrated the ability to not merely speak eloquently to his oppressors, but to use various methods of disseminating information and building social awareness of injustice. His prolific writing in periodicals such as *Young India*, voluminous and regular writing of personal letters to anyone in the world that happened to write to him (Gandhi, 1932), and tireless phrasing and rephrasing of his ideals and

manifesto allowed Gandhi to create the support he needed for his protests. Using his well-educated background, Gandhi was able to make succinct and nuanced arguments against the opposition, which intentionally pointed out the injustice suffered without using divisive language, and incurring the metaphor of ‘enemy’ (Sheean, 1955). Finally, his successful public protests in South Africa and India built him a slow but strong following, and he would be frequently invited to give sermons at various forums, cementing his public persona as influential and larger-than-life.

With this background, I examine specifically Gandhi’s fast-unto-death of 1932, which he performed while imprisoned, and the fast protested the oppressive treatment of the Untouchable community in India. Gandhi opposed divisive legislation passed by the British Government that would have created separate electorates in India on religious and Caste lines. He also condemned the practice of Untouchability by Hindus as a whole, a Caste-based shunning of a community based upon their low birth in social hierarchy and their economic repression by the higher Castes.¹ The British Government organized a Round Table Conference in 1932 (Doke, 1989; Kytile, 1969; Pyarelal, 1932a) and introduced separate electorates for the different caste and religious communities of undivided, pre-independence India—the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and the Untouchables, which Gandhi vehemently opposed. He felt this legislation would reinforce the system of Untouchability in Hindu society and separate them from the

¹ The Caste system in Hindu society is a system of castes determined by occupation and birth (priestly, warrior, merchant, worker, untouchable) which places the lowest level as being unfit for touching by the higher castes or ‘untouchable’ (Kytile, 1969). This system was created through interpretation and enforcement of religious scripture and a politics of purity. With the Untouchables reviled for the lives they lived, which they were condemned to simply by birth into an untouchable family, their livelihood consisted of cleaning the human waste of others and a shunning from public interaction with upper castes.

electoral core of the Hindu religion but not from their name or origin (Pyarelal, 1932a). He proposed their pre-reserved representation in the Hindu electorate.

While in jail for sedition on September 20, 1932, he announced a fast-unto-death, consuming only salt and water unless the legislation was withdrawn (Gandhi, 1957; Kyle, 1969; Pyarelal, 1932a). By subjecting his body to pain while in jail and explaining the reasons for his fast-unto-death and his demands, Gandhi attempted to place the moral responsibility of his death not only upon the British state, but on all those that opposed his stance. As a representative of a repressed group without actually belonging to the group, Gandhi protested for a cause that to all appearances did not directly affect him, but argued that it would have negative outcomes for India both politically and socially. His case is intriguing in the two-fold goal of political and social reform, as well as in his unique execution of a public message to further his cause.

Method

The body rhetoric of Mohandas 'Mahatma' Gandhi and Irom Sharmila is examined through textual analysis of autobiographies, biographies, documentary footage and news media reports. In the case of Gandhi, I looked at the 1931-1932 archives of the *New York Times* to gain an international perspective on his fast, and critiqued previous work on British Newspapers that covered the fast for their national audience. Gandhi's personal letters to his followers, press releases and cablegrams were also analyzed (Gandhi, 1932) as were the accounts of his personal secretary (Pyarelal, 1932a) and his biographers (Doke, 1989; Kyle, 1969; Sheean, 1955). It is worth noting that NO visual evidence (photographs or video) were available to analyze, as the British Government

had prohibited any such media from being disseminated. I will discuss the political implications of such a policy when analyzing Gandhi's fast. For Sharmila, I looked at news media reports at the regional, national and international level, and when analyzing her fast will outlay the disparities in coverages as well as the implications of such disparities. I argue that such disparities are key to the outcomes of Sharmila's fast and the spreading of her message. Finally, I analyzed a short video documentary, *My Body My Weapon*, for Sharmila's fast-unto-death.

Accounts, anecdotes, incidents et al are re-created and stitched together in a narrative for a critique of the issues of control and ethics of responsibility that surround hunger striking. The framework of analysis applied examines both the power for control or autonomy over the body of the prisoner, as well as discourses that describe and affect this struggle through publicity. Without access to the physical bodies of the rhetorical objects, this analysis attempts to adopt Hauser's (2006) conception of *re-enactment* of actions, visuals and events as part of a rhetorical display. In the absence of the objects through death, distance, or through the expiration of the event under examination, the rhetorical display must "marshal verbal and formal resources that induce the audience to undergo the fantasia of imagined seeing" (Hauser, 2006, p. 235).

Analysis through the means of body rhetoric does not merely transport the audience to the temporal situation of a narrative, but places them "in the emotional gambit of eyewitnesses" (Hauser, 2006, p. 235). By recounting and analyzing the events and surrounding discourses, the audience can see the events as they unfolded, but also experience them emotively as a proof of their occurrence. The incarceration of a prisoner of conscience, be it Gandhi or Sharmila, would prevent the immediate observation of the

body. Instead, the writer acts as a 'passive witness' (Peters, 2005) to piece together narratives about political prisoners *despite* the inaccessibility of the body, interpret the discourses that surround the body, and create a record of their actions. Using both Gandhi and Sharmila as objects of analysis, this thesis places both of them as prisoners of conscience in the judicial custody of their respective states in their respective eras.

Simultaneously, the role of their respective audiences will be examined, as will the means of publicity available and utilized by the dissident. Despite temporal (Gandhi) and geographical (Sharmila) obstacles to observing the body, it is possible to capture the defiance and the discourse of dissent that is used by the single individual against a more powerful State. I record symbolic exchanges and bodily discourses, analyzing the mechanisms by which the body is both politicized and controlled, and how the protester may use it to subvert the very powers that seek to subjugate the body. This analysis of body rhetoric of hunger striking seeks to reveal how these processes empower the powerless. By using the words and frames that Hauser (1999; 2000; 2006) necessitates for explaining and contextualizing the act of hunger striking, a writer can create a well-woven narrative that empowers the rhetorical body of the protester. This empowerment of the rhetorical body of the protester is relative to the degree of deterioration of the protestor's body. Body rhetoric is not merely the observation and analysis of the protestor's body and recording its deterioration for dramatic effect. It reveals the machinations of nonviolent defiance against oppression and renders them public.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter II: Literature Review

There is a need to explore how the marginalized are excluded from public view and participation, noting the mechanisms that deny them a full membership in society and then outlining alternative means for the oppressed to express themselves. I will extend my argument about the insufficiencies of deliberative democracy in allowing oppressed groups to express dissent through conventional means, prefacing my analysis with a discussion of the theories of the public sphere. By discussing how theories of the public sphere rooted in the Greek tradition of the *Polis* exclude minorities, I will argue further how they are problematic in not catering to the use of the body as a political tool.

These alternative means take the discussion to the theories of body rhetoric and hunger striking in particular, where I outline the ability of the body to argue through spectacle. By describing the efficacy of image events (DeLuca, 1999), witnessing (Peters, 2005), and hunger striking itself (Hauser, 1999), I lay theoretical ground for the body to become the site for, and source of, discourses. These discourses are vital for framing and explaining the physical act, and I explain the relationship between discourse and the body of a hunger striker. Moreover, I argue for the ability of the body's pain to be communicated beyond the means of personal witnessing, and posit the use of 'imagined seeing' or *fantasia* (Hauser, 2006) for conveying the pain and virtue of a hunger striker to those that cannot see the body itself. Finally, I discuss how the pain acts as a means of proof to convince an audience that the hunger striker is not deceiving them, and thus how pain works as a 'rhetoric of display.'

Chapter III: The Fast of Mahatma Gandhi

Chapter III of this thesis covers the fast of Mahatma Gandhi in 1932 conducted while he was imprisoned by the British government in India. In the background of the independence movement in India, I begin by referencing the inception of the fast to examine Gandhi's rationale for conducting it. Next, I explore how he fused the social problem of Untouchability with the political problem of separate electorates, and note the implications of this unique strategy on Gandhi's fast. Most crucially, I look at how Gandhi succeeded (or failed) in embodying the cause of the Untouchables through his fasting body. So, *what were the effects of Gandhi fasting on behalf of a minority group?*

I discuss the framing of Gandhi's fast by US and UK media, the effect of Gandhi's strategy on the British citizens, and how they struggled to comprehend the meaning of his actions. This issue would highlight the nuanced manner in which Gandhi implicated both society and State, and outline the State's attempts at deflecting responsibility through counter-publicity measures. The next issue of discussion is how the British politicized Gandhi's body through indefinite 'internment' not based upon any criminal act. This is contrasted with the publicity efforts of the British to minimize Gandhi's rhetorical display of suffering, and to show that Gandhi was being 'treated well' while in prison. This helps answer the question: *what were the effects of the British State's counter-publicity measures on Gandhi's fast?* I look at how Gandhi transformed the pain of his fast into a dual act of 'spiritual penance' and political resistance, forming it into a cultural experience that engaged his religiously orthodox Indian audience.

Chapter IV: The Fast of Irom Sharmila

I will analyze Irom Sharmila's ongoing fast in present-day India, outlining first the background of the political unrest in Sharmila's home state Manipur, a province in North-East India. I address the problematic legislation that she protests called the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), and discuss the manner in which it subverts Sharmila's body as well as her state of Manipur. Noting the desperate need of the State to maintain a humanitarian image, I discuss the effects of this need upon Sharmila and peel apart the narrative of 'national security' that is used by the State to undermine Sharmila's cause. This is to answer: *what were the effects of the Indian State's counter-publicity measures on Sharmila's fast?* Using the format of a chronological progression, I examine Sharmila's relationship with the State Government of Manipur and the role this Government played in regionalizing Sharmila's reach, and also discuss her attempts to gain a national or even international audience.

Next will be a visualization of Sharmila's fast as it occurs in the custody of the Indian government, analyzing the power dynamics of her imprisonment and re-imprisonment as she refuses to end the fast. I analyze the implications of the Government framing her fast as a 'failed attempt at suicide,' her being imprisoned while in a hospital, and the application of force-feeding. So then I ask, *how did the State's attempts to control Sharmila's body affect the outcome of her fast?* On the issues of media coverage and audience engagement, I will focus on Sharmila's obstacles in achieving effective publicity, and analyze them in the context of her completion of ten years of fasting with no end in sight. Finally, with the analysis on the publicity discourses that surround Sharmila's fast, I will discuss her audience's reception of the fast and its implications.

Chapter V: Conclusion

I argue that hunger striking, despite its limitations, allowed both Sharmila and Gandhi to speak to an audience, to spread their message and attain publicity for their causes. This outlines the ability of hunger striking to allow the body to speak, even when the individual is marginalized. Focusing on the role of the audience as both passive and active, I compare the ability of both individuals to engage their audience, as well as make them *culpable* for social transgressions. Comparing the personas of both individuals, I ask: *what were the effects of Sharmila's attributes of 'difference' on her fast?* This is to test the efficacy of hunger striking as a political weapon for the oppressed, and to discern better who may deploy it; an oppressed individual, or someone on behalf of the oppressed. In articulating the effects of their personal attributes on their fasts, and how this influenced the degree and frequency of publicity they received, I compare their power dynamics with the regimes they opposed. By tracing the battle of discourses and counter-discourses that ensued, I address the ability of each hunger striker to prevail, and make sense of the outcomes of their fasts. Finally, I discuss the limitations of this thesis and outline some possible future realms for further study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Problems of Access in the Public Sphere

The Greek *Polis* greatly valued the right and ability to speak among others on matters of political import. They appeared before others to deliberate and take up “a publicity of visibility, in a realm of freedom and permanence” (Habermas, 1989, p. 4). Inherent to the achievement of this public presence was the distinction between the obscure *oikos* or private sphere (“realms of necessity and transitoriness” (Habermas, 1989, p. 4), the realm of women, dependents, and slaves) and the *bios politikos* or public life of free, propertied male Greek citizens. Through exercise of discussion in the *agora*, among other ‘public’ places, the free citizens of the *Polis* could interact in a public sphere where previously private “issues were made topical... [and] in the competition among equals the best excelled and gained their essence-the immortality of fame” (Habermas, 1989, p. 4). The specific requirements of possession of property and freedom from slavery acted as exclusionary mechanisms that regulated voice in the Greek public sphere and rationed the freedom of individuals to speak and be heard by others. This freedom of speech was connected to the birth and parentage of the individual, and the reputation and honor of family lineage determined the speaker’s ability to be heard.

Voice, understood here as the right to speak in public, was portrayed as a contested and valued right of citizenship in the Athenian *Polis*. The protagonist of the

Greek play *Ion*, Ion, (Foucault, 2001) is a young man illegitimately and unwillingly begot of an Athenian woman, Creusa, by the god Apollo. The right of free speech was limited in its applicability—available only to those of Athenian birth (determined by the lineage of the mother) that had exceptional respect and prestige in society. Ion, brought up as an orphan servant in the temple of Apollo at Delphi, was unaware of who his parents were. The play revolves around the discovery of Ion by his mother Creusa and her husband Xuthus while seeking a boon from Apollo, and the fight to restore Ion's right to speak fearlessly (*Parrhesia*) as a citizen of Athens through his mother. For Ion, discovering his parentage was crucial “for when a stranger comes into...[Athens], *though in name a citizen*, his mouth remains a slave: *he has no right of speech*” (Foucault, 2001, p. 50, emphasis added). At the heart of the play lies the denuding of Ion's voice in Athenian society through the questioning of his parental lineage, through the examination of his societal prestige, and, by extension, the measurement of his wealth and power. The Greek model of democracy was one that allowed public engagement only by those citizens with prestige, wealth, and status in society: the free citizens born of a particular city-state. Women, children, and slaves were not part of this a community of the people.

The Habermasian (Habermas, 1989) concept of a liberal bourgeois public sphere has long been used as a reference when deliberating upon models for political interaction. Based on the Greek ideas of publicness, the bourgeois classes of European society sought to create a distinct role for themselves, separate from the state and market economy. They wanted to have public discussion about issues affecting their private interest, using rational-critical debate to aid in the “emancipation of civil society from mercantilist rule and from absolutist regimentation in general” (Habermas, 1989, p. 56) to

create a public sphere of activity founded upon the separation of realms deemed private (hidden) and public (visible).

Critical rational debate in public spaces and critical literary mouthpieces that censured policies of the State operated in a dual public sphere that was part literary (dominated by women and dependents) and part public (dominated by propertied free males). Critical rational debate took place among equals who 'bracketed' their social status attributes and ranks during discussion. Habermas (1989) attempts to outline a mechanism through which the bourgeois of Europe gained political status through the eventual establishment of a parliamentary state authority that "the public active in the political realm established itself as an organ of the state" (p. 59).

However, such a formulation of publicness has been critiqued on many counts. First, for the singularity of a public sphere (Fraser, 1992), and for its lack of inclusiveness and its selectivity of access (Warner, 2002). Next, the discussion required a unitary outcome benefiting the 'common good,' arguably ignoring the interests of minority groups (Young, 1996). Finally, scholars question (Peters, 1999; Young, 1996) an insistence upon critical rational dialogue as the means to participate and outlined a need to expand the meaning of public, publics, and publicness.

Habermas (1989) acknowledges the exclusion of slaves, women, children, and undistinguished 'free' men that did not own property from his liberal conception of the public sphere. This exclusion is specifically problematized by Fraser (1992) who questions the egalitarian status and 'unitary,' singular nature of the public sphere. Habermas (1989) also acknowledges the 'fictional' nature of a 'unitary' public sphere. A 'unitary' public sphere ignored the "more active part [played by] female readers as well

as apprentices and servants” (p. 59) in the literary domain of the public sphere and treated the political sphere of deliberation (dominated by males) as the whole of the public sphere. However, Fraser (1992) specifically addressed this unequal treatment as a “class and gender biased notion of publicity” (p. 116). She contests the idea that participants in the public sphere could interact bereft of their cultural or gender-based particularities, and thus questions the conception of the public sphere as a dispassionate and homogenous “space of zero-degree culture” (Fraser, 1992, p. 126).

