Constituting Self-Violent Resistance: Materiality, Embodiment, and Speech Acts[1]

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Abstract

Dramatic self-violent acts, such as self-immolations and hunger strikes, often draw attention, but do not interpret or constitute themselves. In this article, theories of embodiment, materiality, and speech acts clarify the constitution of self-violent resistance as a concept for academics and activists. A novel typology is introduced to situate self-imposed suffering among other forms of resistance, such as armed conflict, nonviolent action, and suicide attacks. An original discourse analysis of self-violence across India from 2011-2016 provides empirical examples of the power dynamics involved in constituting self-violent resistance. The analysis reveals how government officials may successfully frame self-violent resistance as personal desperation driven by mental disturbance, and how social movements use the bodies, objects, and physical spaces involved to declare a seemingly personal act as public resistance. This article contributes to the field of resistance studies by moving beyond generalized references to cultural frames in explaining self-violent resistance, clarifying the contested status of self-violence in relation to the usual violence/nonviolence dichotomy, and demonstrating how theories of embodiment and materiality reveal the differing logics behind self-violent, violent, and nonviolent tactics. Exploring what gets counted as self-violent resistance and who becomes authorized to conduct self-violent resistance is important not only as an exercise in concept formation but also for understanding how individual embodied practices become sites of wider struggle.

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In December 2010, a municipal inspector in Tunisia attempted to confiscate the fruit of 26-year-old street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi, and after the vendor resisted, slapped him in the face. Later that day, Bouazizi walked to the municipal building, doused himself with paint thinner, cried out: 'If you do not see me I will burn myself,' and lit himself on fire (Gough, 2013). The self-immolation was video-taped and widely disseminated as part of the Tunisian Revolution and the wider Arab Spring. Five years later in Hyderabad, India, another 26-year-old, Dalit activist and PhD student Rohith Vemula, was expelled from campus for his activism. Under immense social pressure, he went into a friend's dorm room and hung himself with the banner of the student political association to which he belonged (Vishnoi, 2016). His death was used to rally student movements across campuses for Dalit rights and against Hindu nationalism (2016a; Chopra, 2016). In other situations of conflict, activists have starved their bodies in hunger strikes, drowned themselves in dam-caused floodwaters (Lahiri, 2014, p. 69), and mutilated themselves during protests. Leaving a string of material symbols recorded in pictures, videos, and newspaper accounts, these dramatic self-violent acts often drew attention, but did not interpret or constitute themselves as forms of resistance.

Scholars are increasingly researching the impact of suicide protests, hunger strikes, and other forms of self-imposed suffering in conflict (Biggs, 2012, 2013; Lahiri, 2014; Roberts, 2007). However, this research needs a framework to conceptualize self-violent resistance and theorize about its relationship to other forms of resistance. This article provides that framework through a novel typology organized around whether physical harm is applied to the self, others, both, or neither. This article also explores, for both scholars and activists, the contested status of self-violence as resistance. Resistance activists must decide whether to label self-violent acts as appropriate forms of political struggle or to disavow the actions. Government officials, meanwhile, may put forward alternative labels, such as suicide and mental disturbance, to disallow bodies from being claimed as sites of protest (Wilcox, 2015). Ultimately, I argue that the combined lenses of materiality, embodiment, and speech acts helps to disclose the power and practices behind constituting self-violent acts as either resistance or personal desperation.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section outlines the existing literature on self-violence as a form of resistance. The second section presents theoretical concepts of embodiment, materiality, and speech acts. This section introduces a novel typology relating self-violent tactics to other forms of resistance. The third section comprises the empirical core of the article, an original discourse analysis of self-violence across India from the years 2011-2016. In this analysis, I first argue that speech acts related to the history and law of self-violent resistance help constitute the tactic as a meaningful, although contested, practice. I then use the Telangana statehood case to show how self-violent resistance within the context of a wider social movement follows a distinct logic compared to other forms of embodied resistance. Third, I demonstrate how an academic focus on mass movements risks making individual cases of self-violent resistance invisible. Fourth, I explore how government actors exercise power in constituting self-violent resistance as a public health issue rather than a form of protest.

The article makes several contributions to the field of resistance studies. First, the novel typology of resistance tactics provides a way to theorize and generate research questions between types of tactics based on differing logics of embodied violence or non-violence toward the self and the other. Second, the article reveals resistance tactics as contested categories, rather than categories established through the motivation of individual actors. Third, rather than general references to cultural frames, the analysis uses embodiment, materiality, and speech acts to present a nuanced view of why certain actions may gain acceptance as resistance in certain times and places but not others. Overall, the article provides numerous empirical examples of how a less-studied form of resistance may be understood through a threefold analysis of bodies, the material world, and discourse.

Self-Violence as a Resistance Tactic in Academic Literature

Self-violence, ranging from mild-self harm to suicide protest, is often described as a resistance tactic that occupies an unclear space between two more conventionally understood tactics: violence and nonviolence (John, 2015). Although Gene Sharp's catalogue of nonviolent actions

included mild-forms of self-imposed suffering, such as intentional exposure to the elements, and more extreme forms such as fasts-unto-death (Sharp, 1973, pp. 359 - 367), later catalogues of nonviolent action tend to question whether self-violence should be included (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Schock, 2015a, p. 10; Swarthmore, 2017). Research on self-violent resistance tends to compare forms of self-violence that only target the individual with forms that also aim to harm others, such as suicide terrorism (Bargu, 2014; Dabashi, 2012; Lahiri, 2015; Lester, 2014; Roberts, 2007). As Simanti Lahiri argues in one of the few book-length explorations of this topic, 'suicide protest is a form of self-directed violence that intends death, but which is often framed as non-violence' (Lahiri, 2014, p. 7). Elsewhere, Lahiri portrays suicide protest as 'self-abnegating and self-sacrificing,' with violence 'directed only to the self,' while portraying suicide bombers as intentionally aiming to harm others (2015, pp. 269-270). Suicide protest and self-violence as resistance, then, distinguishes itself as violence against the self and not against others.

A problem for scholars, however, has been whether to categorize these embodied actions based on either the political motivations of the actors committing self-harm or on the subsequent deployment of the act by a wider resistance movement. For example, authors have struggled to classify the self-immolation of Bouazizi, who may or may not have had political motivations for his act, yet inspired additional politically-motivated self-immolations and protests (Bargu, 2016; Lahiri, 2014, p. 136). Emphasizing motivations, however, raises questions about what counts as political, and whether suicide attacks or protests are undertaken as rational acts of resistance (Biggs, 2013; Gambetta, 2007; Roberts, 2007), suicidal impulses (Lankford, 2011; Lester, 2014), or coerced actions (Lankford, 2014). Other scholars, taking a critical perspective, argue that classifying and labeling political self-sacrifice based on motivation is the wrong approach (Michelsen, 2015), and that instead the experienced pain and publicly performed suffering asserts the body as a political subject (Bargu, 2014; Cho 2009; Michelsen, 2015; Wilcox, 2015). Adopting this critical stance, I further argue that certain speech acts granting significance to bodily and material configurations makes self-violence comprehensible as resistance, regardless of actor motivation. However, this constitution of self-violence often involves a

struggle between those who wish to declare the act as public resistance and those who wish to label the act as a personal disorder or escape. These distinctions are important for scholars attempting to count acts of self-violent resistance, who must grapple with the causes and consequences of these actions across various contexts.

