

THESIS

HUNGER STRIKES AND CARCERAL RESISTANCE:
EMBODIED STRUGGLE, DISCOURSE,
AND THE POLITICAL MEANING-MAKING OF HUNGER

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ABSTRACT

HUNGER STRIKES AND CARCERAL RESISTANCE: DISCOURSE, SYMBOLIC CONTESTATION AND THE POLITICAL MEANING-MAKING OF HUNGER

Since 2014, there have been a series of hunger strikes at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, WA. Hunger strikes have been utilized globally and throughout history, and, among other tactics, have been one of the primary tactics utilized by prisoners to protest their conditions and make broader political demands. In this study, I analyze the specific discursive repertoires created and deployed by media, detention officials, detainees, and one community activist organization surrounding the NWDC hunger strikes, in order to discover how hunger strikes operate as a mode of symbolic contestation. By delineating the specific frames constructed and deployed by each group, I construct an analysis of the dynamic and relational processes of discursive resistance and the ways that dominant and subaltern actors structure and contest the symbolic field surrounding immigration, detention, and carcerality. Overall, I find that detained hunger strikers and members of one grassroots solidarity organization draw upon a few primary discursive repertoires, including legalistic and rights-based discourses, and a discourse of family to contest hegemonic narratives of the hunger strikes. Finally, I draw upon the notion of differential consciousness to argue that subaltern actors engage in impure tactics of discursive resistance, deploying hegemonic languages only to subvert them, and in this way, challenge dominant narratives and the symbolic power of the state.

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INTRODUCTION

On March 7th of 2014, more than seven hundred people detained at the Northwest Detention Center (NWDC) in Tacoma, Washington, one of the largest immigrant detention centers on the West coast, collectively launched a hunger strike. It would turn out to be the first in a series of hunger strikes to be implemented over the next several years. In a public statement, detainees together made demands for an end to the arbitrary and indefinite use of solitary confinement, poor food and nutrition quality within the facility, abuse from guards, low wages for labor performed in the facility, indefinite detention, deportations, and separation from their families.

Detainees engaged in hunger strikes at NWDC are in good company. Prisoners have used hunger strikes globally and throughout history as one of the primary tactics to protest their conditions of incarceration, as well as to make broader political demands and indictments. Notably, beginning in 1909, suffragettes went on hunger strike in protest of the government's non-acknowledgement of their status as political prisoners. Irish republican prisoners in Northern Ireland engaged in hunger strikes in the early 1980's, among other forms of creative resistance, ending in the deaths of ten strikers, including that of Bobby Sands, one of the movement's figureheads. In a more contemporary context in the United States (U.S.), around four hundred prisoners at Pelican Bay supermax prison in California joined together in launching a massive statewide hunger strike on July 1, 2011 in protest of the conditions of their confinement.

The expansion of immigrant detention in the U.S., alongside that of state and federal prisons across the country, is well documented, and it is clear that detainees and prisoners are not the only ones taking issue with this turn of events. Debate over immigration is occupying increasingly more space, and in particular since the Trump administration has come to power, print and digital media alike have informed the public discourse on the question of *what is to be done about immigration*. The

media has, in this way, played a large role in shaping narratives surrounding migration and detention, including those of the hunger strikes at NWDC.

Alongside these public, more mainstream accounts of the hunger strikes, one grassroots community group has been working to challenge dominant narratives with detained hunger strikers. Operating out of Washington, Northwest Detention Center Resistance (NWDCR) is a group led by undocumented women of color that identifies largely with an abolitionist position in support of detainees at the facility with a shared name (NWDC), and in solidarity with those engaged in hunger striking. In addition to providing material support to detainees and their families, NWDCR operates as one of the primary vocal supporters for detainees in the community and public eye — holding regular public events, taking interviews with press, and recounting struggles from inside the detention center to the public. It turns out that the capacity for hunger strikers to tell their story — and in turn, have their story told — in many ways brings the hunger strike itself into political being, and it is this crucial communicative act that positions hunger strikers to contest the structures of power that hold them. From this perspective, hunger striker's own efforts at framing their narrative, and NWDC's solidarity work in framing the strikes, in many ways implies an answer to one age-old question — if a detainee goes on hunger strike, but no one sees or hears about it, did they really go hungry at all?