Fraser (1992) reveals the public sphere as operating with culturally specific ideologies and means of expression. She argues that creating or privileging a unitary space and mechanism for public deliberation processes in the presence of stratified social groups and social inequity will “operate to the advantage of dominant groups” (p. 122) and leave the weaker sections struggling for the “right voice or words to express their thoughts” (p. 123). Instead, she proposes the acceptance of diversity and knowledge about multiple cultures and social groups as *part* of public discussion, and the need for democracy to embrace a *multiplicity* of publics that function not only “for the formation of public opinion...[but] for the formation and enactment of social identities” (p. 125).

Central to Habermas’ (1989) idea of critical-rational debate was the use of argumentative, egalitarian political discussion through bracketing of social status or individual traits. Warner (2002) suggested these mechanisms resided in participants’ socio-economic status, heterosexual male cultural values, and education levels. This limited equal access to publicness as part of “a strategy of distinction, profoundly linked to education and to dominant forms of masculinity” (Warner, 2002, p. 51). Gender and sexuality counter-cultures adopt transformative approaches towards “fundamental styles

of embodiment, identity, and social relations—including their unconscious manifestations” (Warner, 2002, p. 51). They use their ‘difference’ from society as an argument against a status quo that represses them by questioning accepted reason or logic as well as bracketing individual traits. Warner reveals how these unaddressed implicit assumptions in the public sphere are inoperable for the oppressed minorities, requiring the re-visioning of publicness altogether. This ‘difference’ that critical-rational debate seeks to *exclude* from open discussion forms the *basis* of the argument for the minorities’ opposition to their repression and the root of their group identities and worldviews.

Warner (2002) echoes Fraser’s (1992) ideas about marginalization of political minorities in deliberative democracy during discussion. Concerns that minorities seek to publicize, such as abuse of women, would be considered ‘private matters’ and denied a forum, while public criticisms of financial issues of propertied males would be ‘economized’ and assigned to ‘experts’ for private discussion. In both cases, this would strengthen the “advantages of the dominant groups...reproduc[ing] gender [or class] dominance and subordination” (Fraser, 1992, p. 132), causing a shift from “a repressive mode of domination [by the state] to a hegemonic one” (Fraser, 1992, p. 117) of constructed consent and a ‘common good.’ A unitary public sphere thus fails to critically address the class distinctions and class repressions of its stratified society reproduced through bracketing and “suspension of status hierarchies...as a strategy of distinction” (Fraser, 1992, p. 115). The particularities of minorities could not be hidden or ‘bracketed,’ and their interests could not be marked as separate from their identities, leaving them unheard and invisible.

Implicit in the assumption of a deliberative democracy is a unified outcome or consensus achieved through debate and reason. Young (1996) reiterates the stratified nature of a populace and states that “where some groups have greater symbolic or material privilege than others, appeals to a ‘common good’ are likely to perpetuate such privilege” (p. 126). By adopting the pluralist, inclusive public sphere iterated by Fraser (1992), Young questions the idea of a ‘common good,’ articulating that plural opinions arise from plural standpoints, each one based upon his/her “own experience and interest in a wider context of understanding something” (1996, p. 127). Also, by individualizing perspective, Young (1996) is able to break the conception of consensus based on personal interest and transform it to one where plural standpoints are stitched together to form a collective, not generalized, viewpoint to keep individual viewpoints intact, understood, and respected.

Young (1996) argues for polyvocality, or multiple channels of personal expression and multiple mechanisms of deliberation (i.e., the use of narrative, rhetoric, and greeting to better represent the totality of cultural worldviews). The author argues that instead of adopting a unitary perspective based upon bracketing, people must respect difference. Though they may hear multiple perspectives and “gain enough understanding of the situation [of the other], [they must] understand that they cannot share the experience” (p. 10) therefore ending the need for a consensus. Seeing how an undue emphasis on consensus or the ‘common good’ can result in the domination of the minority, Young instead argues for a more open course of dialogue, even though such a democracy can be more chaotic at times.

Dialogue as a predominantly verbal enterprise of human political interaction was questioned by Peters (1999) who believes that “the insistence on dialogue undermines the value of those modes of public action that defy and interrupt conversation” (p. 106). Further broadening the depiction of dialogue as unfettered and inclusive, Peters envisions the noisiness of a democracy in which uncivil, frivolous and even shocking acts could count as democratic participation. Even indifference and pure silence should count for democratic participation, and while “dialogue is indispensable for democracy, it is also destructive of it” (Peters, 1999, p. 107). A democracy includes all kinds of individuals, those that are active or passive in participation, as well as those who are privileged or excluded from political action, and so “democratic life is also taking care of those who cannot or will not take part in the conversation” (Peters, 1999, p. 106). Peters presents a case for removing dominating forces of protocol that privilege some groups over others and points toward a more accessible public space, despite the possible chaos of multiple voices and multiple forms of participation that may result. There is an echo of Young’s (1996) polyvocality in this argument of broadening the channels of discussion to include others, and these other channels would form the focus of the next portion of discussion.

Habermas (1989) certainly understands these and other criticisms of his work. He points to a ‘refeudalization’ of the public sphere, the rise of a mass-media culture, and the alleged decline of public discourses. “The exposure of political domination before the public use of reason...now adds up the reactions of an uncommitted friendly disposition....takes on feudal features...[and begins to] dissolve into a sphere of pseudo-privacy” (Habermas, 1989, p. 195). This means a loss of critical power and role of the

public sphere, the establishment of a lateral direction of information flow, and the power of spectacle being used by mercantilist and State forces to promote their point of view without challenge. Through the inordinate powers of the owners of media to promote their message, the already muted voices of repressed groups (Fraser, 1992) would be further silenced.

Based on the preceding discussion, one may argue that the undemocratic repression of minority groups through the prevalent mechanisms of deliberation is not caused by the *iteration* of the public sphere but rather the structure of deliberative democracy *itself*. The following section argues for a different approach to public action that can be followed by muted members of a democracy, using the bodies of the protesters themselves to make political arguments.

Theories of Body Rhetoric

In the bridge sit-in, however, we are confronted by six white-haired local grandparents huddled in blankets and braving the elements in order to defend their community from bureaucratic outsiders in cahoots with big business (the nuclear power industry). With their very presence, their body rhetoric, the grandparents expose the lie that progress benefits a universal humanity, showing to the contrary that it is ordinary people (us) who are often forced to bear the costs of progress. (DeLuca, 1999, p. 57)

DeLuca (1999) presents a different picture of publicity in the modern sphere of democratic politics, commenting upon the ‘tactics’ of image politics that must be adopted by participants of social movements to oppose, critique, and battle their corporate media and State opposition. Presenting bodies to an audience, such as grandparents protesting the nuclear power industry, is a way of opposing policies through the power of a visual proof to critique political opponents more powerful than

themselves. Using the very media owned by the transnational corporations they oppose, environmental organizations such as 'Earth First!' and ACT UP gain media attention through bodily protest and creation of the spectacle as critique. They "must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power" (p. 20). Such organizations spurn and ideologically oppose industrial and organizational hierarchies, as well as strategies to discursively negotiate with them at a table, fearing that "if [they] took on the organization of the industrial state, [they] would soon accept their anthropocentric paradigm" (p. 33). Through sit-ins, demonstrations, placing the bodies of their protesters in harm's way, they attempt "to move the meanings of progress and nature so that governments are more concerned with people and the environments they are embedded in" (p. 59).

The 're-feudalizing' of a public sphere as predicted by Habermas (1989, p. 195) certainly has its vestiges in DeLuca's (1999) world of image politics (there is an inordinate amount of concentrated power in the hands of select transnational mass-media corporations). The oppressed minorities contest the mercantilist oppression instead of passively consuming a unilateral message, and they have adopted a *visual* mechanism to make pointed political arguments. Through the creation of provocative imagery, and the insertion of their own bodies into this imagery, environmental protesters enter into the realm of bodily pain and suffering and assail the abstract nature of deliberative argumentation with the rhetoric of their bodies. Their rhetorical presentation of physical bodies presents a key shift from the logical, reasoned argument of the public sphere to a prudent, emotional appeal. There is a shift here from the rhetoric of pure words to the rhetoric of display, a persuasion through action that "requires situated deeds and that

audiences become engaged with such deeds when the issues they raise touch their lives” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 232).

Rhetors of display in the Roman and Greek traditions were virtuous people exhibiting values worthy of emulation and using demonstrative argument to persuade the audience that ‘seeing is believing’ (Hauser, 2006). The ancient Greek and Roman traditions of demonstrative rhetorical display relied on the virtuosity of the rhetor to foster community and good treatment of others, teaching the audience “how to live [their] lives by bringing the scene before [their] mind’s eye, [making them] witnesses to acts that require [their] affirmation or condemnation for them to live in collective memory as concrete realities” (Hauser, 2006, p. 233). It was not logical proof or scientific reasoning that functioned as metaphysical evidence for the rhetor—it was the “depictions of deeds extolled and condemned [that moved the audience] beyond abstractions” (Hauser, 2006, p. 233). In essence, “the rhetor did not inspire admiration and emulation by *reasoning* about past deeds, but by *exhibiting* them” (Hauser, 2006, p. 233, emphasis in original).

While rhetorics of display were certainly designed for an immediate audience, their accessibility for the indirect audiences was made possible through re-enactment or retelling of deeds of the rhetor through “verbal and formal resources that induce the audience to undergo the fantasia of imagined seeing” (Hauser, 2006, p. 235). This brought both immediate and indirect audiences into a symbolically created reality. In other words, via the bravery and moral uprightness demonstrated by the rhetor of display through the body, or through the fantasia of collective imagining, the audience could be brought to believe in the redeeming qualities of the body rhetor, especially one that was oppressed by a superior power, such as the State. The silent voice of political dissent of

the public sphere could now be heard through bodily demonstration against a stronger power by operating “on a dialectic between official authority and moral conviction” (Hauser, 2006, p. 235) creating “dissident displays as a wedge for negotiation with the adversary” (Hauser, 2006, p. 235) and using their weakness as strength.

Hauser (2006) observes the case of a political dissident imprisoned by the State who “often [has] broken no law save the unspoken prohibition against disagreement with a totalitarian power” (p. 235). Such protesters critique the politics of the State and propose alternatives to the status quo at the cost of their own liberty. In contrast, the repressive regimes they oppose attempt to nullify the bodies of the protesters in order to invalidate their ideas. This begins with incarceration to effect “removal from public view...and possibly deliver a mortal blow to the ideas for which he or she stands” (p. 235). Control over the bodies of imprisoned dissidents is seen as a means of silencing them, of separating them from the public they attempt to persuade with their rhetoric, and to force them to recant their opposition to the regime. So real is the threat of ideas encased in the body of the dissident that regimes have seen fit to “liquidate leading dissidents and entire ethnic groups with genocidal fervor” (p. 235). Unable to oppose the oppression in any other manner, the resistance of dissidents must lie in their ability to wrest back control over their bodies, and the key to this lies in the subjection of their bodies to pain.

Arendt (1958) states that the notion of plurality in worldly realities relies upon its ability to be shared between human beings. In this context, she articulated that great bodily pain was the most intense experience of all and “at the same time the most private and least communicable of all” (pp. 50-51). Arendt posits pain to be “so removed from

the world of that it cannot assume an appearance at all” (p. 51). In response, Hauser (2006) contends that though the experience of pain itself may be a private one, it was the visibility of the *expression of pain* upon the body of the rhetor that invoked a response; its presence in the lifeworld made it not a private, but a *public* site, and source of rhetoric.

Recounting the incarceration of Indres Naidoo in South Africa during Apartheid, Hauser (2006) articulated the uniqueness of prison as a rhetorical site—routine stripping of prisoners, subjection to their own bodily wastes in their quarters, frequent beatings and torture. Naidoo is provoked into recanting his support for the freedom movement in South Africa, and the reader is drawn in to witness the “monstrous forms of brutality so stunning that we can only wonder at their human possibility” (p. 239). By undergoing torture of electric shock and refusing to recant despite offers of wealth and clemency, Naidoo “does not present himself as a threat but as a victim of brutality struggling to survive” (p. 240). These actions of brutality against a powerless human politicize his body, making it a site for power struggles, and its visibility and relevance to the public political struggle of the time rendered it a public site and source for argument.

To subvert a repressive regime, prisoners sometimes adopt a hunger strike to protest a regime’s attempt to control and silence them (Hauser, 1999). In the absence of freedom of assembly, procession, and other means of protest, dissidents refuse to consume food as a last resort, using the only means of protest left to them—their body. Peters (2005) argues that the hunger striker’s task is twofold: to address the cynicism of an audience to make them believe in the sincerity of a protester’s cause or character, and

to implicate the State that oppresses them of being the unprovoked aggressor and a purveyor of injustice and brutality.

Key to these tasks is the protestor's adoption of a non-violent stance and acceptance of pain, for "refusing to fight back makes it clear to bystanders who the aggressor is" (Peters, 2005, p. 231). Before the protestor can earn the desired sympathetic response from the audience, he or she must "[suffer] abuse without retaliation, even with cheerfulness, [which] shields the victim from critical inspection about unrighteous motives" (Peters, 2005, p. 231). Through *dignified suffering* of abuse and pain the prisoner's words are lent more veracity, and so the "civility of civil obedience secures its moral authority" (Peters, 2005, p. 230). It is this moral authority that allows the prisoner to address the audience and attempt to subvert the oppressor.

Hauser (2000) cautions that hunger striking is bound to words, to expression, and to explanation. While the starving body "can capture our attention by the sheer spectacle of its wasting away" (p. 140) the cause it represents has to be explained by way of words. Is it a fast for religious reasons, political reasons, or social reasons? It is by placing the fast in the context of a particular cause that it can be understood, and the positions of the striker and state respectively can be weighed by a watching audience. The muting of the faster through incarceration necessitates the spreading and recounting of his or her story by mass media, with press coverage that relays the news of the indignities suffered. To subvert the regime, the prisoner must serve it with a moral dilemma: it must either yield to the demands of the prisoner to save his or her life, or "stand publicly condemned for moral intransigence" (p. 140). This act of helplessness is a rhetorical affirmation of the superior strength of the State over the body of the protester

as much as it is placing the life of the protester in the hands of the State, and so the act “opposes within the hierarchy, and by not denying it, unmasks it” (p. 140).

A hunger strike forms special fodder for news media through the “gradual demise” (Hauser, 2000, p. 141) of the fasting body, and especially crucial is “linking the body’s ordeal to a cause and opposition” (p. 141). The desired effect of the hunger striker is “driving a wedge between our identification of the State’s actions as an expression of national values and the State’s exercise of its authority” (Hauser, 2000, p. 141) with the intent of tarnishing the public image of the state as a moral or humanitarian authority. The words used to describe the fast serve to give weight to the rhetorical incarnation of the degenerating body of the powerless prisoner, “and transform its powerless physical form into a powerful moral invocation” (Hauser, 2000, p. 141), presenting the rhetorically strengthened identity of the hunger striker.

Conversely then, from the point of view of the State, the goal is to prevent, repress, or subvert the message of the protester, using the media which DeLuca (1999) argues is “an ideological state apparatus designed to produce a citizenry that accepts the existing economic and social power relations” (p. 87). This is not to suggest a direct complicity between the State and mercantilists, but rather a hegemonic perpetuation of ideological frameworks that fear social movements in general because “they threaten to get out of control and disrupt the rationales of their power and privilege” (p. 89). It is not necessarily a cultural dominance by media controlling interests that places organizations and States against social movements. Rather, it is their adherence to social order by “impressing their definitions of the situation upon those they rule...[ironing] out all contradictory life experiences, competing discourses, contradictory discourses and

values” (p. 94) that forces radical movements in particular to be marginalized or not fully presented.

One means to repress or silence the body of a political dissident is by shunning it from the public eye, or skewing the degree and tone of media coverage they receive. Intent on maintaining social order in discourse, State and media interests label “social movements and protesters as ‘disturbers of order’ or ‘deviants’” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 89). They use techniques to frame protesters by “labeling, ignoring, and undercounting, favoring counter-demonstrators, scanting of content, and trivialization and marginalization” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 89).