Not limited to one country or culture, existing research on self-violent tactics has explored cases in places as varied as South Korea (Kim, 2002, 2008), India (Baldissera, 2011; Lahiri, 2014), Tibet (Gouin, 2014; Makley, 2015), Turkey (Bargu, 2014; Sevinç, 2008), Tunisia (Dabashi, 2012; Michelsen, 2015), Northern Ireland (Andriolo, 2006), and the United States (Biggs, 2012). Biggs used international newswires to compile a worldwide political self-immolation dataset, counting 569 individual cases from 1919-2012 (Biggs, 2008, 2012). In India, Lahiri (2014) counts 224 cases of suicide protest between the years 1975-1983, using the Times of India. Each researcher, to count self-violence, adopts different conceptualizations and criteria. Lahiri (2014, p. 6), for example, restricts suicide protest to acts that are intended to result in death, even if major physical harm does not result. By emphasizing the possibility of death, these conceptions of suicide protest are differentiated from related self-violent actions that are below the point of death, such as exposure to the elements or self-mutilation. Despite varying criteria in previous research, the literature is ambiguous on how self-violent tactics, from minor self-harm to suicide, are materially and bodily constituted and contested within specific contexts.

The second criteria self-violent resistance researchers address is the meaning of resistance. Most studies on self-violence and suicide protest come from a social movement perspective, and thus emphasize either a direct (Lahiri, 2014), indirect (Biggs, 2012), or even imagined (Kim, 2008) connection to a wider social movement. One early social-psychological study took a more expansive view of political protest, requiring only that the individual 'made a prior statement to indicate that the suicide was a means of protest' and that the suicide occurred in a public place (Crosby, Rhee, & Holland, 1977). At the most permissive end of the spectrum, Munster (2015) argues that all farmer suicides in India are inherently political protest as their grouping into a government counted statistic makes their suicide visible and potent as a collective

statement. Beyond the usual problems of counting social action, the key question is: do these self-violent acts have a unifying conceptual core that unites them in contrast to other forms of violent or non-violent action? Existing research tends to focus on specific forms of suicide protest, self-immolation, or hunger strikes, without theorizing a wider category of self-violence. What factors – pain, self-annihilation, motivation, publicity, stated goals, lack of mental health issues or personal desperation – matter when conceptualizing and counting self-violence as resistance? Having reviewed questions raised by existing research, in the next section I explore how theories of embodiment, materiality, and speech acts provide the analytical means for researching the constitution and contestation of a resistance tactic.

Constituting Self-Violence: Embodiment, Materiality, Declarative Speech Acts

	Self-Violence	*No Self-Violence*
Other-Violence	Suicide Terrorism Suicide Attacks	Armed Insurgency Assassination Riots
No Other-Violence	Suicide Protest Hunger Strikes Self-Imposed Suffering	Nonviolent Action Civil Resistance (i.e. Public Demonstrations, Economic Boycotts)

Tabel 1: Resistance Tactics Along Dimensions of Violence: Self and other

Before reviewing embodiment, materiality, and speech acts, I introduce a novel 2x2 typology of resistance tactics to orient and place self-violence into the wider catalogue of resistance tactics available. This typology helps overcome the conceptual confusion of attempting to uncomfortably fit self-violent resistance into a dichotomous violence/nonviolence categorization. In the typology (Table 1), the resistance type is categorized by whether a person or group physically harms, or attempts to harm, their own body or the body of another person during the tactic. In this way, suicide protests or hunger strikes are differentiated

from suicide terrorism or suicide attacks. The locus of physical violence centers on only the self in the former and both the self and the other in the latter. Likewise, this typology clarifies the relation of hunger strikes or suicide protest to forms of nonviolent action, where participants may court suffering at the hands of an opponent but refrain from inflicting physical harm on themselves or others.

The way purely self-violent tactics, such as self-immolations or hunger strikes, tend to be discussed in the discourses I analyze later in the article are brought into sharper relief using this typology. The self-violent tactics are often discussed in ways that emphasize the heightening of commitment shown by bodily self-sacrifice, similar to tactics that harm both self and other (i.e. suicide attacks). Unlike the other-directed violence of suicide attacks, however, self-immolations and hunger strikes tend to be framed as virtuous and self-sacrificing, similar to nonviolent tactics that refuse to harm others. Although, unlike nonviolent and other-violent tactics, the self-violent quadrant seems especially liable to counter-portrayals of being driven not by strategic motives but by suicidal impulses and personal desperation.

Any ideal-typical table necessarily distorts social life by focusing attention on certain characteristics and away from others. However, by directing attention to the embodied nature of all resistance tactics, researchers may ask productive questions, such as: What differing causal logics, based on embodiment, are thought to underpin different tactics? Do tactics within the same quadrant possess unifying features? What unique questions could be generated with either horizontal or vertical comparisons? How does the embodied nature of the tactic present limits or opportunities for resisters? How might resistance that harms the self but not others fit into common trajectories of a conflict?

All resistance involves embodiment, and presumably a tactic that attempts to occupy public space by the mass gathering of bodies operates by different strategic logics than tactics that attempt to annihilate bodies of enemies or tactics that destroy bodies marked as civilians. Focusing on material, embodied violence orients conflict researchers to a common-sense distinction, while avoiding simplistic violent/nonviolent dichotomies. In constituting a resistance tactic as either violent, nonviolent, or self-violent the body itself provides a useful marker.

Embodiment

Having introduced the embodied resistance typology, I now outline the threefold theoretical tools of embodiment, materiality, and speech acts which will be used to analyze the constitution of self-violent resistance. First, the so-called "corporeal turn" in resistance studies, or emphasis on the body and the affect or emotions of the body, is a useful entry-point for understanding the constitution of self-violence as a political tactic (Mutlu, 2013a). This approach 'provides an understanding of the body as both the subject and object of discourses, practices, and policies of (in)security,' and attempts to generate 'insights into understanding the political agency of the body' (Mutlu, 2013a, p. 146). This shift in focus has generated insights into the neglected role of the body itself in understanding war (Auchter, 2016; Cornish & Saunders, 2014) and the consequences of bodily pain on debates of torture in wartime (Scarry, 1985). In highlighting self-violent tactics such as hunger strikes or self-immolation, authors repeatedly emphasize pain, spectacle, and agency (Cho, 2009; Makley, 2015). Writing about Guantanamo prisoners, Wilcox argues that 'the hunger strikers are living their pain agentically, in a way that they are not victimized by, and that, crucially, requires a material body that not only can experience pain, but also can weaken and die' (2015, pp. 67-68). For Wilcox and others, the act of the hunger strike is interpreted as 'seeking recognition as a political subject' (Wilcox, 2015, p. 67) or as 'an "act of speech" in which the suffering body communicates the injustice experienced by a community to a larger audience' (Fierke, 2013, p. 37).