My thesis explores how the hunger strikes at NWDC have been framed by a variety of participants and stakeholders, as well as how these frames challenge, align with, or otherwise engage with hegemonic discourses. I additionally seek to explain how these various framings reflect on the role of discourse in reshaping relations of power between hunger strikers, their supporters, and the state. Overall, I find that hegemonic public discourses, drawn upon and produced within media, center interpretations of the hunger strikes as a product of the Trump presidency alone and draw upon sympathetic, yet binaristic and assimilationist narratives of criminality and migration rooted in

‘good’ immigrant imaginaries to construct hunger striker action. I additionally unpack the construction of official accounts through a fusion of legal-bureaucratic rationalities with market ethos discourses, as well as a generalized predilection toward denial and refusal as a means by which to maintain a monopoly on symbolic power. I draw on these findings to argue for a state-centered interpretation of neoliberal transformation, evident through these hybrid discourses.

I find also that detained hunger strikers and members of NWDCR draw upon a few primary discursive repertoires, including legalistic, rights-based discourses and a discourse of family, in order to contest hegemonic and official narratives of the hunger strikes. I draw upon the notion of differential consciousness to argue that these subaltern actors engage in impure tactics of discursive resistance, deploying hegemonic languages to frame the hunger strikes, only to subvert them, and in this way, challenge dominant narratives and the symbolic power of the state from the inside. These findings contribute to understandings of hunger strikes as symbolic, yet powerful collective action that contest the symbolic power of state and corporate carcerality. I also contribute more broadly to understandings of how subaltern peoples – lacking most physical autonomy and material resources, and additionally subject to constraining symbolic and ideological power – strategically work within hegemonic discourses to make space for more revolutionary thought and action.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Below I discuss theoretical approaches to hunger strikes, highlighting key themes, as well as debates and contentions. Scholarship on hunger strikes primarily explores this mode of resistance through themes of legitimacy and power, as well as performativity and meaning-making. I then speak to the value in bridging these literatures with key social movement concepts, namely that of framing and political opportunity structure. Finally, I elucidate sociological theories of discourse, power, and symbolic contestation, with a particular focus on carceral systems. By drawing together these various disparate literatures, I aim to re-embed the study of hunger strikes within key approaches to the study of mobilization, symbolic contestation, and power to show how this tactic operates particularly through symbolic means to shift power, as well as how subaltern subjects, and hunger strikers in particular, must engage in unique discursive strategies to be heard.

Hunger Strikes: Power & Legitimacy

One of the primary themes across the literature on hunger strikes is that of power, authority, and legitimacy, in part via the integral embodiment of this tactic (Landzelius 1999; Yuill 2007; Jasper 2016; Siméant 2016; Bargu 2017). Jasper (2016) writes that “Bodies provide reasons for action, the means of action, as well as being the site where action occurs” (Jasper 2016: 9). Andriolo adds, “Words do not grip unless one gives them hands to do so, unless one embodies them” (2006: 102). Thus, in addition to using one’s body as a tool for building political and social power, hunger strikers bring attention back to the body in a politicized way (Siméant 2016). The starving body becomes a powerful visual within the optics of power that disrupts the invisibility and erasure of prisoners and undocumented people *as people and human bodies*, not merely ‘workers’ or ‘bedspace.’ Hunger strikes in this way disrupt the erasure and invisibilization of prisoners and undocumented detainees. Through

this profoundly corporeal tactic, hunger strikes additionally lend protestors “mastery over violence” (Siméant 2016: 28). In institutional contexts riddled with various forms of state violence, hunger strikers reassert control over their own bodies, thus robbing state and corporate institutions of this monopoly. Individual bodies, as members of a collective, become sites for resisting isolating cellular confinement. Hunger strikes, in this way, underscore, “the ethical and political potential of intercorporeal solidarity” (Guenther 2016: 53). Hunger strikes build power uniquely through the body, yet perhaps contrarily, not through physical or material domination.