Simanowitz (2010) narrates the silencing of hunger strikes that have reportedly occurred in the Guantanamo Bay prison that houses individuals suspected of terrorist activity. Individuals are incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay on the basis of suspicion—the ‘suspects’ are framed in the media as ‘unlawful combatants.’ Without delving too deep into the semantic inaccuracies of this framing, its effects are certainly clear: to deprive the inmates of the ability to evoke sympathy by labeling them as the ‘enemy.’ In 2005, it was found that two hunger strikes were staged in the prison, with the official claim that “50 detainees were involved in the first hunger strike, and 76 detainees in the second; however, human rights activists estimate the numbers to be closer to 150 and 200 participants” (p. 330).

A second means to repress the body is the State’s attempt to prevent the hunger striker from attaining the status of a martyr and attempting to deny the responsibility for the protester’s death (Simanowitz, 2010). That death circles the starving body of the hunger striker is perhaps evident, but it is the framing of this death, its linking

to argument, and the imposition of a meaning and credence upon it that is at stake (Peters, 2005). “Within every witness, perhaps, lies a martyr, the will to corroborate words with something beyond them, pain and death being the last resorts” (Peters, 2005, p. 228).

Having observed the political immorality or impropriety of the state, dissidents feel that they possess a knowledge that must be shared with an audience. In the absence of a voice (because the hunger striker is either subdued or imprisoned) the hunger striker stands before an audience to speak out against the State with his or her body, employing pain to weave the narrative. The difficulty lies in the credence that an audience places in the words and actions of the hunger striker. The power of the words of hunger strikers to create symbolic realities is checked by the brutality of their pain which binds them to earthly realities and shuns abstractions. This pain and suffering that they suffer “checks the word’s power to deceive and its motive to fabricate to zero” (Peters, 2005, p. 225). Through this pain, the audience is invited to believe the ideas of the prisoner and, by showing compassion for the pain suffered, legitimizes the protestor’s cause.

Hauser (2000), in analyzing the hunger strike of Irish Republican Army representative Robert ‘Bobby’ Sands, depicted the clashing characterizations of Sands in the Irish and British populaces. Sands, who died as a result of 66 days of fasting, attained worldwide attention and fame, prompting the depiction of Sands in British politics as a convicted felon, a law breaker, and a danger to society. Therefore, in response to the access gained by the hunger striker, to the media, the State must respond with counter-publicity (Pratt & Vernon, 2005) that seeks to either discredit the actions and cause of the hunger striker—labeling it as blackmail or a political stunt—or “depicting [the] fast as

willful suicide, an act of fanaticism doing as much to hinder settlement as to help it” (p. 94). Thus, while the body of the hunger striker seeks to subvert the oppressor, it is in the oppressor’s best interest to *discredit the very character and intent* of the hunger strike, painting it as an act of selfishness for political gain and a wanton desire to commit suicide.

Peters (2005) argues that the political prisoner is burdened with the role of bearing witness before an audience with a belief that he/she wish to share. Bearing witness is based upon the existence of a ‘veracity gap,’ a difference in knowledge or information that the political prisoner perceives between him/herself and the audience. The witness seeks to transfer this knowledge to the audience, but since “no transfusion of consciousness ever takes place” (p. 222), the knowledge that the prisoner acquired through experience must be communicated to his/her audience through using the body. What is of importance is that the prisoner must ensure that his/her sincerity is not doubted. The way out, according to Peters, is the pain and suffering endured during civil disobedience, for “jail with dignity is a performance of moral authority” and the publicity of incarceration by an unjust regime empowers the stature of a political prisoner.

The ultimate achievement of a hunger striker may be martyrdom, the attainment of an honorable death. Having already given up freedom and a voice, the hunger striker is left with no option but to undergo pain and accept the possibility of death. This is by no means a decisive act, for at the same time, being a “martyr proves nothing, but a truth which is not strong enough to lead a [person] to sacrifice lacks proof” (Peters, 2005, p. 256). The hunger striker is faced with the daunting dilemma of ending their life for the sake of what they believe in, yet (perhaps) aware that this ultimate

sacrifice may not in the end be fruitful, because “deaths alone will not convince anyone, one needs internal grounds for believing” (Peters, 2005, p. 256). Peters rightly states that the protester is faced with the possibility of a death that goes unnoticed, ignored, or in other ways is unsuccessful. Yet if the death is not quick and is long drawn, such as in the case of hunger striking, the uncertainty of the process places the hunger striker in “this liminal position between the living and the dead, hanging precariously” (Gaikwad, 2009, p. 308). It is this uncertainty that empowers the hunger striker and allows, through sustained effort and self-sacrifice, the potential subversion of the repressive regime.

CHAPTER III

GANDHI'S ARGUMENTATION THROUGH THE BODY

Fasting on Behalf of the Untouchables

Gandhi's fast of 1932 was a critique of corrupt practices of the Hindu Caste System in India.¹ The fast, which had both political as well as social implications, specifically highlighted the effects of the system upon the people at the lowest rung of the hierarchy. Gandhi challenged the inequity of power that the Caste System ordained by drawing its power from the authority of religious scripture. Priests used their exclusive access to Hindu scripture as a source of directive power and instituted a 'politics of purity' in orthodox daily practices, thus creating a power hierarchy that privileged some members of society upon the social construct of 'purity.' 'Purity' was not merely a matter of disease prevention or hygiene, but a vigorously sought after state of being that determined social status and spiritual attainment. Cleanliness of the body, mind, and soul were associated with virtue and included acts of hygiene, consumption of food, and

¹ Inspired by a verse from the *Rig Veda*, a sacred book of hymns, the system consisted of four *varnas* or caste categories: priests, warriors, merchants and servants or peasant workers. Categories were rigid, determined by birth alone. The prized highest social rank was that of the *brahmins* or priests. They were responsible both for imparting educational learning and conducting religious ceremony. As the sole gatekeepers and purveyors of all scholarly knowledge, both religious and otherwise, the priests exercised their powers to create a knowledge hierarchy and cement their indispensability to society. The result was a politics of purity and religious rank that was reinforced based on these Hindu scriptures. The eventual result was the creation of a system of occupation and social status called the Caste System (Ghose, 2003).

religious rituals that were more complex and elaborate as one went up the caste system (Ghose, 2003).

At the bottom of the Caste hierarchy were a group of individuals known as *dalits* (the oppressed) or *acchoot* (they who cannot be touched). Both names illustrate the state of this group of society known in English as the ‘Untouchables’; a group considered so ‘impure,’ so ‘polluted,’ that the very presence of their bodies violated the ‘purity’ of those around them (Ghose, 2003). Untouchables cleaned fecal matter and removed garbage from houses, public places, and sewers: tasks that no one else would do or was allowed to do (Ghose, 2003). This hierarchically forced occupation gave them a social image of ‘impurity’—none would associate with them or touch them, hence their name. And, “unlike racial minorities, the dalit is physically indistinguishable from upper castes, yet metaphorically and literally, the dalit has been a ‘shit bearer’ for three millennia, toiling at the very bottom of the Hindu caste hierarchy” (Ghose, 2003, pp. 83-84). Coming into contact with the aura, smell, breath, and ether of the Untouchable was to lose the purity of one’s body through ‘pollution.’ Mere birth and lineage condemned the Untouchable to a lifelong burden of exclusion from society, and the marker of being less than fully human.

Not only could the *dalit* [Untouchable] not enter a Hindu temple or drink water from temple tanks, but he had to live in segregated huts on the outskirts of villages...*Dalits* had to beat a drum to signal their arrival so the *Brahmin* knew where to hide or how to protect his food. The *Brahmin* is most vulnerable to pollution when he is eating, so if a shadow of a dalit fell on his food, the food too became Untouchable. On occasion *dalits* had to wear a spittoon so that his spittle did not fall on his surroundings and he could never stand in the way of a wind that might carry his smell or breath to a *Brahmin*. (Ghose, 2003, p. 89)

The marginalization of the Untouchable lay in the elevation of 'purity' as a social good, as a means of membership and a prerequisite for participation. Bodily 'impurity' encased the Untouchable with a burden of inferiority, a burden that was socially enforced and dependent upon their birth into an already Untouchable family. This system of discrimination and selective public access not only othered the Untouchable, but also challenged their autonomy by controlling their rights of access to public discussion and political participation. The Caste System placed economic bondages upon the Untouchable and restricted their access to activities that ensured their social 'impurity,' and ensuring their continued deprivation of right to public participation. As a result, it created a cycle of social shunning and degradation that would only end in death of the Untouchables' body.

Untouchability was certainly an issue of discussion in the public sphere of 1931, with the passage of legal reforms at a delegate conference in London. Civil dialogue and debate had brought the issue of Untouchability up till this point, and while it was discussed, even the future prime minister of India, J. Nehru, referred to it as a 'side issue' (Pyarelal, 1932a). The Untouchables were being discussed as objects of the electoral map in India, with the goal being to find a 'solution' to their problem, which was one of *social* discrimination. As dehumanized blots of ink, the Untouchables were, in however well-meaning a manner, having their political fates decided through the apportionment of electoral representation in the soon-to-be new democracy of India. What remained unheard and unsung at this point was the daily struggle of the Untouchable and exclusion from the community, to the point of being treated less than human.

While imprisoned in 1932, Gandhi opposed the legislative steps that were being taken, which would have created separate electorates for Untouchables, allowing them to vote outside the religious block of Hinduism for their own candidates. This was an outcome of the perception that each social and religious community in India at the time sought separate representation in politics, with the idea of garnering greater power as voting blocs. While this electoral policy of separation may have been uniformly applied based on religious and Caste affiliations, Gandhi did not see the Untouchables as benefiting from separation the way that religious minorities like Muslims or Christians would.

The problem of separating an electorate for Untouchables can be framed as a mirage of independence. Independence of Untouchables from the larger electorate of other Caste Hindus provided the mirage of their elevation from hardship of economic life, receiving an opportunity to improve in society. Separated from the core of Hinduism and able to vote for leaders of its own Caste, the Untouchable would (theoretically) possess greater political access and voice than before. This would act as a mechanism to populate the Indian legislatures, both at the State and National levels, and through this representation the power of the Untouchables would increase through advocacy and defense of their political interests.

However, in attempting to escape the 'politics of purity' through pursuing these economic and social demarcations, the Untouchables would have to *accept their untouchability* as part of who they were. Instead of deconstructing the 'impurity' that they had been judged for and demanding the rights to emancipation, the Untouchables would have to render permanent the very label that caused them to be 'different,' and that

placed them under the judging gaze of the higher castes. The reason for this is that in order to reap the benefits of the separate electorates, to vote for leaders of their own Caste and seek representation, each Untouchable would have to publicly acknowledge their Untouchability to gain membership in the new, separate electorates. In other words, the separate electorates would result in the Untouchables' irrevocable self-identification as 'Untouchables' (Pyarelal, 1932a). The legislative acts sought to provide them with services and political platforms, but Gandhi saw those provisions to be useless without the provision of dignity to the Untouchable and the removal of the 'pollution' from the body of the Untouchable.

The separation of electorates operates under the assumption that legislative change can subvert structures of social hierarchy, and simply by ordaining it so, undo power inequities in society. Linked to this assumption is the idea that the power the Priests hold in the Caste System operates from the source of their position, or from the authority of the scripture they quote. Rather, I argue, that the power of social hierarchies is at least partially, if not completely, dependent upon the reification and social enforcement of hierarchical norms by members of society. The 'politics of purity' that Gandhi opposed did not merely exclude the Untouchables from political participation; rather it created incentives for citizens to attain 'spiritual purity' through enforcement of norms.

Even citizens that were themselves not Untouchable, or perhaps even denounced the practice, would be faced with the difficult task of enforcing Caste discrimination in order to retain their social and 'spiritual' purity. Thus, through the means of social enforcement and reification of norms, the 'politics of purity' was

rendered a social function that trapped the subject of the function as much as the object. This argument then brings into question the British Government's attempts to 'cure' Untouchability through a purely political, legislative solution, and highlights the need for widespread social change to deconstruct the hierarchy of 'purity.'

Social change in the matter of Untouchability required, first of all, an acknowledgment of responsibility on the part of society. This entailed the realization that societal reification of the Caste System hierarchy was not only a social harm, but that society possessed the means as agent to stop reification of its norms, and release the Untouchables from social marginalization. Through this mechanism of acknowledgment, the realization of personal agency and the atonement for social harms, Gandhi sought to persuade society to emancipate the Untouchables into the larger Hindu community.

Civil discourse on behalf of the Untouchables had brought Gandhi little, he was in the minority opinion on the issue (Pyarelal, 1932a), and the limited social protests of the Untouchables themselves to gain access to temples, wells and community centers had been stymied by upper-Caste Hindus that felt threatened by them. Gandhi's verbal discourses had not made their mark, and had themselves been marginalized by 'consensus' of the majority (Young, 1996) that decided to bestow electoral reform upon the Untouchables in the hopes of increasing their liberties. As a means of last resort to resist the discourses of electoral reform, as a method of 'bearing witness' (Peters, 2005) to the pain and degradation of the Untouchable body, and to bring the light of publicity to Untouchability as a *social* harm for which both State and society were responsible, Gandhi adopted the fast-unto-death to speak on behalf of the Untouchables.

To prevent the ‘mirage of independence’ and to remove the ‘impurity’ from the body of the Untouchable, Gandhi adopted a two-prong strategy of political opposition and social reform that he would execute through a fast-unto-death while in prison. Gandhi’s ‘moral stuntsmanship’ (Peters, 2005) of raising public consciousness about Untouchability demanded equal representation of the Untouchables in the *same* electorate as the upper caste Hindus, and reconciliation between the leaders of the depressed caste and upper caste Hindu leaders “to banish Untouchability root and branch” (Gandhi, 1932, p. 63).

Gandhi conferred the responsibility of social change upon society, aware that the separation of the Untouchables from the Hindu religious order would fail in its potential to awaken “caste Hindus from their slumber...to a sense of duty” (Gandhi, 1932, p. 118). The pollution that was thrust from caste-Hindus upon the Untouchables as a discriminatory burden on their shoulders would, through this separation, remain unpunished. Gandhi rolled this political defiance against legislation into a larger cause of uprooting the social injustice suffered by the Untouchables whose lives were “so intimately mixed with those of the [upper] caste Hindus...that it [was] impossible to separate them” (Gandhi, 1932, p. 63) from mainstream Hinduism. In a letter to Ramsay MacDonald, Prime Minister of England at the time, he stated that he sensed “the injection of a poison that is calculated to destroy Hinduism and do no good to ‘depressed’ classes whatsoever” (Gandhi, 1932, p. 31). Thus, the offending legislation and social norms had to be ‘purified’ to unite the Untouchables from their brethren that sought to disassociate from them.

Gandhi's fast began on the twentieth of September, 1932, at noon, in *Yeravda* prison of Bombay, India. Pyarelal (1932b) narrated a previous occasion when Gandhi sought to make a statement through fasting, which occurred in 1924. That fast, 21 days long, was accomplished by Gandhi as "a free man, under the...expert care of doctors...who knew his constitution and personal habits intimately" (Pyarelal, 1932a, p. 282) and the length of the fast had been known beforehand so that he could plan ahead and pace himself. The Yeravda fast was not undertaken in such favorable circumstances: first, Gandhi was without doctors (though he had some medical care) and he was older and weaker because the earlier fast had taken its toll on his health. This fast was indefinite in length and undertaken with the acceptance of death as an outcome while Gandhi was in prison. "Many of us have to die before this monster of Untouchability is finally destroyed. You should be filled with joy that a comrade has entered the fiery gate. It is well if I come out unhurt; it is equally well, if not better, if the fire consumes me" (Gandhi, 1932, p. 120).

In contrast to Gandhi's 1924 fast, he did not conduct his 1932 fast with the same amount of discipline and precision that kept pain and nausea at bay (Pyarelal, 1932b). By the second day, Gandhi found he could not walk to the jail office to meet his visitors or walk to the restroom to relieve himself, and he was steadily weakening in strength. He stubbornly refused the administration of health care, the presence of doctors and nurses, or any form of special treatment that would take away from the self-imposed purity of his fast. In contrast to the scientific precision with which he imbibed water during the 1924 fast, he now did so when the need arose. He persuaded the Inspector General of Prisons to allow his prisoners to visit Gandhi at his bedside, and finally

Gandhi's bed, already segregated from other prisoners, was placed under the "thick shade of a low mango tree...where he remained for the greater part of the day" (Pyarelal, 1932b, p. 283).