In hunger strikes and self-immolations, 'the sacrifice of the material body is an act that communicates but without words' (Fierke, 2013, p. 37), and generates thoughts and emotions for diverse audiences (Fierke, 2013; Lahiri, 2015). Self-violent acts often generate strong emotional responses and most authors emphasize the performative aspect or spectacle of self-violence (Gough, 2013; Lim, 2013; Makley, 2015). However, in my analysis of Indian cases, self-violence generated variation in the types of emotional responses and in the meanings attached to the acts. At a fundamental level, self-violent resistance should be understood as an embodied form of protest that requires the body to experience and perform some form of attempted or actual self-imposed harm. The

meaningfulness of self-violence as a resistance tactic, though, depends on speech acts setting the authorizations and intelligibility of these embodied acts.

Materiality

Less commonly discussed in the context of self-violent tactics, the "material turn" in studies of violence and nonviolence provides a useful lens for understanding the constitution of self-violence as resistance. The material turn admits that 'objects have a social life that expands beyond their material existence,' and that material objects are 'central to our identities; we practice and perform our identities through objects' (Mutlu, 2013b, p. 173). In reference to security and the body, Wilcox explores how the materiality of airport security, such as body scanners, are used to categorize bodies as safe or un-safe as part of state building (2015, pp. 115 - 124). In terms of civil resistance strategies, Butler notes how the gathering of specific bodies, especially in occupations of public spaces, interacts with the materiality of those spaces (Butler, 2015, p. 10). Other civil resistance scholars emphasize the deployment and contestation of symbolically important cultural items, resistance colors or flags, and occupation of meaningful physical spaces in the framing of nonviolent resistance movements (Schock, 2015a, 2015b; Sharp & Paulson, 2005).

Combining embodiment and materiality, some authors point to notions of entanglement (Hodder, 2012), assemblages (Bennett, 2010; Voelkner, 2012), or bundles (López, 2015) comprising bodies and objects. Lopez argues that 'protests could be considered bundles where the relationship between the individual bodies, objects, and public places is fundamental in constituting and re-constituting identities and the ways they are perceived' (2015, p. 178). The form of self-violent protest, refusing to enact harm on other bodies but inflicting harm on itself, relies upon an assemblage or bundle of material objects and bodies for making the act understood as public protest and not privately performed self-harm. Again, however, these material interactions with embodied resisters are given meaning, even if often contested meaning, through speech acts authorizing only certain acts as self-violent resistance.

Speech Acts

When the intertwined embodied and material actions of self-immolations, hunger strikes, or self-harm occur within a conflict, subsequent reporting and discourse may constitute these acts as self-violent resistance tactics, regardless of individual motivation or strategic intent. The self-violent actions are not performed separately from a discursive framework, but as Butler argues 'embodied actions of various kinds signify in ways that are, strictly speaking, neither discursive nor prediscursive,' but there exists a 'chiasmic relation between forms of linguistic performativity and forms of bodily performativity' (2015, pp. 8 - 9). To understand the role of discourse in constituting and contesting self-violent resistance, I borrow the concepts of declarative speech acts, standing declarations, and status functions from philosopher John Searle (2010). Declarative speech acts operate by 'declaring that a state of affairs exists and thus bringing that state of affairs into existence,' in other words by constituting reality (p. 12). Standing declarations follow a logical form that 'X counts as Y in certain conditions' and relies upon collective recognition (p. 96). Moreover, status functions exist when people collectively recognize that people or objects may perform certain functions under specific conditions.

In terms of self-violent resistance, status function declarations create the tactic through the form of collective recognition (or not) of certain subjects to use their bodies in self-violently political ways (or not) under certain conditions. In other words, certain bodily performances of self-harm are counted, or given social reality, as political acts of resistance and other bodily performances are labeled non-political, or at least not a form of self-violent resistance. Unlike usual appeals to "cultural frames," these declarations are often contested within the same cultural contexts for similar types of cases. Focusing on the logical forms of speech acts guides the discourse analysis to focus not only on what "counts" as self-violent resistance, but also the material and embodied elements (such as physical harm, specific targeted buildings, or cultural objects) that are repeatedly invoked as meaningful markers in specific contexts. The logical form of status functions also clarifies the process of how certain bodies become authorized or not to commit resistance. The use of speech acts thus allows for a more precise tracing of constituting self-violence as either public resistance or private mental health suffering, compared

to the more general concept of cultural frames often invoked in the self-violence literature.[2]

Just as Wilcox argued that state regulation and forced feeding of hunger strikers constituted categories of bodies to be managed (Wilcox, 2015, p. 52), so the competing declarations of either self-violent resistance or private mental health suffering are assertions of power. Searle argues that the purpose of standing declarations and status functions is 'not to invest objects or people with some special status valuable in itself, but to create and regulate power relationships between people' (Searle, 2010, p. 106). Whether self-violent actions, such as those taken by Bouazizi in Tunisia or Rohith Vemula in India, are made sensible and granted collective recognition as resistance reveals the power dynamics behind counting, analyzing, and strategizing about resistance. As has been widely acknowledged, not all conflict tactics resonate in every setting (Gould & Moe, 2012), and 'tastes in tactics' vary (Jasper, 1997). Rather than tracing self-violent resistance to essentialized understandings of religion or culture (Gouin, 2014; King, 2000), the next section presents illustrations from across India in how self-violent resistance was constituted and contested through embodiment, materiality, and speech acts.

Empirical Analysis

Method and Overview

The empirical section of the paper demonstrates the value of a threefold analysis using embodiment, materiality, and speech acts and provides illustrations of the power dynamics involved in constituting acts as self-violent resistance. For the analysis, India was chosen because it has several of the largest and best-documented cases of self-violent resistance, including several conflicts with at least one-hundred political self-immolations (Biggs, 2012, 2013; Lahiri, 2014). For generating the discourse corpus, a search was conducted through LexisNexis using a

[2] Ultimately, what counts as self-violent resistance, and how the resistance is understood, varies across country and cultural contexts (Coburn, 2018). However, for feasibility, this article focuses on the process of contestation and constitution within one country.

string of keywords (India AND "self-immolation" OR "suicide protest" OR "fast-unto-death" OR "hunger strike") and restricted to 2011–2016 for feasibility of coding. This resulted in more than 3,280 news articles or editorials from mostly national and regional English-language newspapers across India. Articles on Tibetan cases not occurring within India were discarded. More than 600 individual events were recorded into an Excel spreadsheet based on the following criteria: plausibility of protesting the government (shown through target locations, previous connection to a resistance movement, or other demonstrated political demand), and threatened, attempted, or completed self-harm. Each event came from at least one reputable source, with well-known cases generating multiple articles over time. Basic information was recorded into Excel, such as event location, numbers of actors, level of harm, conflict demand, and movement connections.