Hunger strikes rather build power, resistance, and agency specifically as a ‘weapon of the weak,’ for those who have few to no other means of resistance at their disposal (Siméant 1993; Waismel-Manor 2014; Siméant 2016; Bargu 2017). Scott (1985)’s iconic work asserts the need for scholars of power, resistance, and mobilization to look beyond overt and observable forms of resistance and to consider more subtle forms of resistance and ‘non-cooperation’ that the most marginalized often engage in. While the body is “one of the most accessible weapons at the hands of the weak and the desperate” (Waismel-Manor 2014), the hunger strike itself is part of a collective “essential repertoire” of the undocumented (Siméant 1993). In this sense, there is instrumental strategic value in going on hunger strike for prisoners, the undocumented, and otherwise subaltern as this method draws on the only means remaining for marginalized peoples to fight back. Still, hunger strikes are frequently undergone by the ‘weak,’ reflecting not simply their lack of alternatives, but also speaking to how hunger strikes specifically use vulnerability *itself* as a weapon (Landzelius 1999; Siméant 2016; Bargu 2017). When we look only to instrumental and explicitly observable means of evading the gaze and control of power, we miss the unique strategies of resistance developed and engaged by those who perhaps cannot politically and socially afford overt defiance, but enact their agency nonetheless (Scott 1985). The notion of the “weapons of the weak” thus

broadens our scope to the more covert strategies of contestation, including those that frame hunger strikes as an explicit form of defiance.

There is nonetheless conflict and confusion over the efficacy of this tactic, as hunger strikes operate via a contradictory physics of power — as a process of empowered, autonomous self-destruction and therefore as a source of “uneasy empowerment” (Lanzelius 1999: 87, see also Conlon 2003; Hagesaeter 2004; Scanlan et. al. 2008; Popham 2011; Bargu 2017). For this reason, it is necessary to interrogate whether hunger strikes can truly be a source of power for those engaged, and if or how the power that is ostensibly forged truly challenges broader social, political, and institutional domination. In particular, the concept of bare life explains how, in “states of exception,” prisoners are reduced to biological, apolitical life and, yet, engage in hunger striking as their sole, limited remaining means of resisting the totalizing power of the prison (Agamben 1998). Hunger striking thus challenges a reduction to a mere biological body and reasserts the political subjectivity of participants *in the midst* of domination. In this sense, neither domination nor resistance are absolute. Indeed, “it is by asserting free will and sacrificing it that the hunger striker establishes his-her *uneasy empowerment*: By projecting agency through the defiance of society qua food, fasting stakes corporeal boundaries as the conclusive arbiter of an autonomous self” (Lanzelius 1999: 87, emphasis added). In this way, hunger strikes are cast as an impure form of political engagement that engages hegemonic power from inside existing power relations. As such, as a form of counter-conduct, hunger striking actualizes the capacity of strikers to make space for agency and resistance in small, everyday actions, in the midst of ostensibly totalizing power (Conlon 2003). By drawing upon this notion of the impure means of resistance forged by hunger strikes, we can theorize prisoner and detainee unique capacities for resistance, and how hunger strikes operate through and reveal unique forms of agency and empowerment (Walters 2008; Bargu 2017; Montagne 2017).

Hunger strikes in this way create unique opportunities for hunger strikers to delegitimize state power over bodies in captivity and to destabilize the state monopoly on legitimate violence (Siméant 2016; Bargu 2017). We may come to see that control in carceral contexts is never absolute and is constantly negotiated (Smoyer 2016). In this sense, it is important to consider hunger strikes as an impure tactic of engagement that cannot easily be sorted into clear categories of political engagement. Still, many scholars continue to question the instrumental efficacy of hunger strikes, seeking to determine once and for all whether they can be successful in achieving stated aims and demands (Scanlan et. al. 2008; Hagesaeter 2004). Through quantitative measures, Scanlan et. al. (2008) finds a high success rate among hunger strikes and argues for it as an effective tactic, ultimately, however, suggesting the need to complicate the foundational conceptualization of ‘effectiveness’ in hunger strike situations – this is to say, there is more to consider than observable institutional and policy outcomes. Focusing only on the direct and visible physics of power that occur through the hunger strike or the instrumental purposes and outcomes of the fast alone overlooks how hunger strikes work to build power in other forms, such as the building of symbolic power.