Though imprisoned, Gandhi created an atmosphere of regularity, spirituality and calm. A little group of companions surrounded him, singing his favorite hymn "with its haunting refrain: 'He alone is the true *Vaishnava* [Gandhi's religious sect under Hinduism] who knows and feels for another's woe" (Pyarelal, 1932a, p. 282). With chanting of morning prayers, singing of hymns and playing of devotional music Gandhi kept up "an intensity and vehemence of assault that was unprecedented" (Pyarelal, 1932a, p. 286) in the wretched darkness of a prison in India. Surrounded by "an endless round of interviews, meetings with friends and visitors, and consultations with the members of the Conference that was deliberating outside" (Pyarelal, 1932a, p. 286), the horizontal body of Gandhi upon his makeshift prison bed formed the center of activity in his incarcerated arena. Subdued and calm, by September 24, his waning body and receding vitality underscored a subconscious tension among his followers, the British Government, and the prison staff alike. "An anxious consultation was held among those around *Gandhiji*, and the jail authorities...the Government had already intimated to *Gandhiji* on the 22nd that he could have his own doctors by him...he had replied that he had full faith in the jail medical staff" (Pyarelal, 1932a, p. 285).

Above all eventualities, Gandhi had embraced the possibility of death, asking that there be "no undue haste or feverish anxiety to save [his] life" (Gandhi, 1932, p. 62) and that if the Caste Hindu leaders were unable to "banish Untouchability root and branch, it must sacrifice [him] without the slightest hesitation" (p. 63). Adopting the

metaphor of the fire, Gandhi constructed a discourse of penance and suffering around his body, providing the contextual framework for his bodily dialogue to take place in. A symbol both of suffering and purification, the fire allowed Gandhi to imagine his bodily self as the *samigri* or holy sacrifice for his deity, offered in reverence not for a boon of selfish achievement, but purportedly for the penance of sins incurred. In the context of Indian culture and spirituality, the fast amounted to a *yajna* or purification ritual, conducted with the metaphor of cleansing oneself of impurity or fault through a trial by fire (Gandhi, 1932). The fast is still practiced today in Indian culture as part of ceremony often with the intention of seeking a boon, forgiveness, blessings, and good fortune from a cosmic deity.

Having lost the battle of verbal discourses at the Round Table Conference, where the foundation was set for the legislation that Gandhi now opposed, he turned to his body to present it as a means of argument and a site for discourse, accepting the issue of the Untouchables as a reason to undergo his idea of penance. In opposing the ‘purity’ that perpetuated inequity in Indian society, Gandhi adopted the fast for his own perception of purity, a kind that involved the atonement of wrong and the acceptance of responsibility. Regardless of what he actually believed, the purpose was for the creation of a display of proof for Gandhi’s Hindu audience, using the rhetorics of display to render his suffering, fasting body into a proof for his argument of social reform. The display was certainly precipitated by the legislation he fought against, but it was inseparable from the lesson he sought to impart to his audience (Pyarelal, 1932a, p. 281)—to return dignity to the Untouchable body, and in his own mind, to atone for the wrong done to the Untouchable community.

Gandhi attempted to paint his body as the body of India and Indians, presenting the suffering self as the torture a people were inflicting upon one of their own—the Untouchables—and employed agony to show the pain that would, in the end, devastate both the oppressor and the oppressed. Read in the context of the Indian independence movement, Gandhi's agony represented the inner cancer of Indian society that would dilute, if not nullify, the liberties of a modern free nation living in a facade of freedom that continued to crush the weakest sections of society. Through the public expression of his pain and its linkage to the moral issue of Untouchability, Gandhi's fast was successful in raising an awareness about the social degradation of Untouchables and the unacceptability of their poor treatment.

Lal (2000) recounts Gandhi's characterization of his body as a vehicle or carrier of his self, and thus mitigated the significance of his body to himself as a temporary vestibule as opposed to an inherent part of his identity. This distinction offered Gandhi the ability to distinguish between the 'earthly' and temporary presence of his body and its actions from the (perceived) eternal presence of his inner being. Gandhi was an orthodox Hindu that believed in the Eastern conceptions of reincarnation or rebirth and *Nirvana*, or spiritual release from the cycle of death and rebirth upon earth (Sheean, 1955). His detachment from his body allowed him to not only mitigate the significance of pain upon his body and permit him to endure more suffering over time, but it fused with Gandhi's metaphysical embrace of suffering as virtue and a means of spiritual salvation. To the caste Hindus that he sought to reform, Gandhi presented the ultimate sacrifice of Hindu legend (i.e., the subjugation of his self to pain and diminution).

His pain and impending death were the displays of proof Gandhi needed to make a potent argument, using his bravery in the face of mortality to teach “us to believe as right beyond dispute things for which our doubting minds are slow to find words of proof” (Peters, 2005, p. 152). That what could not be articulated at the Round Table Conference, in private deliberations with Caste Leadership, or by the protests of the Untouchables themselves through civil disobedience (Paswan, 2002) required the adoption of physical sacrifice by Gandhi to be heard and seen. This form of sacrifice was not a loud or belligerent one; rather, it was marked with a test of patience by its indefinite time limit. It would test not only the patience of Gandhi’s foes but also that of his audience to render those around him as passive witnesses “by which experience is supplied to others who lack proof” (Peters, 2005, p. 250) and to “bear record of the record borne” (p. 250). In doing so, Gandhi would create a cultural experience of the plight of the Untouchable, the unseen, invisible, and muted group, and pass the message on to those that could hear him, and vicariously live his experience for others.

This cultural experience of Gandhi’s in the form of a fast-unto-Death was problematic in that it was of indefinite term. The indeterminate length of the fast, being carried out until death or reaching an agreement, prevented Gandhi from measuring and controlling his body’s rate of deterioration. He could not economize his strength, imbibe fluid at regular intervals, and plan his day or his thoughts in any manner. The openness of the timeframe bound him in its ambiguity, trapping him to a fate he had little control over and simultaneously bewildered the audience he had gathered in *Yeravda* prison that wished to help him but initially found him uncooperative. Nurses offered to him as aides were refused, for Gandhi was acutely aware that he was still a prisoner, albeit one with

unique privileges and facilities. Gandhi's resolve was stronger than his body though, and by September 22, he was forced to "resign himself to those nursing aids with a sigh" (Pyarelal, 1932b, p. 284).

The deterioration of Gandhi's body was becoming physically palpable; he was reduced to moving about on a stretcher by September 22, requiring careful massage to relieve his body of the pain that threatened to consume it. He was assigned doctors to watch over him and allowed overnight caretakers until the September 29. The symbolic nature of the fast was slowly turning into the sacrifice of not merely the body but the very life of Gandhi himself. Doctors determined by September 24 that his blood pressure had dramatically dropped and, if the "margin of safety was assessed, even if the fast was broken his life would still be in danger" (Pyarelal, 1932b, p. 285). By September 26, the doctors administered "injections of soda-bicarb dissolved in water by enema" (Pyarelal, 1932b, p. 285) twice in desperate attempts to alleviate pain and discomfort in the degenerating body of Gandhi.

The physical exertion as also the strain caused by speaking, induced nausea at an early stage. As the fast proceeded and the body tissue burnt away, his whole frame was racked by excruciating aches...there was a limit beyond which flesh-and-blood could not go. (Pyarelal, 1932b, p. 284)

By the third day of the fast, all appearances of jail discipline had been lifted, and Gandhi received visitors, medical attention, and correspondence freely. He was "allowed some music as music to him was a medical necessity" (Pyarelal, 1932b, p. 286). Hymns were sung in his presence and friends paid visits. A conference constantly debated outside the prison over the minutia of the amendments Gandhi sought, with many leaders meeting for long lengths of time with Gandhi. Spinning his characteristic wheel to

weave cloth, Gandhi labored on with his self-presentation as a disciplined individual, addressing his many mail correspondents and engaging in more harrowing political discussions. On September 22, his wife was transferred over from the women's prison, serving her own sentence for sedition against the British Government to watch over him as he lay on his bed.

While Gandhi suffered and conducted a self-imposed penance for the cause of Untouchability, he simultaneously engaged in a battle over discourses with the British Government that had imprisoned him. The British were in a bind: They feared that his death while fasting for the Untouchables would render him an Indian martyr, dead while imprisoned by the British. In the absence of aggression on Gandhi's part, they were faced with "the obnoxiousness of [Gandhi's] righteousness, the unbearableness of [his] humility" (Peters, 2005, p. 221). As an unarmed and vulnerable political prisoner, Gandhi could not be harmed physically or be allowed to die in their custody for fear of national and international indignation at the least, and at the worst, riots. The very reason for his January 4 arrest, sedition, was the expression of the threat Gandhi posed to the Empire. His engagement with the masses of India and exposing British injustice was considered riotous (Pyarelal, 1932a) and had, over the years, characterized Gandhi as a 'troublemaker.' The British Government was keenly aware of the ramifications of Gandhi's death and did not want to "let him starve himself to death in the walls of a British Prison" ("Britain to Release Gandhi," 1932, p. 23) and make him a martyr for the people of India.

They wished to discharge him from his jail sentence (which he refused) and provide him with medical care. Stopping short of forcible feeding Gandhi, the British did

everything they could to exert influence over his body, not by trapping it, but by freeing it, caring for it, and ensuring its vitality and survival. The life of Gandhi was more precious and politically important for the British than the death of Gandhi, and as shall be explained in the proceeding section on publicity, they had a progressive image to maintain that required the benevolent care of the dying body of Gandhi and his survival (Pratt & Vernon, 2005). To maintain a progressive image, the British Government ensured the provision of health care and doctors for Gandhi, allowing visits by prominent Indian politicians, and even the presence of Gandhi's wife to look after him (Pyarelal, 1932b). Gandhi's personal relations with the prison director and the Prime Minister of England ensured that he received care (Gandhi, 1932) and included the acceptance of his decision to remain in the prison despite the British Government's will to have him discharged and placed under house arrest ("Britain to Release Gandhi," 1932).

Battle of Publicity and Counter-Publicity

Eight months before he started his fast, on January 4, 1932, Mahatma Gandhi was arrested by the British Government on charges of sedition and "provided for no trial and no fixed term for imprisonment" (Pyarelal, 1932b, p. 284). The incarceration of Gandhi, future Indian Prime Minister J. Nehru, and "more than 30,000 political prisoners...during January and February" (Pyarelal, 1932b, p. 281) of 1932 was an act of control of the unruly bodies of these protesters *before* they protested again. While this "removal and control of [Gandhi's] physical body [was] administered as a form of therapy...it underscored the body's rhetorical potency...[to create] a tension with the state's self-sufficiency" (Hauser, 2000, p. 139). In other words, Gandhi and the others

had to be removed from public view and access, without harming them, for their nonviolent public actions were capable of harming the state.

Though counter-intuitive, the nonviolent protester gains from imprisonment. Gandhi's civil disobedience against the communal award made to Untouchables was executed while he was in prison, but that suited him. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., believed that "prison can produce an untainted witness...[and would] rather stay in jail for the rest of [his] days than make a butchery of [his] conscience" (Peters, 2005, p. 237). As a rhetorical site, the prison lends the political dissenter a veneer of credibility in the eyes of the audience he or she courts (Hauser, 2006) and Gandhi's imprisonment, as well as his *refusal* to leave prison, counted towards the sincerity of his actions and the genuineness of his intentions.

The British sought to release Gandhi from prison, and "allow him to choose his fasting place" ("Britain to Release Gandhi," 1932, p. 23) rather than "die in the walls of a British prison" (p. 23). Gandhi refused to leave the prison for the full duration of his fast. Aware of the rhetorical power that imprisonment of a public figure such as Gandhi wielded, the British Government even reframed his imprisonment as 'internment,' which allowed them to "limit [his] movement and keep him in one place without actually committing him to prison" ("Britain to Release Gandhi," 1932, p. 23). Reframing Gandhi's captivity as internment also allowed the British to make concessions to Gandhi, such as visitation from friends and politicians, in the presence of prison personnel. More importantly 'internment' allowed Gandhi to be contained by the British *without actually having committed a crime*.

This shift in framing as well as the earlier charge of sedition for imprisonment marked Gandhi specifically as a political prisoner, something that other hunger strikers such as Bobby Sands of Ireland (Hauser, 2000) struggled to achieve. The ramifications of such terming include the politicization of Gandhi's body. He was not being held for breaking the law. He was being held to prevent him from engaging in civil disobedience. By politicizing Gandhi's body (i.e., by rendering its control and containment an issue of power between the State and individual) the Empire implicitly acknowledged that Gandhi's body, through its very presence among the Indian public, possessed the potential to subvert its aims. While the Government may deny wrongdoing on the basis of upholding law and order, their conditionality in negotiating the release of Gandhi from prison included him refraining from civil disobedience ("Britain to Release Gandhi," 1932).

Interpreted as a curious rhetorical choice on his part, Gandhi decided *not to* outline an *explicit* adversarial relationship with the British state or the Caste leaders. Instead, he stated his fast to be "an appeal not merely to Hindus and India in general but to British conscience, indeed to the whole world" (Pyarelal, 1932b, p. 287). Using speech to clarify his body's argument, Gandhi explained that though he was a political prisoner of the British, he did not state his opposition to them as the official face of the Empire (Gandhi, 1932) but to their legislation. "Fasting cannot be undertaken against an opponent. Fasting can only be resorted to against one's nearest and dearest, and that solely for his or her good" (Gandhi, 1926, p. 343).

This framing of an opponent as a 'friend' allowed Gandhi to present his fast as a means of persuasion, not accusation; conducting his relations with opponents as he

would with disagreeing friends. He crucially separates the action from the actor, and beseeches the actor to adopt right conduct. This non-coercive, non-traditional approach accentuates the imperative of the demand of the body rhetor who then fights for a cause greater than themselves, and attains the higher ground. To make matters worse for his detractors, Gandhi followed through on this fast being indefinite, and, as time went by without action being taken, his death became more and more imminent. In doing so, Gandhi stayed true to the tenets of his nonviolent resistance by not “violating the personhood of his foe...to draw forth the human side of the oppressors by shaming them” (Peters, 2005, p. 220). Gandhi’s proposed changes were staunchly opposed by a State. It sought to control the bodies of all Indians it considered as lawful subjects, and particularly that of Gandhi’s, whose imprisonment was still indefinite.

This manner of opposing the folly rather than the perpetrator allowed for the cordial treatment of Gandhi by the British State while he was incarcerated, including special access to visitors, the press, and letters and cables that kept him in contact with the rest of the world. Through letters and cablegrams, he addressed the Indian and the world audience and urged them to act on their conscience. In his statement to the press, he said “if my presentation is true, this cause demands the mobilization of world opinion, so as to compel right conduct by the British Government” (Gandhi, 1932, p. 133). The distinction between the Gandhian body rhetoric and traditional protest is exemplified in a letter to the British Prime Minister (Gandhi, 1932). In it he pledged to end the fast if the British Government, “of its own motion or under pressure of public opinion revise their decision” (Gandhi, 1932, p. 62). By announcing his decision to protest the offending legislation, Gandhi shifted the site of rhetoric from the collective body of the

Untouchables to the body of Gandhi himself. His frail, slowly degenerating self became the embodied argument for their emancipation into the fabric of the Hindu religion, the Hindu electorate, and Indian society.

The power of the starving body lies in its ability to be seen either visually or described in words to appeal to the mind's eye of an audience and evoke a visceral response (Hauser, 2006). Gandhi's body as a starving prisoner of conscience under British control in his cell was a stirring image, but this image was not published in newspapers across Britain or the world (Pratt & Vernon, 2005). The British Empire was "intensely aware of the dangers of allowing Gandhi to be seen suffering in their hands while in prison" (Pratt & Vernon, 2005, p. 105). They adopted a campaign of media publicity through the Central Bureau of Investigations for the Colonial Government of India, engaging directly and aggressively to disseminate messages through news media, from their point of view, about their treatment of Gandhi and the situation in the prison. Though the totalitarian shutdown of information and repressing facts lay before them as a viable option to quell Gandhi's narrative argument of the body, they instead resorted to disinformation tactics to regain control over the discourses surrounding Gandhi's starving body (Pratt & Vernon, 2005).