For these events, and other examples of self-violence appearing in the sources but without a clear protest element, an analysis was conducted noting: who was involved; the reported material elements, bodily details, and speech acts by participants, onlookers, authorities, and other actors; and follow-up contentions among police, authorities, political parties, social groups, and family members. NVivo was used for categorization and searches among these different elements, and to group articles on specific cases. Relying on English language reporting shaped the structure of the analysis; however, included extensively among the sources were two of the top 20 most-read newspapers in India (The Times of India and Hindustan Times). For a visual element, the analysis also included dozens of videos of self-immolations or other self-harm protests in India from this time-period that were posted on Twitter, Facebook, or India-based news sites. The Rohith Vemula case, in addition to news articles, included several hundred Twitter posts referencing his name that were downloaded using Ncapture. The following key findings emerged from the analysis: standing declarations made a wide-range of embodied and material actions intelligible as self-violent resistance; resistance movements deployed distinct logics of self-violent resistance as a tactic distinct from other forms of violent or nonviolent action; embodiment and materiality constituted self-violence as an individual resistance tactic apart from social movement connections; and governments exercised

power in constituting self-violence as personal mental disturbance rather than resistance. I discuss each finding in the following four sections.

History and Law in Constituting Self-Violent Resistance

First, self-violence is constituted and enabled as resistance in India through historical and legal standing declaration speech acts. These declarations include: 1) a political history of lauded, and sometimes compensated, martyrs who wrote their resistance onto their bodies through fire, starvation, or other self-inflicted harm; and 2) a legal code that made the incitement or abetment of suicide, often with political connotations, a crime. However, these standing declarations are not unproblematic and significant variation and contestation occurs over where and under what circumstances certain embodied actors are granted status as resistors and political subjects and others are denied that status and labeled objects of medical concern.

History

Lahiri traced suicide protest in India to early cases such as Gandhi's political 'fast-unto-death' undertaken to 'sting the Hindu conscious' into action against caste discrimination (2014, p. 30). Lahiri argued that 'a complex dance of cultural practice, personality, political innovation and critical political junctures helped establish fasting to the death and self-immolation as acceptable forms of political expression in India' (p. 20). Despite this history, the constitution of self-violent resistance, from extremes of suicide protest to self-harm short of death, remains contested and problematic.

Besides recognition of Gandhi's fast-unto-death, other existing declarative speech acts constitute self-violence as resistance. One repeated story regards Potti Sriramulu, who died in 1952 after fasting for almost a month. His fast-unto-death was for the creation of Andhra Pradesh, a goal that was achieved after significant riots and protests following his death. During this time-period, fasts were being conducted so often, without resulting in death or serious self-harm, that many government officials thought that not responding was the best political choice. Prime

Minister Nehru wrote the Chief Minister of Madras that he was unmoved by the fast and that he did 'not want to be driven to any reactions' (Lahiri, 2014, p. 51). As Sriramulu's body visibly weakened, though, parliament debated his cause and with his death three days of violent riots occurred (Lahiri, 2014). Even as the government explicitly ignored this embodied protest, a weakening body self-deprived of food in the public sphere, their treatment of the fast as a political tactic was clear. Although the fast was being used so often that the government did not consider it to be a 'serious political tactic' (Lahiri, 2014, p. 50), the government still recognized the act as a form of political resistance.

This history was repeatedly invoked during the time-period analyzed for this article. For example, leaders for a separate Telangana state connected their struggle conducted through self-immolation to his original self-violent resistance (Muthukrishnan, 2014; 2013a). Also, social activists compared current self-violent hunger strikers like Irom Sharmila or Anna Hazare to Sriramulu (Desai, 2011; 2011a), and remembrances to his sacrifice were frequently celebrated (2013b). Government officials and activists in the past and present constitute self-violent resistance by representing it as existing through these various declarative speech acts of reference and remembrance. The fasts - performed publicly on a material body that could be measured through weight fluctuations, visually represented through media as suffering from self-imposed harm in the public sphere, and finally leaving a dead body to be mourned - asserted a political stance and a body as a political subject. While a standing declaration acknowledging as resistance these specific assemblages of materiality (publicly visible spaces), embodiment (a visible body undergoing change and evident suffering), and supportive speech acts by resistance movements, many other hunger strikes of shorter duration failed to mark a clear enough suffering or change on the body and went unrecognized as resistance. The same can be said for the large numbers of threatened public self-immolations where petrol was poured, but police intervened before a match could be lit and significant bodily harm done. A status function analysis asks: who is authorized to commit a recognized act? These lauded historical and contemporary cases provide a blueprint for self-violent resistance but also circumscribes the material elements, such as visible harm on the body, that make the acts recognizable as resistance.

Moreover, forcing these fasts-unto-death into a violent or nonviolent binary label would strip the acts of the specific causal ideas about strategic effectiveness connected to a tactic that publicly imposes materially visible harm on one's own body while pointedly not imposing materially visible harm on other bodies. References in subsequent reporting indicate causal ideas attributed to the act such as evoking sympathy and showing extreme commitment in ways that mimic both nonviolent and violent logics respectively. Yet as the violent riots following Sriramulu's death demonstrate, a self-violent tactic does not necessarily guarantee that subsequent resisters will use the act to spur resistance on a nonviolent trajectory.

Law

Besides a history of lauded activists, another standing declaration constituting self-violent resistance was the recently repealed law criminalizing suicide. While proponents advocated for repealing the law because it generated stigma against those attempting suicide, some opponents argued that decriminalization would take away police tools used against self-violent resistance. A 2014 article on the repeal debate reported: 'Failed suicide bombers, cyanide-popping terrorists and intransigent agitators - these were some of the issues raised by at least five states that opposed the Centre's proposal to decriminalize attempt to commit suicide' (Jain, 2014). While encompassing both self and other-focused forms of self-violence, these comments demonstrate the power of the law in constituting a category of self-violent resistance. Other states with a history of self-violent resistance, such as Madhya Pradesh and Sikkim, argued that decriminalization would prevent police from 'dealing with persons who resort to fast unto death or self-immolation to press the government or authorities to accept their unreasonable or illegitimate demands' (Jain, 2014).