One of the primary forms this takes is the capacity of hunger strikers to garner legitimacy for their cause. In part, in order to do this, they must construct themselves as authoritative and, in this way, in making their demands, fight for the right to make demands, and to cast themselves as worthy of making demands and having a say (Guenther 2016). For this reason, it is necessary to unpack the inherently political nature of demands-making, including for “creaturely” and corporeal comforts, and the transformation that occurs, “when one struggles to have the right to demand” (Guenther 2016: 50). This is at the core of the revolutionary character of prisoner-led hunger strikes in particular; it is this defiance through insisting on one’s worthiness of naming not only unmet needs, but also wants, that defies dominant carceral logics. When narratives of hunger strikes push aside

basic corporeal needs or pleasures in the name of deservingness, nobility, or even political radicalism, they delimit some needs as more worthy and some prisoners as more deserving, reinforcing exclusionary notions of deservingness that underlie carceral systems (Guenther 2016). To demand based on physical and emotional wants and needs, alongside or even in lieu of more lofty institutional transformations, is to unequivocally assert one's right to be not only political, but also a body worthy of having one's needs met regardless of an ascribed criminality; to make these more corporeal demands is thus, "to question the social and moral distinction between the innocent and the guilty," and to push boundaries of deservingness (Guenther 51, quoting Foucault 1977). In this way, hunger strikes build power in part through the legitimation of demands that work to erode the boundaries by which deservingness and legitimacy are determined. All of this highlights the extent to which hunger strikers not only strategically craft messages about what it is they are fighting for in order to be deemed legitimate, but they also make space for new definitions of "a meaningful experience of freedom" (Guenther 2016: 49).

The study of hunger strikes through the lens of power furthermore underscores the need to consider the many stakeholders, players, and participants, state and official responses to hunger strikes in order to fully elucidate the battle of legitimacy between multiple actors that occurs in these political moments (Guenther 2016; Siméant 2016). State actors and corporate elites frequently seek to construct hunger strikes as passive, manipulative, and weak, or as not authentically engaging in a fast to suggest that hunger striker demands are trivial or unworthy in order to maintain their own legitimacy (Siméant 2016). By reintroducing state responses into analyses of hunger strikes, as well as that of broader publics, we can begin to build beyond singular analyses that reduce hunger strikes to that of protest fasting alone, without consideration of the broader relational and dialectical processes through which hunger strikes are constructed and played out historically, materially, and in real time. Conversely, through this lens, the hunger strike operates as a process of claiming and enacting

political subjecthood in part through relationships of solidarity for migrant detainees largely excluded from social, economic, and political life (Montagne 2017). In this sense, the hunger strike, as a tactic drawn upon largely by prisoner populations, relies upon networks of solidarity for the development of political subjectivity and power. We must then directly consider the discursive processes of (de)legitimation as a key mechanism in the making and maintenance of hegemony and one of the central means by which hunger strikes take effect, as well as the role of those organizing in support of the hunger strikers in legitimating strikes and shifting structures of power (Hall 1978; Makus 1990). In order to do so, it is necessary to consider the performative and cultural meaning-making processes embedded within and surrounding hunger strikes, and the many participants who take part in these processes.

Hunger Strikes: Performativity, Cultural Context, & Meaning-Making

In order to grapple with the non-instrumental forms of efficacy surrounding the hunger strikes, we must explore the themes of performativity, cultural processes, and meaning-making surrounding hunger strikes. This emphasis constitutes a need to understand hunger strikes, as well as prisoner resistance more generally, beyond instrumental, rational action; hunger strikes must additionally, if not principally, be understood as a form of symbolic and expressive action. During a hunger strike, the weaponization of life is not instrumental, but rather a form of political expression through which violence becomes a *sign* (Bargu 2017). Hunger strikes enact symbolic re-humanization and assertion of subjectivity (Bargu 2017; Montagne 2017). By transforming their bodies into symbols of the movement, hunger strikers display their commitment to a broader struggle and to resisting their conditions, in spite of the acute physical limitations of their circumstances.