This was ostensibly done by the British-run Government of India in order to preserve the "liberal progressive image it was keen to cultivate" (Pratt & Vernon, 2005, p. 102), to counter the nationalist uprising of native newspapers in India, and feed international curiosity and confusion over the actions of Gandhi ("Alarm over Gandhi," 2009). Images of a serene Gandhi upon a ship sailing to India from England and file photos of portraits of Gandhi were all that were visible to the Western audience; the

visceral pain of the hunger strike was limited to what could be expressed in print or through words. It would have benefited the British to show sympathy for Gandhi, to paint a picture of his relative comfort and health, and retain its image as a humanitarian State. Gandhi was told he was free to leave prison, a fact that was heavily publicized in British media (Pratt & Vernon, 2005).

During the course of the hunger strike, the hunger striker is highly dependent upon the elaboration of a cause, a motivation and intention being expressed in conjunction with the self-starvation act in order to frame the act as one of protest and explain it for an audience. A hunger striker is incapable of being effective if his or her exploits remain unknown or misunderstood. Hauser (1999) argues that the incompleteness of the hunger strike is starkest when it is not disseminated to an audience for persuasive effect. The suffering body of the hunger striker must be offered for the view of the public as a subversive spectacle, an indirect argument against the physically superior power “making it morally culpable before the larger body of witnesses” (Hauser, 1999, p. 7). Failure to do so can result in the crediting of suicide as the cause of death of the hunger striker, ridding the State of all responsibility for his or her passing and nullifying the suffering endured by the hunger striker (Simanowitz, 2010).

Biggs (2004) contends that the use of suffering as a politically communicative act connotes deprivation and commitment, the two major requirements for completion of the hunger striker’s quest. Deprivation is used to evoke emotional response to the hunger striker and his/her cause, and as President Lyndon Johnson would say “The blows that were received, the blood that was shed...must strengthen the determination of each of us to bring full and equal and exact justice to all of our people” (Biggs, 2004, p. 12).

Commitment in this context would be the ability to stand resolute in the face of opposition and continued suffering, creating authority derived from both pain and a sincerity in the sufferer's resolve. Gandhi sought to relinquish the right to leave prison early, demanding that only a full acceptance of his conditions regarding the separate electorates for the Untouchables would result in his leaving prison (Pyarelal, 1932a). His deprivation and ability to stand unmoved in pursuit of his goals created the impetus necessary to evoke a favorable positive response from the audience.

The British publicized information about 'luxuries' and 'concessions' afforded to Gandhi in prison, greater than those of an ordinary prisoner by far. They included the medical attention (refused by Gandhi initially, but accepted after his health deteriorated), access to visitors, and the privilege of correspondence through mail and cablegrams. The image of a benevolent State was sought by the British Empire, and in order to have that image, not only did they seek to restrain the audience's sympathy towards a starving Gandhi, but they sought to diminish the effects of Gandhi's suffering as a communicative act.

Based upon the press releases by the State, British and American newspapers framed Gandhi's actions in two predominant themes. One was that of bewilderment about the 'mystic' practices of a person from the East, with headlines such as "Inner Voice Compelled Me to Fast," "My Life is but a Poor Penance." The other was that of ascription of responsibility for Gandhi's own death upon himself ("A Political Stunt," "The Death Sentence: Gandhi Pronounces His Own Doom"). In other ways, Gandhi was described as "terrible meek" (Williamson, 1932, p. XX2), and articles described the minutia of his sentence, such as his drop to 100 pounds in weight, the number of yards of

cloth he produced while in prison, his cost of upkeep in prison being one dollar a day, and mocking Gandhi's fast by contrasting it with his need for a new set of false teeth.

Gandhi's fast of 1932 was "the first time [the British press] had to explain the politics of Gandhi's fast to their public" (Pratt & Vernon, 2005, p. 94), and the "lines of cleavage were unclear" (p. 94) resulting in a varied reaction of "detachment, skepticism, bewilderment, concern and hostility" (p. 94) across various press outlets. The press sought comment from various 'India experts' who professed military, diplomatic, or other experience with the still mysterious land, comparing the fast to a *dhurna*—the act of 'sitting' in front of a government office or the house of an adversary in protest until the demands were met. Or, that Gandhi's fast was based upon "traditional mythology and philosophy...based upon the strongest and deepest instincts of humanity" (Pratt & Vernon, 2005, p. 94).

As the causes and rationale were publicized in British newspapers, two threads dominant in the coverage: skeptical detachment and ridicule with the latter "depicting his fast as willful suicide, an act of fanaticism doing as much to hinder settlement as to help it" (Pratt & Vernon, 2005, p. 94). The British Government released a press statement stating that Gandhi's fast was for a "point of principle unrelated to the Civil Disobedience movement" ("Britain to Release Gandhi," 1932, p. 23) and that he would be removed from prison to a place of residence chosen for him where he would be placed under house arrest.

In the United States, The New York Times reported bewilderment about Gandhi's choice to fast and risk the movement for Independence, asking why he "was dying now for only one class of Indians, instead of the Nation [he] claimed to represent"

("Alarm Over Ghandi," 1932, p. 3). Attempts were made to explain the mysticism of Gandhi's actions by explaining the act of fasting in a more scientific or modern way ("Long Fasts," 1932). Instead of focusing on the cause and morality of the fast, it was reduced to scientific measurement of food, water, and other physical factors in fasting, such as mentioning how a Westerner, MacSwiney, held the record for fasting. The scientific approach minimized the moral power of Gandhi's fast by reducing his actions from the level of sacrifice through body rhetoric to those of a trained athlete or disciplined medical person, and denuded his actions of their poignancy.

The tone seemed to change by September 23, three days into the fast, when the focus changed from the fast itself, and the culpability of the British government, to the plight and "tragedy of the people known to the world at large as the Untouchables" (Wilson, 1932, p. SM9). With this shift, the bewildered British public was then able to reframe events as Gandhi's "appeal to his own countrymen, both high caste and low caste" ("A Settlement," 1932, p. E1). Kuhn (1932, p. E1) wrote how the British would applaud Gandhi for his actions of social reform and end their enmity with him, but at the same time, doubt that he would succeed in his efforts. Relieving the moral burden by this self-imposed realization of Gandhi's true target significantly mollified the British press and public and allowed for a condescending approval of his actions, while cautioning not to allow the Indian people to have too much freedom (Pratt & Vernon, 2005).

The British government ceased in their cold reaction to and condemnation of Gandhi's fasting once the culpability of the fast and the plight of the Untouchables could be rhetorically shifted to the fault of 'bigoted and uneducated' people of India (Pratt & Vernon, 2005). That is to say, once information increased about the Caste system

(Wilson, 1932) and the plight of the Untouchables in Hindu society, it became easier for Western audiences to blame Gandhi's actions upon Indian society's transgressions, though they formed only part of Gandhi's rationale. During the initial phase of Gandhi's fast, when uncertainty prevailed about his target and intentions, attempts were made to drape Gandhi in the frame of a suicide, a willful and irrational self-murderer. However, the New York Times reported the perception of the British government that Gandhi's death would be perceived as martyrdom ("British to Release Gandhi," 1932) and their unwillingness to have Gandhi's death on their hands at the risk of riots. This points less to Gandhi's position in terms of right or wrong, but more to his success in the battle of publicity.

In order for the British and Indian Caste delegates to concede to Gandhi's demands, Gandhi needed to win the battle for his body as well as the battle for publicity. He retained his body's autonomy by a successful portrayal of commitment and deprivation (Biggs, 2004), by enduring the fast until a resolution was made and the law was amended, and by abjuring release from prison or accepting hospital care until his goals were achieved. In fact, he sought to stay in the prison even after the fast was ended, seeking the re-imposition of his jail restrictions upon him and serving a jail sentence well into the next year. Gandhi was not force-fed or forcibly treated by medical staff until he relented, adding to his success in that battle. His letters explaining his actions and intentions (Gandhi, 1932) allowed for a constant interaction with the outside world, and a constant reason for Gandhi to continue his fast through the motivation and solidarity he received from supporters.

Despite the British efforts at counter-publicity (Pratt & Vernon, 2005) (blacking out Gandhi's emaciated fasting body, publishing a list of concessions and 'luxuries' provided to Gandhi, etc.), his independent channels of communication with the established press as well as the public allowed Gandhi to combat their narrative. His achievements with the Salt march protesting the British Salt Tax in 1931 (Weber, 2002) had exposed Gandhi's image to a worldwide audience, and so his absence or silence would have been deafening in its conspicuousness. Finally, no significant attempts seem to have been made in Gandhi's case to ascribe his actions as suicide beyond the few published newspaper articles. This concession of the battle for responsibility allowed Gandhi's publicity to flourish in a positive image of martyrdom, engage an audience, and attempt to gain their empathy in his cause.

Independent India in 1947 abolished Untouchability from its Constitution, which accomplished the basic political goal of emancipation of the Untouchables, but did not rid their suppression as a social evil. While Gandhi's fast did not rid the country of Untouchability as he desired, it did succeed in opening doors formerly closed to Untouchables by the 'politics of purity.' Temples and societies that shunned the Untouchable now threw open their doors. Untouchability was finally "recognized as morally illegitimate...to practice Untouchability branded one a bigot" (Pyarelal, 1932a, p. 296). Marriages between Untouchables—now referred to as *Harijans* (Children of God), Gandhi's moniker for them—and caste-Hindus became acceptable as well as prevalent.

He stood out in his stand against Untouchability, placing himself in the public eye as an opponent to a status quo, defying convention. At the same time, he stood side by side with the Untouchables by professing to be one. As an honorary member of their

social group, he sought to defy the polluting quality they were burdened with. Having nothing else to give, he placed his most personal possession, his life, in the balance, and argued for the lives of the Untouchables with his death. The death of the Indian political leader was not an option, because “for the Hindus, Gandhi was Mahatma, the Great Soul...were they going to kill him?” (Fischer, 1950, p. 293). An emotional bond with their mystical leader along with his choice of a purifying *yajna* or sacrifice on their behalf placed him in a unique position of attention. “In villages and small towns, and big cities, congregations, organizations...adopted resolutions promising to stop discriminating against Untouchables; copies of these resolutions formed a man-high heap in Gandhi’s prison yard” (Pyarelal, 1932a, p. 295).

He received several cables, letters, and telegrams from supporters of his cause that pledged to fast with him (or that he not fast at all). He replied to each one that he did not want a fast of sympathy from them, only their support in the emancipation of the Untouchables (Gandhi, 1932). Thus, the specter of death controlled the sympathetic responses to his actions. As a result, gates to thousands of temples were thrown open to Untouchables across India, marches and prayer meetings were held in his honor, and public places allowed co-mingling of caste Hindus (Fischer, 1950). The offending legislation was redrafted and read to Gandhi as he lay feebly in his prison bed, and it was eventually accepted by the British Government as well.

Gandhi had placed an imperative upon several parties: the Hindu orthodox community had to accept the Untouchables as their own brethren and allow them into the religious public places they were earlier banned from, and the Caste leadership had to reconcile differences and end the legislative stalemate over electorates. The British

Government had to accept the proposed revisions in the communal portion of their legislation and electorally unite the Untouchables with other caste Hindus. In all these situations, the practical task at hand was impossible unless followed or driven by the imperative of accepting Gandhi's perspective on the Untouchables' emancipation.

A resolution was drafted and sent for approval to British Parliament, and, on the morning of September 26, news arrived that it had been approved (Pyarelal, 1932b). The Inspector General of Prisons, Colonel Doyle, came to personally hand the letter of approval at 4:15 P.M. to Gandhi. Gandhi's political demand had been met, and the Untouchables would now be included in the Hindu electorate with special seat reservations for them. In less than a week of fasting, a pact was agreed upon by higher caste Hindus and the Untouchables for a unified electorate, with special representation for the Untouchables. Once the British Prime Minister agreed to the pact, Kasturbai (Gandhi's wife) "handed Gandhi a glass of orange juice and the fast was broken" (Kytile, 1969, p.153). Mahatma Gandhi had fasted, and he continued to live. The Untouchables would still be oppressed, but their oppression would no longer be socially acceptable (Fischer, 1950), and that was a foundational stone for Indian society to build upon.

CHAPTER IV

NOT FREE TO STARVE: THE FASTING

BODY OF IROM SHARMILA

The Hunger Strike of Irom Sharmila: Battle for Autonomy of Her Body

On November 2, 2000, in the state of Manipur, India, government armed forces gunned down ten suspected militants at a bus stop in retaliation for an alleged attack upon government forces a few days prior (“An Expensive Fast,” 2003). Locals alleged that the people gunned down were innocent (Biswas, 2010), and the incident became known as the Malom Massacre (after the village in which it took place). Around the same time, a young man named Sanjit was shot by armed forces “in a crowded market, in broad daylight, in one of Imphal’s busiest markets. An innocent by-stander Rabina Devi, five months pregnant, caught a bullet in her head and fell down dead as well” (Chaudhury, 2009, p. 1). Also among the dead were “a 62-year-old woman and an 18-year-old boy (who had been the recipient of a national bravery award)” (Desai, 2011, p. 5). In 2004, a local woman, Thangjam Manorama, was allegedly raped and killed by local armed forces after she had been taken in for questioning (Roy, 2011). Her body was found abandoned in an irrigation canal nearby.

This presence of armed forces in the Indian state of Manipur and neighboring states falls under the authority of the Armed Forces Special Forces Act of 1958 (AFSPA).

It is emergency legislation in effect since 1979 and “reports of torture, disappearances and deaths were common, with women often being caught in the cross-fire between insurgents and the military” (Roy, 2011, p.1). The present political anarchy in Manipur dates back to its annexation by the Union of India. The Kingdom of Manipur was freed from British rule in August, 1947, the same time as the new modern country of India gained its independence from Britain. In 1949, India sought to annex Manipur, designating it as a Union Territory in 1963 and as a state in 1972. Multiple militias have appeared to retaliate against this annexation, which was seen by them as the Indian Government’s take-over of Manipur and its neighboring states. The militias seek to remove the presence of armed forces from their land and fight for the right of self-determination. However, civilians that are suspected by the army of aiding the militant movement get caught up in the crossfire between the army and militias. Taken in for questioning, these civilians are sometimes harassed, raped, tortured, or even killed by the army (Gaikwad, 2009).

In response to these militias, termed by the army as ‘insurgencies,’ the Indian Government has marked Manipur as an unstable or ‘disturbed’ area to justify an indefinite army presence in Manipur. The AFSPA grants the Indian military and local affiliates the authority to exercise discretionary actions and decisions against groups and individuals labeled by the Indian state as ‘insurgents’ (Gaikwad, 2009; Butalia, 2007). Operationally then, the AFSPA creates a “state of exception that allows democracy to be *permanently suspended* and the peoples of the region to be [placed] under permanent surveillance” (McDuie-Ra, 2009, p. 255, emphasis added). Despite civilian resistance to this policy, the central government argues that “because things are so bad...the Manipuris

cannot be depended upon to govern their land” (Butalia, 2007, p. 25), and the government has to wait for the right moment to make its exit from the area (Butalia, 2007).

The AFSPA, “can come into force in any part of India declared as ‘disturbed’” (Joshi, 2006, p.1), and the designation of a state as ‘disturbed’ can be renewed *at the sole discretion* of the central government (McDuié-Ra, 2009). This designation is “not open to judicial review, nor can it be contested by state governments...let alone local governments...or concerned civil society actors” (McDuié-Ra, 2009, p. 256). Individuals can be arrested on suspicion of *potentially* committing an offense, “with no clearly specified period of release, [or] the right to remedy by ensuring that no charges can be brought against the armed forces for any of their actions” (McDuié-Ra, 2009, p. 260). Because of this law and the resulting prolonged army presence in the area, “militant groups have thrived and the number of insurgent groups...has increased dramatically” (McDuié-Ra, 2009, p. 259) and since it is these very groups that the AFSPA is attempting to quell, the cycle continues, and the act shows no sign of being repealed. “An eye: piercing, intent. A nose, covered by a swatch of medical tape, as a yellow tube forces its way in. Lips, stretched tight as if in pain. A woman sits against a bare wall, huddled under a blanket, tightly hugging herself” (Joshi, 2006, p. 1).