The debate also highlights the contestation over speech act declarations constituting two separate status recognitions for bodies undergoing self-imposed suffering: one as medical objects to be managed and decriminalized, and the other as politically resisting subjects to be prosecuted. The state of Bihar, for example, wanted separate legal codes, one for 'persons driven to suicide due to medical illnesses,' and the

other for suicide bombers who failed to die in their attempted attacks (Jain, 2014). The government commission urging repeal, noting the contestation over labeling motivations, argued that suicidal acts 'may be described differently in different circumstances and at different times in the same community,' and that 'no deterrence is going to hold back those who want to die for a social or political cause or to leave the world either because of the loss of interest in life or for self-deliverance' (2008a). Opponents also argued that, if repealed, individuals could not be charged under the law and then force-fed, as activist Irom Sharmila was while kept alive by the government during her 14 year fast (Jain, 2014; Mathur, 2012). Concerning hunger striking prisoners, Wilcox argues: 'force-feeding makes the prisoners into objects of medical knowledge, a prerequisite for making them into objects that can be managed as dependents of the sovereign state' (2015, p. 71). Government actors declare starving bodies, such as Sharmila's, to be objects available for forced feeding and management through the suicide law; not because the protesting actors are unable to manage their own bodies, but because their public self-imposed suffering and the possibility of death poses a threat to established order. This acknowledgement, of using the law to materially manage activist bodies, contributes to the contestation of self-violence as resistance.

In addition, the law serves as a standing declaration constituting self-violent resistance through an abetment statute. This statute allows police to arrest those who aided or abetted the suicide. Individuals have used this to name a political opponent who drove them to self-immolation or suicide, thus provoking police investigations and prosecutions. For example, in 2014, Pinky, a college student in New Delhi, was with fellow students nonviolently protesting college management for poor grades by blocking traffic and holding a sit-in at the main college gate. During the protest Pinky poured petrol on herself and lit herself on fire. Based on a subsequent recorded statement, police began an investigation of college teaching staff for abetment of suicide, a move encouraged by various political figures within the state (2014a; 2014b). In multiple other cases, suicide notes were left indicating the conflict opponent who was to blame and the conflict grievance. This abetment law not only provides a strategy for those employing self-violent resistance, but also adds to a standing

declaration constituting embodied self-harm as resistance. As theoretical notions of assemblage and entanglement reveal, what matters in this legal constitution of resistance is not individual actor motivation, but an investigatable trail of material objects, such as suicide notes and recorded statements, public physical locations, gathered protesting bodies, and visible evidence of bodily harm.

The strategy of prosecuting the conflict targets of suicide resistance, however, is contested by forces within the state, including the judiciary. In a controversial case, five Nepali family members living in Gujarat, who were about to be evicted, set themselves on fire in front of the civic body office. By subjecting their bodies to fire outside of a governmental office, instead of privately in their homes, the family members brought their form of protest to a recognizably public sphere. Subsequently, the landlords were arrested and charged with abetment of suicide. A judge ultimately ruled in favor of the landlords, arguing that the government had a responsibility to discourage and prevent suicides (2015a). This counter-declaration, with the status function of rights and obligations under the law, attempts to establish the suicides not as protest to be acknowledged, but as a health crisis to be managed.

Taking the government declaration at face-value, however, would mislead resistance scholars, who could instead emphasize how bodies on fire in front of a public building served as embodied and material assemblages pointing to resistance. These and similar cases, reported with a clear script of accusation, suicide attempt, and attempted prosecution (or at least investigation), establishes the assemblage of elements in these cases. Embodied acts of self-harm are performed in front of material structures representing public authority as a resistance tactic to force legal action against conflict targets. As discussed throughout this section, the legal and historical standing declarations, combined with a productive discourse highlighting repeated embodied and material elements, establishes constitutive rules for a category of action that might be meaningfully labeled as self-violent resistance.

Telangana: Self-Violence as Martyrdom

Having examined the constitution of self-violent resistance through history and law, I now use the Telangana statehood movement to

illustrate two main points: 1) that social movements are a powerful force for constituting self-violence as resistance, even as they establish status functions limiting who can claim authority to commit the acts; and 2) that self-violent resistance follows a distinct logic compared to other forms of embodied resistance tactics. Extensive use of suicide protest as a collective resistance tactic has occurred in the movement for Telangana statehood, with an estimated 800 – 1,000 suicides committed for the Telangana cause (Muppidi, 2015). Telangana and Andhra Pradesh were organized along linguistic lines as one merged state in 1956 after the previously mentioned fast-unto-death of Potti Sriramulu. Soon after the re-organization, activists in Telangana began agitating for a separate state based on a perceived dominance of Andhra interests in the merged state (Janardhan & Raghavendra, 2013). Suicide protests supporting Telangana statehood began to increase in 2010, with student leaders and youth leading the adoption of the tactic (2011b). A leader of the Telangana movement, Deputy Chief Minister Narasimha, noted: 'So many youths have sacrificed their lives for Telangana. There were hundreds of self-immolations for this cause…and it was perhaps unique in the world' (2013c). The following examples demonstrate how leaders such as Narasimha declared these suicides as self-violent resistance tactics in the context of a broader nonviolent struggle, demonstrating the distinct causal logic of effectiveness attributed to self-violence.

The reported suicides for Telangana followed a common threefold pattern of embodiment, materiality, and speech acts. In one example a nineteen-year-old engineering student wrote pro-Telangana slogans on the wall of his college and then lit himself on fire, dying in the process (2013d). Another example comes from a 2012 article: 'Bhojya Naik, a 21-year-old MBA student, self-immolated reportedly shouting "Jai Telangana" slogans in front of the Kakatiya University Arts College here. Shocked students and passers-by tried in vain to douse the flames, hours later, he succumbed to his burns' (2012a). Just as Lopez remarked on bundles of bodies, objects, and public places constituting protests, the repeated physicality of shouted or written slogan, public location, and bodies in flames repeats throughout the Telangana self-immolation accounts. The slogans give clarity to these as political acts of embodied resistance and the self-inflicted pain upon individual bodies is evident in

the shocked responses of witnesses, even though the intensity of pain is de-emphasized in the written accounts.

Beyond individuals asserting their political subjectivity through self-inflicted suffering, the actions of supportive leaders served to affirm these specific bodies as authorized to self-immolate for the cause. After Naik's death, leaders of various pro-Telangana political parties came to the area: 'They declared him a martyr and took out a grand funeral procession' (2012a). Leaders of the main political movement for statehood, Telangana Rashtra Samiti, made suicide martyrdom a central part of their rhetorical appeals. Before statehood was granted, leaders of the party promised financial compensation to family members of officially tallied martyrs. The chairman of the Telangana Legislative Council declared after taking office that 2,000 martyrs had given their lives for the cause. This number was then revised lower to 900 martyrs, and finally only 459 families were given financial compensation in 2014 (2012a; Redi, 2014). The list served as a status function authorizing only certain actors to be officially recognized, and compensated, for constituted acts of self-violent martyrdom. This powerful official declaration, with the weight of a status function creating obligations, caused controversy by omitting names that some felt were clear political suicides, such as well-documented cases of students who self-immolated in public and left suicide notes in support of Telangana, and including names that were questionable as political suicides (2012a). As previously mentioned, inquiring into the use of speech acts reveals not just the social classification and categorization of resistance tactics, but also the power dynamics claimed by social movements and governments in successfully naming and authorizing some resistance acts but not others. If standing declarations follow the form of x counts as y in certain conditions, then in these cases leaders were able to successfully count thousands of self-violent martyrdoms when it bolstered their resistance claims and exercised power to reduce that number once they committed themselves to a status function obligation of bestowing financial compensation to self-violent resisters' families.