In this sense, there is a need to consider cultural contexts and social frames of meaning that guide the choice to use specific mobilization tactics over others, including and perhaps in particular

in the case of hunger strikes, and how these choices inform the interpretation and meaning-making that surrounds them. Tilly (1993) speaks to these “repertoires of collective action,” asking what causes a group of people to pursue shared interests through one set of means over another and why these change across time and place, and one scholar applies this notion of repertoires of collective action to speak to the distinct cultural meanings associated with hunger strikes across various locales (Waismel-Manor 2005). From this perspective, hunger strikes are invoked more in specific cultural contexts than others, asserting that the choice to engage in a hunger strike goes beyond its instrumentality, lying largely in the distinct meanings that hunger strikes have in one community versus another (Waismel-Manor: 2005. This finding centers the significance of culturally inherent meanings that surround hunger strikes in varying contexts and bear on the choice of this particular tactic in a given time and place.

Yet, this interpretation must be complicated, by deconstructing the notion of a cultural predilection toward the use of a hunger strike, or any other tactic. One scholar asserts, “The forms of action elaborated in specific historical and cultural contexts are often imported, re-appropriated, transformed and reinterpreted, sometimes in complete disconnection from their initial meaning” (Siméant 2016: 35). Rather than cultural contexts essentially determining tactics and the meanings associated with them, we should instead analytically center the dynamic meaning-making processes in which hunger strikers themselves engage. In this sense, we must critique the assumption of unidirectional cultural contexts, instead centering a more interactive process of meaning construction between hunger strikers and the cultural and ideological interpretations applied to their actions. Siméant illustratively describes the “broad palette of meanings associated with the Gandhian fast, alternatively calling on the exemplarity of the striker, risking their life for the cause; shaming their adversaries, establishing a power struggle” (2016: 22) In this way, she evokes not the singular essential cultural meaning of a hunger strike in any one context, but the constructive and iterative

work of distilling particular meanings out of the prism of many possible interpretations. It is vital to consider how hunger strikers dialectically engage in the process of discursively producing their own cultural contexts and the meaning of their political action, without losing sight of the broader cultural, political, and institutional contexts constraining these possibilities. This recognition of hunger strikes as deeply and iteratively culturally embedded furthermore sheds light on how hunger strikes are ultimately performative and fundamentally reliant on the stories they tell, the social, political, and emotional meanings they evoke, and how the messages they convey are received. Through a hunger strike, the body itself is made to be the stage and site of the performance (Siméant 2016). In the case of hunger strikes within prisons and detention centers, the body within this political theater calls attention to the ways the fasting body has been already subjected to various forms of state and symbolic violence that have long gone unnoticed and unremarked. Thus, what is key about hunger strikes is not merely that the body is undergoing violence, but that, through the organization of the hunger strike, there is finally both, “a suffering body and a public as a witness” (Siméant 2016: 43).

Hunger strikes must be understood as a means to make a symbolic appeal to one’s broader community and public opinion and “provide a public testimony of injustice” (Siméant 2016: 38, see also Dingley & Mollica 2007; Anderson 2010; Simeant & Traïni 2016). As such, they rely not on the sudden change-of-heart or goodwill of institutional elites to change course, but rather on the cumulative power of the public to witness. This witnessing power can best be understood through the Foucauldian theory of the gaze and regimes of visibility through which the act of seeing becomes the primary means by which power is exercised — those who are seen become subject to surveillance and disciplinary power, and those who see remain invisible (Foucault 1977). Through this apparatus of optic power, invisibility becomes a means for evading the force of power, and therefore, a means of resistance (Bridle 2018). Within this visual system of power, capacity remains

to engage in resistance by turning the gaze of power back on itself through the oppositional gaze or visual citizenship through which marginalized subjects have the capacity to ‘look back’ at power and in doing so, rob it of its ability to remain invisible and unnoticed (hooks 1992; Krasmann 2017). In the case of hunger strikes, these concepts identify the extent to which hunger strikes rely on a kind of visual solidarity and a willingness of broader communities to bear defiant witness, calling to task state-sanctioned institutions that thrive on their ability to not be seen. Hunger strikers, through the spectacle of their performance, thus turn the gaze of power back onto the state and powerful institutions, calling attention to harms that are being done that might otherwise go unnoticed and unseen. In this way, the power and meaning of the hunger strike includes performing for the public to make the invisible visible. As such, the hunger strike is dependent not only on the resolve of the strikers to remain on fast, but on their ability to effectively activate key publics toward action.