In response to the violence and the AFSPA’s suspension of democracy, a woman named Irom Sharmila of Manipur has not willingly accepted food or drink since November 2000 (“10 Years On,” 2010; “Not Free to Starve,” 2009). As a form of protest against the repression of the AFSPA, Sharmila is locked in a self-imposed fast-unto-death because “there was no [other] means to stop further violations by the armed forces” (Joshi, 2006, p. 1). Sharmila is unarmed and illiterate so she has no military or diplomatic

means to oppose her adversary, the State. All she possesses is her body and a vow not to consume food or drink until her demands were met. She demanded a repeal of the AFSPA, the end of atrocities upon local civilians, and the withdrawal of armed forces from Manipur. Not sure how to respond to Sharmila's decision to go on hunger strike, the authorities decided to arrest and imprison her.

In the short documentary *My Body My Weapon* (Joshi, 2007), Sharmila is shown when she was seven years into her fast, housed in the jail ward of Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital in Imphal (the capital of Manipur). Sharmila is locked in a 20' x 12' cell located down a dark corridor that seems to forbid the entry of light as well as that of visitors. The only voice heard in the documentary is the slow breathless tone of the prisoner herself. She lies in (mostly) solitary confinement, the dreary room having no windows and very little light. Her weakness forces her to stay confined to a bed, wrapped in a blanket and loose clothing. She lies there, passive and calm, "being force-fed lentil soup through a tube inserted into her nose" ("Not Free to Starve," 2009, p. 1), or perhaps "a mixture of liquefied carbohydrates and proteins by a nasal tube three times a day" (Buncombe, 2010, p. 1). She is under the 'care' of her opponent, the State, hospitalized so that she may not die.

She misses the fresh air and sunlight. For their own reasons, the authorities refuse to allow her to go outside. And when she is permitted to speak with journalists or campaigners, officials from the hospital and a plainclothes policeman often sit in. "They treat me like a criminal," she says. (Buncombe, 2010, p. 34)

The liquefied food does not give her strength. She appears weak and unable to stand up on her own power. The tube itself is taped to her nose with a hastily applied white bandage that obscures her face. Journalists are rarely allowed to see her and must

go through many official channels to get permission to interview her (Buncombe, 2010). As she speaks to the journalist (Joshi, 2007) of ‘her bounden duty’ to continue her fast, she stops several times mid-sentence to take another breath. In agony, with the continued deterioration of her body, Sharmila closes her eyes when she speaks in English with soft, sometimes barely audible tones. There are many pauses when her head is raised upwards at an angle as she strains to speak, her mouth open but unable to vocalize her thoughts.

Her hunger strike acts as protection for Sharmila “whose death, even through her own actions, would trigger massive unrest and so she could not be harmed” (Buncombe, 2010, p. 34). To prevent that, she is force fed. Sharmila continues to be confined in her cell, “shut off from the outside world” (Buncombe, 2010, p. 34). While her opposition to the AFSPA endowed Sharmila with the garb of protester, it is her choice of hunger striking as a means of political protest that forced her arrest by authorities and changed her garb to that of a political prisoner.

From Sharmila’s body may perhaps be one of contestable autonomy, i.e., she must fight over the right to control her body with the State. Sharmila’s fight for her body’s control lies in her inability to be allowed to die—that the right to life does not include the right to die (Gaikwad, 2009). Sharmila’s autonomy is one with permeable boundaries (Butler, 2003, p. 18) where one’s body is simultaneously one’s own as well as not one’s own. It is a kind of ongoing struggle for determining one’s concept of self, claiming ownership over one’s own body and asserting the authority needed to take responsibility for one’s own actions, while repudiating the subversive discourses of the State.

One may differentiate between Sharmila's biological life, her existence in the world as a breathing human body (an object), and her existence as a human being of cognition who desires certain freedoms and seeks control over her existence (a subject). Through containing and 'caring' for Sharmila, the State renders her as a rhetorical object and attempts to permeate her autonomy. She is being fed against her will, which prevents her from voluntarily starving and using her body in order to exercise her right to self-determination. Her movements are controlled, access to visit is limited and conditional, and Sharmila's imprisonment is constructed to prevent her death. With all these restrictions, the Government contests her autonomy and self-determination but simultaneously solidifies her body as a political plane of competing discourses.

The contestation of Sharmila's bodily autonomy through force-feeding and 'hospitalization' in a jail ward are paradoxical. Her body is at once rendered an object, it is being controlled against it's will to deny the course of mortality as well as to prevent her the freedom of movement. More importantly, it is an object that is dangerous enough to *itself* that the State must intervene to prevent it's demise, and dangerous enough to the State that Sharmila's body must be confined. The body's demise is denied, and monetary and other resources are continually diverted to ensure the 'object' Sharmila's existence. Sharmila's confinement to a medically equipped facility of interment simultaneously speaks of the denial of her choice to die, as much as it unwittingly highlights her ability to subvert the State. Thus the very body that the State seeks to contain, to render an object, and to control, presents an embodied argument against the very core of the State's authority. Each breath of the force-fed Sharmila, who continually refuses to consume

food of her own will, is her means of castigating the State's suspension of democracy, and her denial of the State's complete power over her.

To explicate this 'denial of power,' the State's complete power over Sharmila would arise from her capitulating and ceasing her fast-unto-death, by accepting food willingly and breaking her self-imposed vow of deprivation. The State can remove the arguing body of Sharmila from public view and attempt to control its suffering to diminish the capacity to argue. What the State cannot do is completely stop Sharmila's fast-unto-death, which could only take place through her willful acceptance of nutrition. This capitulation would dissolve Sharmila's body as a means of proof; with the removal of pain and suffering from her physical body, her rhetorical body would begin to recede in its size and potency (Hauser, 1999). In other words, the persuasiveness of her fast upon her audience and its subversion of the State would simultaneously be weakened, and her bodily critique of the AFSPA would lose its grip upon the State.

The outcome of this dilemma is the State making every attempt to preserve the life of the individual. Should the hunger striker live, the State can take credit for his/her preservation, and preserve Sharmila's categorization as an object without agency. Should death occur, the individual *chose* that as a subject, and his or her death was *not* in the control of the State. In other words, the State purposefully avoids the responsibility for the death of the hunger striker, for if this responsibility is successfully placed upon the hands of the State, the death of the hunger striker attains the status of martyrdom. In an effort to avoid the contingency of martyrdom, the State must ascribe the hunger striker's death as the 'selfish' act of suicide.

For ten years, having no other legal means to detain her, the Indian Government has charged Sharmila with “attempted suicide, an offense for which she can only be jailed for a year” (Buncombe, 2010, p. 34). By interpreting her actions as attempted suicide, the Government has kept her “mostly in solitary confinement and released [her] for a day or so (the law does not allow internment under the terms of her arrest for more than a year) and then rearrested”¹ (Desai, 2011, p. 5). Sharmila refuses to accept failure, or culpability, in the face of her imprisonment by not posting bail and serving out her one-year sentence until the court issues a release order (Biswas, 2010). The Government’s adherence to the law and continued imprisonment of Sharmila and her continued adherence to her principled hunger strike have created a repetitive cycle. Sharmila begins hunger striking, is arrested and sentenced to a year of imprisonment, and then released. With the AFSPA still in place, she refuses to end her fast and so is arrested once again, sometimes just a day after her release. Through the continued, indefinite imprisonment of her body over her political beliefs, she seeks to stay behind bars, to remain in the confinement of her oppressors and continue the politicization of her body to further her cause.

Characterizing Sharmila’s fasting as suicide is problematic (Sridhar, 2006) as it creates dilemmas regarding her treatment and negotiation of her release. First, the law punishes a *failed* attempt at suicide as opposed to a successful one (Morgan & Macpherson, 1997). By this definition, all forms of bodily protest that threaten the life of the protestor, but *do not result* in their death would render the protestor vulnerable to

¹ Section 309 of the Indian Penal code makes illegal ‘attempted’ suicide, i.e. a failed attempt at suicide that does not result in the death of the individual (Morgan & Macpherson, 1997). The punishment is a maximum of one year in prison.

prosecution and imprisonment. The Indian Government applies the law with the assumption that such suffering in a political context is undertaken with the intention to die, and the implication of this framing is that all suffering is rendered an act of attempted suicide. All political demonstration, then that places the life of the protester in jeopardy is instantly categorized as a social harm, a crime, and a reason for the protester to be detained for a year. The legal process then, effectively subverts the political meaning of an act of hunger striking and reduces it to a question of clinical life or death, and simultaneously denies the protester the right to dissent through pain.

An individual's attempt to commit suicide through fasting is further problematized by the nature of fasting to vary in the time it takes to end the life of a person. This type of suicide is always a painful process of deferring the inevitability of death, with young hunger strikers such as Bobby Sands lasting in excess of 60 days, while older hunger strikers such as Gandhi undertook fasts as long as 21 days at over 70 years of age (Simonowitz, 2010). This is further complicated by the diets chosen by the strikers—the varying quantities and combinations of salt, sugar, water, and vitamins have a great effect on the longevity of the striker, with vitamins significantly increasing the span of a possible hunger strike. On the one hand, the law refers to suicide as self-murder; on the other hand, the force-feeding of the individual prevents completion of the act of suicide. The political dissident who places his or her life on the line, such as Sharmila, is under these provisions and prevented from exercising the progression towards death; however, on the basis of *failing* to die, is placed under arrest and imprisoned. Moreover, the hunger strike, if interpreted through the lens of the Indian

Penal Code, becomes a long and indeterminate attempt at 'self-murder' that is easy to foil.

Feeding the hunger striker by force prevents the wasting away of the body through biomedical nutrition. By foiling the attempt of the suicide to commit so-called 'self-murder,' the hunger striker is immediately culpable under the law as a failed suicide and is punished by further imprisonment. With the imprisonment of the failed suicide limited to one year, the continuance of the hunger strike by Sharmila renders her a perpetual inmate of the prison—being released for a matter of days only to be imprisoned again when she resumes her fast. The result is a cat-and-mouse game (Simanowitz, 2010) of serial release and imprisonment carried out over many years to disrupt the hunger strike and to contain the body of the dissenter.

Suicide characterized as self-murder (Stern-Gillet, 1987, p. 162) is a limited understanding of the human will or intention to end life. Ending one's life to save another's altruistically as a martyr, or standing up for principles that transcend the immediate needs or wants of the individual, should be differentiated from the murder of the self to escape deprivation or control by the oppressive force. There is a difference here in the manner of death too. The consumption of poison for a quick death differs from the refusal to eat or drink, which is the staple of a fast. Through its very nature of being a slow, painful, and drawn out way to suffer, the fast represents losing the desire to live, and to a greater degree, the acceptance of mortality.

Thus, in terms of the battle for control over her body, Sharmila has achieved a stalemate between her and the State, with the cyclical arrests and releases controlling her physically, but more importantly preventing the completion of a fast-unto-death or even

the continuance of a fast at all. The act of force-feeding renders Sharmila's emotional appeal weaker since it denudes the appearance of deprivation in her actions and supports the image of the Indian nation-state as humanitarian in preventing the death of a political dissenter. Killing of the self to escape the trappings of state-sponsored power would have released Sharmila from the containment and control of the State, but it would have failed to free her people and Manipur from oppression. With this stalemate in the battle for control over her body, the outcome of Sharmila's fast relies on her ability to create and disseminate discourses, and to use the plight of her body to argue for social and political change.

Battle Between Publicity and Counter-Publicity

India's national aspirations to be an 'emerging nation' in the family of countries like Russia, China, and Brazil (Varadarajan, 2010) creates its desire to be a respected democracy in the international community. This may deter the Indian State from violently subjugating political activists such as Sharmila. The integrity of the nation-state among the family of states is dependent upon its ability to uphold the rights and lives of its citizens, and to endow them with the freedoms that are enshrined in its constitution as well as endorsed by the international community. Can India then not serve all its citizens? Can it not execute the word of the law and uphold justice and human rights?

This is where Sharmila's power lies—the death of a political prisoner would lead to humiliation and mortification of the State in front of the international community (Gaikwad, 2009). It would result in the dilution of India's human rights credentials and

stoke fears of violent reprisal by the Sharmila's supporters (Sridhar, 2006). Therefore, Sharmila's continued protest is *striking at the very heart* of the nation-state as a democratic, progressive nation by embodying its alleged atrocities in the state of Manipur and challenging the pristine, humanitarian image the State so dearly desires.

[The Indian Central Govt.] would rather the dirty war of India's north-east did not attract the attention of the wider world. Manipur and several other north-eastern states are designated with a special security status and even Indians need special permission to travel there. (Buncombe, 2010, p. 34)

Should she die while in the custody of the State, Sharmila would perhaps be rendered a martyr for her cause and cause an uprising against the State. Sharmila was arrested by the Indian Central Government for using her body as a living argument against the use of oppressive armed forces in 'disturbed' Manipur. The State has her in a hybrid of medical care and imprisonment which must simultaneously deny her the right to 'speak' through her body's pain and keep her alive for the sake of a progressive image that the Indian Government seeks to show to the international community. The dilemma of the State is its unwillingness to release Sharmila or allow her to die and an equal unwillingness to lift the AFSPA and withdraw armed forces from the Manipur.

By 2003, three years into the fast, the state of Manipur had spent Rs. 240,000 (approximately \$5,333) on the force-feeding, housing, and security of Sharmila ("An Expensive Fast," 2003). Recognizing the political potency of Sharmila's body to tell a story about her oppression, the State has chosen to extend her incarceration almost indefinitely. The State's and Sharmila's actions have constructed a situation in which she refuses to end her fast and finds herself incarcerated. In response, the State displays an

unwillingness to either release Sharmila or to let her die, thus continuing to force-feed her through a nasal tube.

The dynamic between Sharmila and the central government is mediated by the Manipur state government. The Chief Minister of Manipur (equivalent to a U.S. governor), Mr. Okram Ibobi Singh, presents the face of the state and presides over an expensive dilemma. Chief Minister Singh “had even urged the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister to lift the Act in some parts of Manipur to persuade Sharmila to withdraw her fast” (“An Expensive Fast,” p. 1). By forcing the Chief Minister to discuss her condition and actions in front of the state legislature, Sharmila had successfully framed her body’s starvation as a plane for discussing the implications of AFSPA. By forcing the Chief Minister to acknowledge her protest, she succeeded in linking her actions to the outcome of AFSPA. Most importantly, the AFSPA was not unanimously or categorically defended as a necessary action on the part of the State; it was questioned, both in terms of the degree of its application as well as its overall legitimacy.

Now part of public record, the State’s dilemma is further exemplified by the Chief Minister’s attempts to defray responsibility for not removing the AFSPA from limited parts of Manipur, for “as he had received no go-ahead [from the central government], he has been unable to lift the Act” (“An Expensive Fast,” 2003, p. 1). This subtle attempt on his part to shift agency was achieved by linking his failure to lift the AFSPA to the possibility that the Center “may withdraw all Central forces for deployment in other areas” (“An Expensive Fast,” 2003, p. 1). By attempting to shift the locus of responsibility from himself to the central government, Chief Minister Singh framed the ‘problem’ as one of law and order and a matter of ‘national security’ and

‘territorial integrity’ to avoid capitulating to Sharmila’s fast-unto-death. Thus Sharmila’s actions, though in some way acknowledged, could not be fully acceded to because “the ‘law and order’ [situation] ... had not yet reached the stage where armed forces could be completely withdrawn” (“An Expensive Fast,” 2003, p. 1).

The narrative of ‘national security’ consists of shifting responsibility from the level of the state government to the national government. However, the potency and effectiveness of this narrative lies in its systematic dehumanization of the conflict by relieving the State of human responsibility. In other words, Sharmila fasts for the repeal of the AFSPA, but while it was imposed upon Manipur through State action, repealing the AFSPA is rendered subject not to the State, but to the *process* of law and government. The ‘anti-national’ rebels that oppose the central government are the ‘troublemakers’ that force the imposition of the AFSPA, which once imposed, renders the government ‘helpless’ at all levels. The Manipur government is unable to lift the AFSPA because of its subordination to the central government, and on the other hand, the central government is ‘bound’ by its duty to restore law and order to the region. A complex of responsibility-avoidance is created that rhetorically removes responsibility from the hands of government officials and transfers it to the abstract process of law and order, denying a corrective response to Sharmila’s fast.