If scholars focused only on the discursive element, however, and ignored a material and embodied analysis of the Telangana conflict, what would be lost? Focusing solely on subsequent representation of the acts

misses the need for actual physical harm to be self-inflicted on material bodies. While all resistance tactics involve elements of materiality and embodiment, the focus shifts here to material bodies in the public sphere openly suffering self-imposed harm. Thinking about the typology introduced in Table 1, resistance may be aimed at the physical destruction of other bodies or mass destruction of physical locations (as in other-harm focused armed conflict), or resistance that pointedly refrains from both self-harm and other-harm (nonviolent action). These embodied forms of violence and nonviolence likely operate from different causal logics compared to self-violent resistance. In Telangana, movement leaders in a resistance struggle that explicitly maintained nonviolent discipline for over a decade of struggle, nevertheless consistently highlighted - through recorded videos, remembrances, memorials, and statements - the widespread material harm done to self-immolated bodies. As one pro-Telangana leader appealed to the central government: 'How many youths have to die? In the last two days, as many youths ended their lives and how many more deaths does the Congress want to see? (2011c).

Movement leaders' public statements positioned the self-directed bodily destruction as a signifier of commitment, the willingness to not harm other bodies a signifier of purity, and the self-harmed as innocent. The self-violence was often used by leaders as a motivator to call for more intensive nonviolent actions, such as bandhs (general strikes) and mass demonstrations. The rhetoric and practices encouraging these sacrifices became so intense that leaders eventually disavowed the actions. A student leader, referencing two well-known cases, declared: 'Remembering self-immolation from Srikanthachari to the recent Bhojya Naik, we shall vow not to give up our lives. I would erase the quote "Do or Die" from my mind. All I know is "Do But Don't Die"' (2012b). This admission of strategic planning demonstrates the tension between the strategic logics of a resistance tactic requiring bodily self-sacrifice to demonstrate commitment (similar to suicide bombings) versus resistance tactics that maintain nonviolence against self and other.

As scholar and Telangana activist Himadeep Muppidi admits, 'bodies entangled in ropes, scorched by fire and corroded by pesticide constitute a poignant and mournful opening' into discussion of the

Telangana cause (2015, p. 9). She admits to ambivalence about deploying these suicides as constituted political tactics, however, noting:

> are deaths – killings, suicides, the violent destruction of bodies – the only compelling tune of global politics? Are we too well trained into reading the trans local significance of an issue only as an elementary function of the corpses that it stacks up or the pain it produces? (2015, p. 9).

For both scholars and activists, there is a risk that constituting suicide and self-harm as a strategic political tactic elevates bodily destruction to a desired status in resistance. However, to frame suicide protestors solely as mentally unstable victims, as objects acted upon by movement leaders' extreme rhetoric, would be to deny political agency to these resisting bodies. Politicians opposed to the Telangana cause promoted this victim framing for their own political purposes of dismissing these bodies as resisting subjects. Scholars and activists are confronted with how the constitution of an act of self-harm may perpetuate the suffering of those seeking empowerment, and yet to disown the act as a constituted form of resistance would be to deny agency and the right to embodied action to those committed to a cause. Gaining control over the constitution and declarative labelling of these acts is ultimately a form of exercised power.

Self-Violent Resistance for Individual Redress

The emphasis by academics on cases of self-violent resistance in the context of wider social movements, such as Telangana, obscures an equally prominent set of cases across India of personal self-violent resistance to structural injustice. Just as in the social movement cases, these self-violent acts for individual redress are given shape and made meaningful through a threefold lens of embodiment, materiality, and speech acts. Past research on self-violent resistance, coming from a social movement tradition, focuses almost exclusively on counting individual acts connected to wider social movements. Biggs, in one accounting of suicide protests, explicitly rejects those committed for 'personal or familial grievances' (Biggs, 2012a, p. 1). However, in analyzing potential cases across India, I found that individual acts of self-violence with plausible personal protest motives were frequent, including at least 70 completed or attempted

self-immolations. Many cases involved accusations of police or judicial inaction over sexual assault, unfair labor conditions, or landlord abuses. In one case a 17-year-old girl from a village in Punjab was hospitalized after a self-immolation attempt. While in the hospital she recorded a video accusing several local boys of harassment and sexual abuse that had not been addressed by the authorities. After making the video she died of her injuries and the police arrested the accused perpetrators (2015b). As noted in the theory section on entanglement, assemblages, or bundles, an act becomes meaningful as protest under specific configurations of individual bodies, objects, and public places. In the cases of individual redress, a discourse of self-violence as resistance, celebrated in history and established by the law against suicide, makes these embodied actions meaningful as resistance.

A few examples from the cases analyzed represent these patterns clearly. In a 2014 case, a low-income contractor lit himself on fire in front of the head government engineering office to protest an alleged bribe demand and the subsequent failure of the police to investigate the case (Bhatia, 2015). In another case a 55-year-old ex-serviceman harassed by loan sharks, self-immolated outside of a local government office to protest police inaction after a local politician demolished his house (Dominique, 2014). In 2012, a 38-year-old railway employee poured petrol on herself and lit herself on fire in front of a railway manager's office. She was reportedly protesting a lack of action after filing a complaint against co-workers for attempting to rape her (2012c). In a 2014 case, four sisters between the ages of 23 and 37 doused themselves in kerosene in front of a district collectorate office and reportedly attempted to self-immolate before police intervened. The sisters then delivered a petition alleging that villagers tried to force them into prostitution, and when they refused, socially ostracized them and denied them access to the local water tap. After the attempted self-immolation, a local officer agreed to investigate their case (Sivarajah, 2014).

Each reported instance reveals similar assemblages of embodiment, materiality, and speech acts. Bodies were either set on fire or doused in kerosene with a threat of bodily destruction by fire portrayed. Written petitions or spoken declarations attested to a grievance. Physical public structures, especially government buildings related to the grievance, and

the material remnants of a suicide attempt, such as matches and petrol, were noted. While the written reports offer a mostly sanitized and pain-free account, the television reports and videos spread by social media document the intense suffering and audible pain experienced during these public acts. The reporting often took for granted that individuals acted out of legitimate grievance and in many cases the resistance was reported as successful, with authorities opening investigations or prosecutions against conflict targets mentioned by the self-violent resisters.