Even with a willing audience, hunger strikers must be able to give a compelling performance. A key objective of a hunger strike is “to open and sustain discursive spaces for the emergence of new, decarceral forms of political subjectivity” (Guenther 2016: 54). At the same time, in carceral contexts, one of the main tools for containing the strike, one of the primary barriers for hunger strikers, and one of the great ironies considering their hyper-surveillance, is the fact that the starving bodies of strikers are *not* visible to those outside prison walls. The capacity of the strike to create change, be seen as legitimate, and perhaps be believed to be occurring at all, rests on the *telling* of what is going on. For this reason, the effective framing of hunger strikes through discursive means has vast consequences both for hunger strikers to be seen as legitimate and stand a chance of achieving their stated demands, but also in a broader sense, in the longer-term project of calling into being a different political and social reality.

Among framing strategies drawn upon in making meaning of hunger strikes, one primary through-line is the appeal to liberal democratic discourses and specifically to that of ‘rights’ and

appeals to the law (Agamben 1998; Reiter 2014; Miller 2016). In exploring institutional narratives of uses and contestations regarding force-feedings, hunger strike responses are closely pinned to dynamic international legal definitions surrounding human rights (Miller 2016). For example, hunger strikers at Pelican Bay constructed their mobilization within the broader context of a criminal justice system that is legitimate insofar as it follows the law and respects the human rights of inmate, in this way also drawing upon international human rights discourse. As a result, prison officials were unable to discursively position the criminalized hunger strikers as outside the law and unworthy of legal protections (Reiter 2014). This ‘legitimacy paradox’ suggests that discourse and its strategic use cannot be seen as ideologically pure, but rather is a dynamic tool for political participation, particularly for marginalized groups who lack material or economic power. In the case of hunger strikes specifically, some protestors work to complicate or even reject dominant discourses of liberal humanism (Guenther 2016; Bargu 2017). In one analysis, incarcerated hunger strikers reject liberal, humanist discourses that hold life alone as sacred, while reasserting the sacredness of a politically active and self-determining life by “threaten[ing] to die rather than submit themselves to the state” (Bargu 2017: 3). Weaponizing life in this way serves as a rejection of liberal discourses that define the state as protector (Guenther 2016). The tension between these two cases suggests a complex, ostensibly contradictory relationship between the legitimacy conferred by hegemonic liberal democratic frames and the revolutionary potential of counter-hegemonic discourses, suggesting a need to consider narrative framings of hunger strikes as outside of binary, essential interpretations of discourses as hegemonic or revolutionary alone. In many way, this impurity and tension within hunger strike discourses maps onto that inherent within the tactic itself, as previously explored.

In this sense, hunger strikes invoke a variety of tensions, drawing on a variety of discourses, as well as engaging in a complex rejection of non-violence and at the same time avoiding much of the social stigma associated with enactments of violence against another. This reframe additionally

involves reworking liberal conceptions of violence and non-violence beyond the individualizing interpersonal acts of abuse and violation, redirecting attention to the violence of state and institutional arrangements. Through not only the act of willful and politicized self-destruction, but in particular how they talk about it, hunger strikers and their supporters engage in a production of new political imaginaries, new ways of seeing the world (Cox & Flesher Forminaya 2009). Through an analysis of these key frames and dynamic meaning-making processes undergone by hunger strikers, their supporters, and their opponents, we can more reflexively understand the complex narratives that are created about the hunger strikes and how these discourses may ultimately determine the outcome of a strike or a movement. Engaging resolutely with the strategic discursive framing activities of hunger strikers themselves helps us see beyond hunger strikes as essentially one thing, and to understand how, through and around the hunger strike, meanings are intentionally and strategically produced and applied in pursuit of political transformation. Engaging directly with these processes of framing and discursive contestation requires drawing upon a variety of key social movement theories to make sense of how scholars of social movements theorize framing activities, the limits of dominant theories of framing, and how meaning-making processes might be better politicized and synthesized within broader structures of power and political opportunity.