Six years into the fast, in 2006, Sharmila tried to increase the scale of her protest by taking it from Imphal, Manipur to New Delhi (Hazarika, 2006). The regionalized scale of her protest thus far had rendered her “a fixture, a fact of life and an object of curiosity” (Prabhakara, 2010, p. 1). The mediation of her protest by the Manipur state government had bought the State time. Instead of resolving the dispute, it used the

narrative of 'national security' to sequester Sharmila and indefinitely imprison her. Frustrated by failed attempts to gain attention from national media, she traveled with some supporters to the national capital to place her embodied argument in front of the central government, hoping that the proximity of her starving body to the oppressive State would energize her supporters. To add to the demonstration, she paid her respects at the memorial of Mohandas Gandhi. Sharmila would have stayed in the capital and continued her hunger strike, but soon after reaching there, she "was taken away gently by police under medical supervision and rushed to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) for treatment, as her condition deteriorated" (Hazarika, 2006, p. 1). Sharmila's health, though certainly fragile, was used to remove her from public view and disrupt the protest movements she had planned.

Sharmila had been acknowledged in the Manipur state legislature due to the successful articulation of a bodily discourse of pain and linking this pain to the legislative demand of repealing the AFSPA. Her challenge lay now in discursively framing these connections as human rights violations, particularly against the women that had been sexually abused, raped and killed. In 2007, Sharmila wrote a personal letter to UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) outlining the brutalities committed in Manipur as a result of the AFSPA ("AFSPA May Come," 2007). CEDAW discussed the issue and questioned the Indian Government on "how gender perspectives are being mainstreamed in military operation in disturbed area and conflict areas" ("Not Free," 2007, p. 1).

More forcefully, the UN Chief of Human Rights, Navi Pillay, "urged India to scrap [the AFSPA]. But, despite recent promises to moderate the law, and some moves to

limit its application, the government in Delhi shows no enthusiasm for this” (“Not Free,” 2007, p. 1). In response, the Indian Defense Minister asserted the sensitization of Indian troops “on the human rights issue both during pre-commission and post-commission training and that its track record of protecting human rights was excellent ” (“Not Free,” 2007, p. 1), *denying altogether* the presence of ‘armed conflict’ in India. This denial of conflict came in conjunction with the government’s contention that armed force presence in Manipur was justified by the insurgent activity and that the AFSPA would not be repealed.

The other portion of the narrative of ‘national security’ is framing the Manipur situation as an ‘insurgency,’ which is to protect the humanitarian image for the State. By doing so, the Indian State discourages the perception of the situation as an ‘armed conflict,’ which would confer a sense of legitimacy upon the battle waged by rebels in Manipur. Instead, the label of ‘insurgency’ asserts the rights and need of the nation-state to defend its integrity and secure its territory. The label of ‘insurgency’ also elevates the needs of national security above the concerns of humanitarian violation for who would not wish not be safe? This framing attempts to protect India’s image and rhetorically subverts the Manipur conflict. The fighting is not then, a war and a sign of internal strife, or even a problem of human rights. It is instead framed as the State’s armed effort to struggle for ‘national unity’ and uphold the word of law.

Almost 11 years after she began her fast, Sharmila was released from prison on March 11, 2011 (“Sharmila Freed But,” 2011) after completing another one-year term. She left the security ward of the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences in Imphal, Manipur and went to her residence nearby where she resumed fasting. She is still

not free. Her residence is marked as a site of dissidence, a place of protest that through her continued fasting draws the curiosity of her community as well as others. Though she is fasting in her own home, a “large number of police forces have been deployed on a strict vigil around the agitation site” (“Sharmila Freed But,” p. 1). Sharmila’s residence in its quietude still strikes against the State she opposes, even as the Indian President makes a visit to Imphal. Sharmila said that she would want the President to “treat the deprived people of Manipur as equal citizens of the Nation” (“Sharmila Freed But,” p. 1), and “demanded the President lift the Army act at a least on an ‘experimental basis’.”

It would appear that almost despite her bodily suffering, Sharmila is denied a fuller, more vital presence in national media discourse. Heard in fragments and in fits and starts, Sharmila’s body is deprived of a sustained and credulous public attention. Her fast-unto-death, now almost 11 years old, still finds itself eluded by the illuminating light of publicity that would bring it into the awareness of a wider, sympathetic audience. The highest-circulating English-language dailies *The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, and *The Hindu* (Campaign India Team, 2010) did not cover her fast-unto-death until its tenth year (“10 Years On,” 2010; “B’lore Support,” 2011; Saravanan, 2011), or until it reached the national capital (“Six Year Long,” 2006). Their coverage granted Sharmila a form of distant sympathy, where her efforts at leading a cause were presented as noble, but no finger of accountability was raised against the State.

The media coverage in its inefficacy denies Sharmila from presenting her body as a proof. Without being able to critique the policies of the State through her bodily suffering, without receiving a frame for giving meaning to her actions, Sharmila’s fast places her in the position of fasting to the puzzlement of many, or even to their

ignorance of her cause. Despite her sustained pain for over a decade, her body in its questionable autonomy remains in a limbo between public view and complete privacy; she is watched over constantly to deny her peace, and to deny her the privacy of death. It is almost as if she is pushed aside to a limited form of obscurity, to a semi-private realm of existence. The skew of coverage prevents her body from being a credible and effective example of her political cause and from stirring social and political action. Sharmila is thus *being denied a sense of publicness* that would allow her to reach wider audiences, unfettered by the forces of the State, and aided by media sources to disseminate her nonviolent message.

Manipur is hardly the only state experiencing an uprising of militias against the government. “The Indian state...is facing Maoist rebels in perhaps a quarter of its states...But the government knows that applying the AFSPA Act would be unacceptable to politicians and powerful interests in ‘mainland’ India” (Buncombe, 2010, p. 34). In other words, the exceptional force and suspension of democracy that comes with the AFSPA is limited to only two regions—internationally volatile Kashmir and the North East corner of India, where Manipur is. This differential treatment on the lines of geography, and arguably, ethnicity, is disconcerting in how long it has continued, as well as in the stubbornness of the State against calls for its repeal.

Sharmila’s supporters are the Mothers of Manipur, a group of activist women enraged at the brutalization of Manipur bodies by the occupying army. These women resort to all means of protest, including stripping naked in public (Butalia, 2007) in front of the army headquarters, challenging the soldiers to rape them. There is no sense of fear in the face of a superior power, and the courage of the Manipuri women is evident and

noteworthy. They stand by Sharmila's side when she is released from her cyclical arrests and arrested again. However, there is a disconcerting trend. While Sharmila has the solidarity of her people, her most vocal supporters are largely women. While Sharmila has some degree of publicity, it is largely female writers that take up her cause and vociferously argue for her (Chaudhury, 2009; Gaikwad, 2009; Joshi, 2006; 2007; Roy, 2011). This solidarity of women, while heartening as a narrative and encouraging as a phase of a social movement, marks the relative male apathy or silence over the issue and, uncomfortably, makes one wonder if the limited reach of Sharmila's publicity is affected by her gender.

One reason for this is the brutality of the situation in Manipur, which is marked by a difference in the way men and women are treated, even in the way their bodies are brutalized by the armed forces. Men find themselves rounded up in groups, subjugated through beating, threats and firing of warning shots, taken in for custody, or even killed. Men's activism against the AFSPA manifests itself in a violent form, with young Manipuris taking up arms as part of rebel forces against the army. Women are sexually abused and raped (Prabhakara, 2010). Some are subsequently killed.

The rape of a woman that seeks to protest in public, to exercise her right to speak out against oppression, is not just silencing her voice as an oppressed minority. It is a violation of her idea of selfhood, a cruel deprivation of her rights over her body in a manner that will live on in the form of personal psychological trauma. The dead body of Thangjum Manorama, a woman protestor found abandoned in an irrigation canal (Buncombe, 2010) acts as bodily proof. Her rape and death not only silenced Manorama herself, but her violated and ravaged corpse deters other potential women protestor's

from following her example. Trauma of bodily violation is then used to remind the protesting Manipuri woman of her 'place' in a society that is occupied by an army, and systematically attempts to deprive her of the right to be seen and heard. "Robbed of her natural rights, handicapped by law and custom at every turn, yet compelled to fight her own battles, and in the emergencies of life to fall back on herself for protection" (Stormer, 1999, p. 55).

It is worth mentioning that this is *not* to argue that women should not be public or raise their voice. Instead, societal norms and male-dominated publicness exert undue pressures upon women with the effect of silencing and/or excluding them. Warner (2002) argues that the word 'public' "derives from the Latin *poplicus*, for people, but evolved to *publicus* in connection with *pubes*, in the sense of adult men, linking public membership to pubic maturity" (p. 23). One's possession of male genitalia was the first prerequisite to speaking in public and holding an audience's attention, so collective participation in civic acts were based upon a "was understood as a *brotherhood* of individuals whose self-sovereignty was embodied in their sex if not their social position" (Stormer, 1999, p. 54). Sharmila's inability to secure a wider degree of publicity may be a result of her 'sexed body' (Stormer, 1999), a body discursively produced to be inseparable from her gender. Unable to separate herself from this gendered incarnation of her body through abstraction, Sharmila is prevented from using her body as a 'purely civic subject,' who could 'rationally' argue her case.

Thus, the 'sexed nature' of Sharmila's body may have lead to forced linkages between her gender and body in news media discourses. That is to say, she would find herself depicted as a *female* hunger striker, placing more emphasis upon the 'tragic

sacrifice' that she underwent, describing the pain of her body and the atrocity of her conditions. Sharmila's rhetoric of display, meant to be a means of proof of the injustices of the Indian State, was instead reduced to a running anecdote of tragedy about her 'brave sacrifice,' one that rarely indicted the State and demanded justice. In doing so, the discourses reduced Sharmila as a text from the bodily discourses she attempted to create about injustices, to a distanced object of pity. In other words, the media discourses were no longer 'of the body,' they became discourses about *her* body, and in this reduced, redacted form lost their potency to create political change.

This is not to say that women in India cannot garner publicity, especially when the issue of their death comes up. The late 2000s in India saw the rabid news media coverage of evening candlelight vigils as a form of peaceful protest, particularly in the national capital, New Delhi. Organizing processions via text messaging, local citizens would take lit candles and march slowly across the city center, the procession culminating at India Gate, an iconic national landmark. The lit candles would be placed at makeshift memorials for the victims of (usually) high profile murders, with the marchers protesting that their killers had not been brought to justice. This practice grabbed national attention with the vigil held for Jessica Lal, a model and barmaid, who was shot in a New Delhi hotel (Kumar & Mahajan, 2006). A similar protest was held for Ruchika Girhotra, who was molested by a retired police officer and later committed suicide ("Every Girl," 2010), and for Aarushi Talwar, ("Aarushi's Friends," 2011), a student at an upscale New Delhi school who was allegedly murdered by her own family.

Based upon the news reports about them, the uniting factors between these other women are their relative affluence, being photogenic, and being of North Indian

origin. It would appear that major news outlets in India have excluded or diminished the discussion of Sharmila's body, which is marked in its 'otherness' from mainland India (Biswas, 2010). Hailing from Manipur in the northeastern corner of India, she bears a name and features more strikingly East Asian, or of 'the hills' than mainland India. Sharmila is then partially dehumanized, or her story is deemphasized in the importance it receives in media coverage. Her body is consequently subjected to a differentiation in empathic response from the mainland populace that identifies less with the indigenous peoples of her region than their own traditionally Hindu-Aryan folk of Northern and Western India. Further creating barriers to her organizational abilities is her linguistic alienation from the mainland India. Her lack of proficiency in Hindi (the national language) creates barriers for her in terms of negotiating with the opposition as well as maintaining a steady stream of discourse to promote her cause and document her helplessness for the observing audience to react to.

Sharmila is subjugated because she opposes the government, but she is socially marginalized because she is a *Manipuri Woman* that opposes the government. Sharmila was marginalized by her audience of fellow Indians partly on the basis of her gender and partly due to her ethnic identity. The mantle of social leadership that she seeks in order to be a symbol for the plight of the Manipuri people, and the publicness that she desires in order to bring the tragedy to light elude her and is denied her. This undercurrent of public exclusion would explain the brutal way in which Manipuri women are forced to retreat into private.

This is not to deny her some measure of success, though. Sharmila's discourses were successfully linked to her cause of displacing the AFSPA ("An

Expensive Fast,” 2003) and even attained limited publicity at the regional (Hazarika, 2006), national (“10 Years On,” 2010) and international levels (Buncombe, 2010). What she was unable to achieve was a public sense of credibility as a leader of her movement, a sense of credibility that did not lie in the perception of her opponent, but rather in the eyes of the audience she was desperately trying to reach out to.

Sharmila’s fast is a fight for self-determination and dignity of the self, for a respectable and safe existence of her self and her people, and for the unfettered safety of their bodies from the provoking and threatening presence of the Indian armed forces. Sharmila’s bodily protest is not a threat to the State or her opposition of committing her death, but rather a discursive provocation of their conscience and guilt. To that end, Sharmila accepts death as a possible outcome of her actions and is aware of the indefinite outcome of her fast and the effects of this fast upon her body. Yet her discourses are directed to the self-determination of her people, a restoration of honor to their existence, and a removal of the unyielding power of control over their wills and corporeal existence.

She infuses the bodily suffering she endures with a personal sense of higher purpose and calling. To her, the deprivation of her body “is not an ‘infliction.’ ..is not a punishment. [She thinks it is her] bounden duty” (Joshi, 2006, p. 1) to endure the pain. She is careful to distinguish her actions from an act of suicide while fully realizing its indications toward the inevitability of human mortality, and the rhetorical effects that such indications have upon observers of her fast. The notion of duty is preeminent in the case of Sharmila, who proclaims her hunger fast as her “bounden duty” (Chaudhury, 2009, p. 1). Ojas Vinay (Roy, 2011), the street playwright too, then, reacted with a sense of duty, when she translated a play into the mainstream languages and toured the country

performing it before skeptical and shocked, but mostly ignorant crowds. Iranian Nobel

Laureate Shirin Ebadi remarked on a trip to India in 2006, that:

If Sharmila dies, Parliament is directly responsible...If she dies, courts and judiciary are responsible, the military is responsible... If she dies, the executive, the PM and President are responsible for doing nothing... If she dies, each one of you journalists is responsible because you did not do your duty... . (Chaudhury, 2009, p. 1)

This reveals the greatest fear of the Indian State: Sharmila's exaltation through her death as a martyr for her cause, and a leader for her people. Sharmila's fast is not just an individual's desperate fight for control over her will and body against a superior foe by leaving the physical plane of existence. It was "a deep human response to the cycle of death and violence she saw around her" (Joshi, 2006, p. 1) through a sense of duty and speaking courageously at great personal risk. Through the enactment of her pain as a visible spectacle, her body became the symbol of the suffering endured by the Manipuri people, and put a human face upon atrocities that were committed by a sanctioned authority in a 'disturbed' region.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Effects of Hunger Striking: Comparing the Body Rhetoric of Sharmila and Gandhi

This thesis problematizes the communicative mechanisms in deliberative democracy that exclude, mute, marginalize and otherwise diminish members of a society on the basis of ethnicity, culture, gender, ability or even disposition. While contextualized in the politics of a society and the State, this thesis focuses on the rhetorical efficacy of the body in pain, as a political weapon and a site and source for discourses. It is in the study of these bodily discourses, in the critique of the media publicity that surround them, and in the close examination of the narratives of power between the State and hunger striker that hunger striking is presented as a communicative act. For, it is the rhetorical meanings that are created, argued for and born witness to through the hunger striker's spectacle of pain that form the substance of study in this thesis.