Academics and activists may be wary of constituting individual self-violence as resistance because of the difficulty in establishing motivation outside of a social movement context. Instead, they may constitute these acts as suicides of desperation. However, by committing these acts in public in front of grievance-related buildings, individuals add to the sense that these are publicly, rather than privately, enacted suicides. One may interpret individuals as either affected by the physical government structures representing the impediment of a quest for justice, or the physical structures as sites chosen by individuals demonstrating their pain bodily and agentically. Whether viewing the building as an actant influencing the individual to commit self-violence or interpreting the building as a specifically chosen target, the public physical space provides researchers a scheme for recognizing these cases as self-violent resistance against shared grievances.[3] Publicly enacted suffering at government buildings in front of an audience of fellow citizens and government representatives is a jarring sight that, regardless of individual motivation, serves to resist perceived injustice and prod follow-up action.

One scholar of the Occupy Movement, using a materiality lens, argues that 'when objects and architectures are repeatedly encountered at sites of struggle, they become stickier and stickier – laden with meaning and potent with feelings' (Feigenbaum, 2014, p. 17). In the discourse I analyzed, bodies in self-inflicted pain outside of government buildings had clearly come to constitute a recognized form of meaningful resistance. These individual bodies undergoing self-violence raise the question of

[3] The term actant, from Latour (2007), means "a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things" (Bennett, 2010, p. viii).

what should count as resistance? Resistance scholars attuned only to tactics of large-scale social mobilizations are likely to miss the perhaps more common everyday forms of self-violent resistance to social problems (such as rape, police unresponsiveness, or judicial inefficiency). In some cases, fellow citizens did take up the cause of individuals to publicly assemble against a declared wider injustice, but in many other cases the public reporting of these events ended, with no clear picture of the wider set of power-relationships necessary to understand the constitution of these acts. For researchers of self-violent action, paying attention to the assemblage of bodies and objects repeated through the individual stories makes visible a neglected form of political resistance.

Contesting Constitution of Self-Violent Resistance

Having analyzed the constitution of self-violent resistance for social movement and individual cases through historical and legal discourse emphasizing embodiment and materiality, I turn now to the exercise of power in contesting that constitution. In this section I use the case of Rohith Vemula to illustrate how government actors exercise power in constituting self-violent resistance as a public health issue, and how embodied and material factors could be used by resistance movements to instead promote self-violence as resistance. In comparison to the well-known Bouazizi Tunisian case and the Telangana cases, the suicide of Vemula in India was deeply contested as an act of self-violent resistance.

Vemula, an activist and PhD student, belonged to a Dalit political association, Ambedkar Students Association. In 2015, the head of a competing nationalist student union accused Vemula and four other students of assault, and a regional nationalist politician wrote a letter to the university requesting punishment. Vemula and the other students were expelled from their dorm and had their tuition assistance revoked. After several days of sleep-out protests on campus, Vemula went inside a friend's room and hanged himself with an Ambedkar Student Association banner. Friends eventually found him; they took no pictures but did copy the suicide note he left (2016a; Chopra, 2016). In his suicide note, Vemula reportedly did not blame anyone for his suicide but highlighted the injustices of Indian social identity structures (Dev, 2016). In comparison to Bouazizi's suicide, which was recorded in public with the

dramatic visual of a person on fire, Vemula's suicide was conducted in a private physical location and was typical in India during an epidemic of student suicides (Chua, 2014; 2016b). After Vemula's death, cartoon images were distributed showing a likeness of his body hanging from the distinctive t-shaped logo of Hyderabad University, but none of the images became iconic in the same way as in Bouazizi's case.

While resisters were able to portray Bouazizi as an apolitical street vendor fed up with government repression, Vemula was unambiguously political. Even in his suicide he chose to hang himself with the banner of the political student group to which he belonged. Outrage over Vemula's suicide was channeled through regional Dalit political groups. This political agitation began on nearby campuses among Dalit student groups (2016a; 2016c). Protests invoking Vemula's name included hunger strikes (2016e), attacks on the houses of campus Hindu-nationalist administrators (2016f), and student strikes from classes (Chopra & Janyala, 2016). These self-violent, non-violent, and occasionally violent protests temporarily shut down some campuses, drew widespread backlash from Hindu nationalist groups, and faced state repression (2016g). Unlike the Telangana cases, however, the subsequent mobilizations were portrayed as a benefit to a mistreated individual rather than as inspired by a heroic martyr. In other words, Vemula was portrayed as an object of victimization, rather than lauded as a subject who martyred himself for a cause.

Although the details in Rohith's case were well known, the symbolic representations never cohered around a single discursive category, such as martyr. Protesters began referring to him as Ekalavya, the student in the ancient Indian epic of the Mahabharata who cuts off his thumb as payment to his teacher when demanded. One widely shared cartoon, for example, was titled 'Caste in Education', and on the left side showed someone cutting off their finger with a bloody knife under the word Mahabharata. On the right side was written the year 2016 with a noose and a suicide note in the frame. Here, a traditional story of victimization in education was re-deployed for modern day relevance.

However, this material creation did not solidify Vemula's status as a self-violent resister. Instead, in media commentary his death was portrayed as a misfortune, a great tragedy, and a personal suicide. One supporter

said: 'Rohith's tragedy should have stirred our collective conscience, including that of our government. Unfortunately, we have a heartless government that refuses to listen to the cries of despair coming from the marginalised sections of our society' (2016h). Most forcefully Vemula was labeled as a victim murdered, through negligence, by the nationalist government. This last declaration of murder especially takes advantage of the previously mentioned law that allowed for government officials to be charged with aiding and abetting suicide (2016i). For example, those advocating for Dalit rights demanded criminal prosecutions against the head of Hyderabad University and several national leaders (2016c). Charges were eventually filed against several high-level government officials in connection with Vemula's suicide, even though they were not directly implicated in any way (2016i).

The government also exercised power by framing his suicide in non-political terms. For example, the government released a new rule for centrally funded universities 'to run a mandatory orientation program to sensitize all "academic administrators about understanding and handling problems faced by socially, educationally and economically disadvantaged students"' (2016j). The nationalist government actively countered the protests related to Vemula's death, perhaps fearful of a repeat of the suicide protests on campuses during the early 1990's and more recently in Telangana. The prime minister publicly expressed sadness over Vemula's death (2016k), while also chastising what he termed as anti-nationalist sentiment on campuses (Kaushal, 2016). Another Hindu-nationalist politician, opposed to the Dalit politics of Vemula, argued in the media that Vemula was not a hero because he did not fight but committed suicide (2016l). In general, the government treated the suicide as reflecting maladjustment among Dalit students. The government response was to promote life skills training for Dalit students and sensitivity training, rather than addressing Vemula's deeper political concerns (Chopra, 2016; Nagarajan, 2016). Ultimately, neither sympathetic social movement actors or government opponents accepted a declaration of Vemula's suicide as self-violent resistance.