Social Movement Theories

Sociological social movement literatures introduces valuable perspectives on the role of framing, as well as the structural contexts in which framing activities occur. As I delineate here, this body of work offers much to scholars of hunger strikes for understanding how movements work to shift power simultaneously at a structural, as well as symbolic and discursive level. I turn now to key social movement concepts, namely that of framing and political opportunity structure, which help ground hunger strike scholarship within larger understandings of movement mobilization and

strategies. I then work to re-embed these theories of mobilization within broader frameworks of discourse, symbolic power, and contestation.

Framing

For those exploring the narrative meaning-making within social movements, *framing* describes the process by which social movements define and highlight the problems they seek to address, the solutions they craft and envision, and their own role in the social problem narrative (Snow & Benford 1988). Drawing on Goffman (1974), the capacity of movements to engage in these meaning-making processes – defining and redefining their own actions as well as the nature of the social and political situations to which they respond – is one of their central projects, rather than as incidental. Yet, in order to achieve broad appeal and support, movement frames must tap into broader, pre-existing values and beliefs (Polletta 2008). In this sense, the concept of movement framing poses a complex conundrum for determining how revolutionary movements can draw upon existing, legitimate structures of belief, while at the same time working to shift and create new visions for society beyond these symbolic limits.

There furthermore remains contestation as to what precisely the term *framing* includes. For some, framing is derivative of deeply embedded and conscious ideologies and includes all the ways we are led to see the world, including strategic persuasive appeals alongside subconscious portrayals of belief systems (Snow & Benford 1988). For Jasper (1997), however, we ought to pursue conceptual clarity by reserving the notion of *framing* for the explicit, intentional, and strategic deployment of rhetoric for recruitment purposes. However, this insistence on clearly and cleanly distinguishing between consciously crafted movement rhetoric and more deeply and ostensibly authentic beliefs and ideologies oversimplifies the far more iterative, relational, dialogical and messy relationship between rhetorical discursive frames and cultural ideologies (Lindstedt 2017). As such, it

is necessary to deconstruct this binary opposition between movement rhetoric and ideological positions by reconnecting them as relational and re-embedding these social movement concepts within broader theories of symbolic power and contestation, to be elaborated upon in the final section.

Additionally, theories of framing are primarily focused on the deep analysis of conscious political rhetoric itself, often with limited engagement — or no engagement at all — with larger political structures and contexts that are deeply connected to belief systems and potential frame resonance. In these ways, the framing literature generally considers movement frames as analytically distinct not only from ideology, but also from larger institutional and structural conditions. As such, conventional theories of framing within movement studies remain truncated from broader considerations of political and institutional power that operate to structure the field of political and discursive opportunities. By reintegrating framing strategies within their institutional and symbolic structural context, we can go beyond analysis of framing as an apolitical and descriptive act, to exploring and explaining how and why different discursive approaches build power at various points.

Political Opportunity Structure

For most social movement scholars, these larger structural conditions influencing mobilization possibilities have been the analytic turf of political opportunity structures, a set of theories which claim that movements materialize and advance when and where there is a culmination of existing political support (Lipsky 1970; Eisinger 1973; McAdam 1998; McAdam,

Tarrow, & Tilly 2001; Meyers 2004). Success of movements often rests upon access to institutional support and resources, suggesting that the sympathy of institutional elites foreshadows broad success for grassroots movements (Eisinger 1973). Structures of political opportunity shift over time, often as a result of movement activity, indicating as a far more ongoing, mutually influential process (McAdam 1998). The theory of political opportunity structure offers researchers an important analytic tool for understanding how aspects of the political system can and do affect the abilities for actors to engage in contentious politics (Giugni 2009). Overall, the theory seeks to address how access to various resources, legal and legitimate political channels, and institutional support shapes movement successes, as well as the forms of tactics employed — including the extent to which marginalized political actors are shut out of legitimate political channels.