Contrasting the theories of the public sphere with those of body rhetoric, I argue for the weakest of society to be able to speak out and be heard by means of their suffering, disseminating their message through the rhetorics of display, particularly in the face of tyranny by the State and deprivation of their rights. In other words, I examine the persuasive abilities of the weakest members of society, critique their ability to democracy from the perspective of power inequities and posit hunger striking as a protest mechanism

to serve the weakest and the most desperate members of a society. Applying an analytical framework of publicity and autonomy, I examine the bodily discourses of Mohandas Gandhi and Irom Sharmila, and measure the efforts of the State to quell their voice and subvert their ‘unruly’ bodies (Hauser, 1999). “The practical reason why, when the power is once in the hands of the people, a majority are permitted... to rule is not because they are most likely to be in the right, nor because this seems fairest to the minority, but because they are physically the strongest” (Thoreau, 1849/2009, ¶3)

I argue that the lack of power and the resultant vulnerability of the oppressed minority, which arose from their mutedness and invisibility in society, could be rectified through the light of publicity. Gandhi and Sharmila had to be visible to their public, acknowledged for their self-imposition of suffering, and interpreted through a frame of discourse to give meaning and potency to their hunger striker. This required the exposure of the starving body of the hunger striker in the channels of media, bringing compelling images of discourse through texts to the audience that the hunger striker sought to persuade. The lack of monetary resources and perhaps social standing distanced the hunger striker from public exposure, which they had to discursively obtain through the rhetorics of display, using their suffering to shock and attract onlookers to their cause.

Though the argument of bodily spectacle, Gandhi critiqued the ‘politics of purity,’ and the subjection of his body to the possibility of death ensured that Untouchability could no longer be ignored *as a social issue*. Gandhi crucially shifted the framing of Untouchability as a ‘problem’ that could be solved purely through legislation to one that needed both legislation *and* social change in order to serve the Untouchables well. Using his stature in Indian politics to defy not only Caste politics, the Indian

political delegates but also the British Government, Gandhi revealed the objectification of the Untouchables even in the drafting of legislation that acted out of their ‘best interests.’ He problematized the electoral reform as creating a ‘mirage of independence’ by promising the Untouchables social benefits and political representation, but in exchange forcing them to identify with the label of Untouchable. Instead of liberating them, the separation of electorate would end up encasing them irrevocably in the ‘impure’ bodies that marginalized them in the first place.

Both strikes outlined how hunger striking does not merely seek to be a political ‘stunt’ or attention-getting measure, but that it *actually attempts to engineer social reform*. Gandhi and Sharmila demonstrated the need for societies to uphold the right of oppressed groups to speak and be heard and for the need to attack the repressive policies of governments. More importantly, they demonstrated that “citizenship movements must change cultural attitudes, not just laws” (Jasper, 1997, p. 374) and that neither of the two objectives are simple to accomplish. Sharmila’s self-induced suffering set a stage for her audience to at least *begin* to comprehend the anarchy of Manipur, the injustice of the AFSPA, and the loss of life that seeped away with each labored breath of Irom Sharmila. Achieving milestones such as anniversaries of protests (“10 Years On,” 2010) resulted in some renewed media interest of her fast, reminding the public of the injustice she protested.

Given that hunger striking is an argument through the means of a spectacle, I would argue that the effectiveness of a hunger striker is at least partially dependent upon the resonance of the spectacle with the audience. Sharmila, more so than Gandhi, faced a form of public discourse and mainstream media coverage that arguably hindered the

critical abilities of their audiences while supporting the common interests of corporations and State alike (DeLuca, 1999). While Sharmila did not face a media ‘blackout,’ the coverage she received was skewed in its representation of her fast and cause, failed to critically examine the reasons for the conflict in Manipur and did not *sufficiently emphasize* that the State should withdraw the AFSPA. In other words, her position and ethical critique of the State was de-emphasized, even displaced from national discussion.

The body of Sharmila was constructed in the media as being ‘sexed,’ i.e. it was inextricably linked through discourses to her gender. More importantly, it was linked to the limiting effects of her gender that, the social norms and hierarchies that questioned implicitly Sharmila’s right to protest in public. In the distancing of Sharmila’s bodily argumentation and critiques from the ‘story’ of her hunger strike, media reportage and public perception weakened their ability to advance her call for justice, and so Sharmila’s gender had a limiting effect upon her hunger strike. Even with the sparse coverage Sharmila did receive, outside of regional media sources or international sources, her fast was reported as an anecdote of personal and human tragedy, redacting the political and ethical implications. It was *not* reported as a critical form of body discourses that bore witness to State brutalization of Manipur, but rather as a discourse about *her* body.

In addition to the treatment of ‘othering’ by media sources, Sharmila’s fast has been discursively limited from receiving a wide and effective form of publicity, partly due to the counter-publicity actions of the State. The State’s desire for a pristine international image and its successful framing of the issue as an ‘insurgency’ shifted the responsibility of Manipuri deaths and blood to an unavoidable tragedy of war, absolving human action from responsibility. As an abstract actor, the AFSPA was endowed with the

responsibility for the deaths of civilians, with the picture painted of a Manipur government that could not control the situation (“An Expensive Fast,” 2003) or that needed ‘clearance’ from the central government to act. The State would not lift the AFSPA until violence went down, even though this violence could be traced to the application of the AFSPA itself. The narratives of ‘national security’ and ‘territorial integrity’ reduced the humanitarian nightmare of Manipur to ‘collateral damage,’ a situation that was distressing but ‘could not be helped.’ Together, the State’s attempt to discursively frame Sharmila’s hunger strike as a regional issue of ‘national security’ and the selective, de-emphasizing coverage of the fast by national media arguably forced it out of the realms of national public discourse.

A sharp contrast between the fasts of Gandhi and Sharmila lies in the degree to which their audience could relate to them. Gandhi was able to discursively frame his fast-unto-death as a form of ‘spiritual penance’ to resonate with his orthodox, Caste-Hindu audience, marking Untouchability as a ‘blot’ and a sin (Gandhi, 1932). He repurposed his body as a canvas for the fast, which he executed in the Hindu tradition of self-sacrifice for ‘holy purification,’ which implicated his Caste-orthodox audience as guilty of transgression. Gandhi then bore witness to the bodily marginalization and de-humanization of the Untouchable through the politics of ‘purity,’ and their exclusion from public discourses. So pervasive was Gandhi’s effect on public discourse that the British government was forced to engineer a systematic means of counter-publicity that played down his fast and crucially blocked out images of his emaciated body from public view (Pratt & Vernon, 2005).

Gandhi addressed his audience very explicitly through the press, and despite his critique of Caste rigidities persuaded them to be his allies. As he spoke to Hindu society, he required them to support the legislative reform by reflecting the need for a concurrent, supportive form of social reform, without which the legislation would be meaningless. With his other key audience, the British public, Gandhi sought a level of understanding of not only the plight of the Untouchables but the need for India's self-determination as a nation (Pratt & Vernon, 2005). Gandhi was aware that the West had little knowledge of the implications or motivations for a fast and thoroughly explained his rationale through press discourses (Gandhi, 1932). Most importantly, Gandhi did *not* assume an adversarial position against either the British Government or his audiences, but rather sought to persuade them to 'do the right thing' (Pyarelal, 1932a).

Sharmila's call to the people of India was less explicit, and certainly was more voiced on her behalf by the media (Gaikwad, 2009; Hazarika, 2006; Roy, 2011). Her ethnic and gender-based marginalization found her alienated from public discussion. Though Sharmila's strike received a less vociferous response from supporters, it critically exposed the stark divide that lies between the northeast and mainland regions of India, especially how they get treated by the regime. It could be argued that Sharmila's argument for repeal of the AFSPA was not clearly articulated as an argument for human rights (Prabhakara, 2010), forcing her discourse to be limited in appeal. The lack of universality in her message limited Sharmila from moving the discussion beyond the rights of Manipuris and attempting to compare the injustice of the AFSPA in terms of the rights ALL Indians should enjoy. It remains a largely political (e.g., legislative) argument

that, in the face of ‘national security,’ has found itself repeatedly sidelined and shelved, reducing the potency and momentum of her fast.

In terms of her bodily autonomy, Sharmila’s fast created the paradox of her ‘imprisoned care’ (i.e., the forced ingestion of food to keep her alive against her will) and the cycle of incarceration and release that has been perpetuated for almost eleven years now. The complexity of her battle for autonomy revealed that she was simultaneously an ‘object’ that needed the ‘care’ of the State, but dangerous enough to the State as an ‘unruly’ body that she had to be confined indefinitely. Sharmila was force-fed through a tube, and this foiled her hunger strike on many levels. It prevented her body from becoming visibly emaciated, and the suffering of wasting away was muted. Her bodily persuasion was limited by the enforced nutrition, and even though she was imprisoned, the attention-getting specter of impending death was removed from Sharmila’s fast. With her death not imminent, and her body weakened but not able to visually convey suffering, the State had successfully deprived her bodily spectacle of starkness. The hunger striker was not allowed to go hungry, nullifying the very bodily deprivation and self-sacrifice used to gain credibility.

At a personal level, 10 years of the most unnatural kind of life—constant public exposure, moving from prison to hospital and court and, above all, the forced nasal feeding—has, according to medical opinion, done irreparable damage to her organs. Even if some kind of a compromise were to be reached...she will never be able to lead a normal life. (Prabhakara, 2010, p. 1)

Finally, the long duration of her fast both hindered and aided Sharmila’s cause. Coverage of her hunger strike was strikingly spotty, which as mentioned earlier was greater when she tried to raise the scale of her protest by going to New Delhi (Hazarika, 2006) and facing the central government head on. Most of her coverage came

after the ten-year anniversary of her fast, which comes at a time when the issue has receded in the popular discussion (Prabhakara, 2010) and at a great cost in terms of Sharmila's actual health and bodily survival. Unfortunately, the ability of the State to sequester the striking body of Sharmila may have succeeded in the attempt to obscure her suffering from public view and preventing the linkage of her fast to the gross human rights violation of the AFSPA.

Gandhi certainly enjoyed class, gender, and ethnic advantages over Sharmila that widely contributed to his relative greater success. By the time he executed the fast of 1932, Gandhi was already an established leader of the Indian National Congress, the political party that had been established to further India's ambitions of independence (Sheean, 1955). He enjoyed the ability to create his own steady stream of discourses, writing letters and public press releases, delivering interviews to the press, and having one-on-one discussions with key public figures (Gandhi, 1932). Though imprisoned, it was part of his routine during his fast to reply to correspondence and to voice his opinions on issues. The bodily discourses of his suffering were well accompanied with verbal discourses that attempted to frame, clarify, and re-state his positions on key issues, mitigating their ambiguity. His previous successful political movements had endowed his opinion with sufficient credibility to ensure it being heard.

As briefly mentioned early in this thesis, Gandhi's fast of 1932 should perhaps not be examined as a stand-alone instance of civil disobedience, but rather contextualized as one instance among a lifetime of nonviolent struggle. His execution of rhetorical displays were "not merely about removing the British but to demonstrate what an ideal nonviolent society should look like, how ideal lives should be lived" (Weber, 2002, p.

47). Once, while preparing to deliver a sermon to 5,000 followers, he sat patiently while the audience sat, growing impatient with his silence. Finally, he spoke: “either you invite the Untouchables and my volunteers to sit freely among you or I’ll have to address you from the hill where they are sitting” (Weber, 2002, p. 47). Through such rebuking of ‘tradition,’ Gandhi sought to desegregate Hindu society, to emancipate the Untouchables, and to rhetorically display the lessons he wished to impart.

Gandhi’s strike was performed as an extension of his established public persona for “so embedded was hunger striking in his everyday life that it is difficult to separate its practice as a regime of the self from its practice as an act of national significance” (Pratt & Vernon, 2005, p. 94). His actions permeated beyond his role of a political leader and treaded the fine boundaries between his actions as a prisoner of conscience and a person seeking moral purification. Hunger striker in this sense was a “corporeal drama, at once individual and heroic, yet representative of the suffering of a wider nation in front of an audience” (Pratt & Vernon, 2005, p. 94). It was a uniting force between the body of Gandhi and the people he addressed, an attempt “to inscribe the self upon the nation, the nation upon the self, in ways that elevated Gandhi’s claims to moral leadership” (Pratt & Vernon, 2005, p. 95).

Perhaps more central to Gandhi’s success was that, rather than performing hunger striking as an isolated act, he internalized the philosophy of non-violence as a way of life (Pyarelal, 1932b). The bodily self-discipline that it required was already part of his public persona, and his image as a quasi-spiritual leader allowed him to frame the act as *beyond* political protest. Through his published discourses, Gandhi was able to explicate his fast as being in line with traditional Hindu religious fasting, a form of penance and

spiritual sacrifice. For a deeply religious nation, this forged an immediate cause for alarm. He was successful in creating a bodily narrative that resonated with the cultural beliefs of his directed audience and was able to compel them into acting on his requests for social reform.

The conclusion of this thesis is that oppressed groups with attributes of 'difference' are at a great disadvantage when attempting hunger strikes. A hunger strike may be connected to the personal credibility and overall persona of the dissident, relying upon a previously created public image that the dissident may enjoy, and such an image is often rarely available to an oppressed minority. Without nullifying the ability of the minority group member to be hunger striker, and subjecting my conclusion to further revisiting, I advance the idea that an oppressed minority may be more effectively and expediently represented by an unoppressed individual through the means of hunger striking. With such an individual's greater access to media dissemination, protection from 'othering' attributes, and an ability to speak frequently in a public setting, this would arguably allow for a more nuanced and well-crafted argument against the social or political injustice, as well as the ability to garner greater sympathy from an audience.

The success of hunger striking is its ability to give a lonely, helpless individual the place and the means to question a State. Even though her fast is ongoing, and her message is not strong or very widespread, Sharmila has continued her fight against the State. For this continued bodily resistance, Sharmila's reward is a semblance of self-determination, and a flicker of hope in the face of oppression. Gandhi succeeded in that he engineered political success in cohesion with a social transformation, albeit that the society moves far more gradually than the laws that are signed into a constitution. For

his ability to successfully deploy a social and political argument, and to use spirituality to both execute his fast and frame it for his audience, I point to Gandhi's perhaps well-earned name, 'Mahatma' Gandhi.

Limitations of This Thesis and Future Areas of Study

One major limitation of this thesis is my lack of access to non-English language sources of information. Though English is widely spoken in India, and English-language newspapers are widely read across the country, they are but one-third of the circulation of Hindi-language (the national language) newspapers (Campaign Team India, 2010). Even regional newspapers are competitive with English-language newspapers in readership. The loss of newspaper data is significant in terms of gaining a different subcultural perspective, especially from the regional language newspapers of Manipur. Having discovered the regional seclusion of the issue of the AFSPA and the cultural biases that go with mainstream news coverage of the issue, the exclusion of a specifically Manipuri perspective may limit the applicability of my conclusions.

I would also have liked to explore in greater detail the mechanisms that fasters use to invoke spirituality into their protest (i.e., how they used a spiritual connection to motivate themselves and also to add to the content of their messages). Displacing one's motivation or characterization of the fast from purely pragmatic to cosmic, even fatalistic grounds brings up questions about the appeal of using hunger striking as a method of protest. No matter what one's personal beliefs are, these mechanisms could have given vital insight into the ability and attitude hunger strikers have towards pain and how they are able to justify to themselves the continuation of an excruciating penance.

Future research on related issues could include the discussion of hunger strikes alongside other mechanisms of protest, contrasting the abilities of different approaches to give voice to the oppressed. It could be vital to discern how the more indeterminate duration of hunger striking compares to the more short-lived duration of public suicides, or any other means of attempting to die. While duration is certainly only one component of any form of protest, it would be interesting to judge if the indeterminacy of the length of hunger striking renders it a specific form of advantage, and if so, what that would be.

Following up on the idea of citizen journalism and activism that was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the role and usage of social networking for creating publicity of a hunger strike presents a new challenge for research. Having mentioned how there are biases in press coverage, particularly when it comes to regionalized issues, the efficacy of social media to overcome both biases as well as information blackouts by the State needs further exploration in the specific area of body protest. With the wide availability of image capture and dissemination through personal portable media devices, this citizen-based role would give a greater sense of agency to the very society that a hunger striker may be trying to reform.

While hunger striking presents both promise and limitations for application, it presents a unique means of using emotion in protest and allowing for that emotion to be articulated before the bodily act is over. A final area of further research is the role of emotion in perceiving hunger strikes. Specifically, what frames of reference and interpretation an audience uses when presented with the image of the weakening body of a hunger striker. Whether it is the fear of mortality, or a perceived sense of guilt based

upon the cause of the fast, the ability of a wasting body to bring a society to a new realization is a powerful one and deserves a deeper and better understanding.

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