An analysis focused on materiality and embodiment points in competing directions compared to previous cases examined. The assemblage of bodily suffering and death, coupled with objects such as

the political banner and suicide note, helps those declaring the case as self-violent resistance. The private physical location works in the opposite direction, helping those declaring the act a medical tragedy or symptom of neglect. An object analysis of the subsequent representations of Vemula's suicide demonstrates the importance of this material in constituting self-violence as either a resistance tactic or a personal tragedy. While the Telangana suicides were successfully portrayed as martyrdom committed by political subjects, both opponents and supporters collectively assented to labeling Vemula's suicide as a tragedy befalling a victim. As Searle argues, the purpose of creating social facts is power 'but the whole apparatus – creation, maintenance, and resulting power – works only because of collective acceptance or recognition' (2010, p. 103). In this case, in a country with a history of self-violent resistance accepted as a social fact, collective recognition of this fact as applied to Vemula was denied by both government officials and movement activists.

Labeling an embodied act as self-violent resistance is not done simply as an academic exercise of categorization. As previously mentioned, Wilcox argued that the U.S. government asserted power in declaring hunger strikers to be medical bodies to be materially managed, instead of self-violent resisters demanding bodily autonomy. Similarly, the Indian government declared Vemula as a body that was driven to suicide by a lack of coping skills, and not a body with the agency to impose self-suffering for a political cause. In other words, his body was declared to be a defective body, acting out of material dysfunction rather than intentionality. In the language of status function declarations, his body was not "authorized" to act in a politically self-sacrificing manner, and the language of prevention was deployed to show how health policies could have stopped his act. As previously argued, basing a concept of self-violent resistance on the motivations of individual actors leads to mixed or unclear results. The assemblage of material factors implicated in his death could be interpreted as pointing towards different categorizations: the private room pointing towards a personal suicide and the political association banner used to hang himself pointing towards political resistance. His suicide note, while explicitly not blaming anyone, contained unambiguously political protest themes. The subsequent contestation over what to label his act, either medical suicide or suicide

protest, reveals the strategic issues at stake for resistance movements.

Conclusion

After reviewing hundreds of potential cases of self-violent protest throughout India, clear patterns emerged. These patterns benefit from applying materiality, embodiment, and speech acts as key theoretical lenses. First, the line between private and public becomes blurred as sometimes individuals with personal grievances self-harm publicly in front of government buildings, while individuals with collective grievances self-harm privately in their rooms. Second, some self-violent protestors give clear linguistic evidence of their resistance motives, through shouted slogans or suicide notes, while others leave their embodied self-violence unaccompanied by any self-interpretation. Third, material objects indicating a political cause or cultural affiliation may be implicated, such as traditional weapons used to draw blood (Chanda, 2017) or a political banner used to hang oneself. In the self-immolations, the repetition of material objects such as petrol, match, and fire, and the occasional intervention of a police officer, adds an element of generic form to the self-violent acts. Indeed, self-violent resistance is an assemblage of the surrounding materials and the body itself but made comprehensible through a standing declaration making these combinations parts of a meaningful category. In India this standing declaration was developed from a celebrated history of self-violent resistance and a legal code criminalizing the tactic, and it continues to be constituted as additional cases are given collective recognition.

However, resistance tactics are inherently contested and constituted categories, rather than categories established through the motivation of individual actors. Despite the prevalence of repeated material and embodied elements, questions about how to "count" or recognize self-violent resistance remains. For example, among the cases analyzed, dozens of self-immolations related to domestic violence appeared in the reported record. Reading these cases, most performed privately at home with no material accompanying message, it feels emotionally wrong to deny their status as political protests and bodies capable of political subjectivity. Importantly, the question is not just what counts as self-violent resistance, but what should count as self-violent resistance? Do private deaths with

no clear protest motive automatically defy categorization as a resistance tactic? Similar themes have been addressed by other resistance scholars under the term of everyday forms of resistance (Scott, 2008). Should the sheer number of farmer suicides and self-harm across agrarian regions of India count as resistance acts, or only the suicides taken dramatically in public settings during collective protests (Kumar & Najar, 2015; Munster, 2015; Varma, 2015)?

Dramatic self-violent acts do not interpret or constitute themselves. Scholars should focus not only on the criteria of self-violent resistance – public role, clear political message, connection to a social movement – but should also examine whether the surrounding discourse supports a standing declaration of constructed self-violent resistance. Which powerful actors support such a possibility, and which oppose or ignore such a possibility? As Searle argues, one method for exercising power is 'the power of manipulating the subject's perception of available options'(2010, p. 149). Relegating self-violence to a health problem to be managed through force-feeding or prevention policies is to remove a bodily form of resistance that has been practiced across multiple contexts. Labeling self-violence as a health problem constitutes bodies as objects to be managed or pitied, rather than as resisting bodies acting out political subjectivity.

Self-violent resistance researchers may be tempted to provide overly-determined explanations of self-violence across different countries based on essentialized understandings of culture and religion, or by referring generically to different cultural frames. As demonstrated repeatedly through the cases of Telangana and Vemula, constitution of self-violent resistance relies upon declarations of actors within the conflict. Whether a tactic will be recognized and resonant depends not on an unchanging cultural location, but on the actions of leaders and movements, even when the wider discourse could support a meaningful framing of self-violent resistance. Attention to the dynamics of materiality, embodiment, and declarative speech acts focuses researchers on the contested processes that allow some self-violence to be labeled as resistance and other self-violence to be declared a health problem.

Ultimately, self-violence is one category of action among a range of resistance tactics that may be conceptualized as varying by the locus

of embodied harm or non-harm against self or other. As suggested by the article's case illustrations, and made explicit in the novel typology introduced, each quadrant of resistance is likely considered by conflict participants as effective based on differing strategic logics. Future research could explore in more detail how self-violent resistance is understood by various actors in relation to these other violent and nonviolent tactics. For instance, do actors belonging to movements or groups adopting predominately nonviolent forms of resistance view suicide protest or self-harm differently from groups that adopt predominately violent forms of resistance? In the cases I analyzed, self-violent resistance was sometimes followed by massive displays of nonviolent civil resistance and at other times by violent forms of resistance. How do actors involved in different conflict settings view the application of violence towards themselves and others? The embodied and material nature of resistance tactics are open to competing declarations about their nature. Just as proponents of nonviolent tactics often must defend against the label of passivity, or differentiate nonviolence from pacifism (Howes, 2013), so too should activists and scholars continue to conceptualize the tactic of self-violent resistance.

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