The concept of political opportunity structure can also be applied to interpreting how political contexts shape activists' specific tactics and strategies. Going beyond the expressly 'structural' and instrumental interpretation of political opportunity structure, Gamson & Meyer argue that "political opportunity has a strong cultural component and we miss something important when we limit our attention to variance in political institutions and relationships among political actors" as opposed to the full spectrum of how these political structures and contexts shape movement activities, opportunities, and power (1996: 279). Taking this a step further, we should broaden the analytic scope of political opportunity beyond the formalized political structure, the discrete consideration of the sympathy of political and institutional elites, and the availability of material resources (Koopmans and Statham 1999; McCammon, Muse, Newman, and Terrell 2007; McCammons 2013). Particularly in the case of hunger strikes and in the context of framing theories, we must consider also the symbolic and cultural characteristics structuring political opportunities. From this perspective, it becomes possible to interpret hunger strikes as a democratizing form of political protest, accessible in spite of material limitations and institutional subjugation, yet also

posing new questions for explaining their occurrence, in particular within political contexts hostile to both leftist protest and immigrants of color generally. As I develop more below, the interrelationship between structures of political opportunity and discursive framing activities offer persuasive new angles on how hunger strikes engage with shifting structures of political opportunity in less-than-straightforward ways.

In particular, the concept of discursive opportunity structure synthesizes collective action framing and political opportunity theories, moving scholars of political opportunity beyond consideration of straightforward, instrumental political resources and support, and moving frame analyses beyond the descriptive plane (Koopmans and Statham 1999; McCammon, Muse, Newman, and Terrell 2007; McCammons 2013). As much as formalized political processes and institutional structures shape opportunities for struggle, so too does the structure of ideas in the public sphere that are understood to be commonsense, believable, and legitimate (Hall 1978; Koopmans and Statham 1999). This ideational structure influences not only whether movement framings can be effective, but also understood and believed, by aligning to a sufficient degree with the status quo. The notion of discursive opportunity structure works to extend framing theory generally from a largely descriptive theory, to one with the capacity to account for the strength, resonance, and efficacy of certain frames over others and to speak to the larger strategic value of frames (Koopmans and Statham 1999; McCammons 2013).

One further way to understand and extend these structures of discursive and political relations within movements is to look to the key role of the media in particular using the model of mediation opportunity structure (Martin-Barbero 1993; Bart 2012; Cammaerts 2012). Through this lens we might consider the “dialectical” and “diverging articulations between media, communication, protest and activism” through which political opportunity structures of engaged, contested, and shifted within the discursive plane (Cammaerts 2012: 3, see also Martin-Barbero (1993). Theories of

mediation opportunity structure helps scholars trace the structuring role of the media in creating or delimiting possibilities for contestation, as well as the extent to which collectively mobilized action groups are increasingly “becoming media” as a means for overcoming structured marginality within mass media (Martin-Barbero 1993; Bart 2012; Cammaerts 2012). This emphasis helps reconnect analyses of framing and larger structural and political contexts of power and furthermore underlines that it is critical to re-embed framing practices within the structured field of relational discursive contestations.

These key social movement theories introduce and deepen nuanced perspectives on the role of framing and structures of political opportunity, discourse, and media and in hunger strikes. They offer much for understanding how hunger strikes operate not only at a historical, structural, and instrumental level, but at a strategic cultural and ideological one, as well. My aim in drawing upon these theories is to show how linking collective action frames to the larger structure of political opportunities can identify the dialectical symbolic interplay within and around hunger strikes themselves and to expand notions of political opportunity to include discursive and ideational components of opportunity and structuration. Finally, through the synthesis of these largely isolated theories of mobilization, we can begin to reinterpret the iterative structuring of discursive possibilities that surrounds hunger strikes as a politically accomplished act. In order to fully flesh out the political and structural connections between political opportunity structure and framing, I draw upon a few key theories regarding discourse, symbolic power, and discursive resistance in the following section. The field of power and resistance has much to offer for making sense of how power structures the field of engagement and the politics of the possible. Finally, by connecting these social movement theories with broader theories of power, discourse, and resistance, I aim to incorporate more critical and nuanced notions of power and politics into my exploration of hunger strikes; in this sense, I include within my scope of exploration not only those overt, explicit,

intentional, and organized means of political pressure and engagement, but also the less visible forms that power takes and bears on collectives organized in pursuit of transformation.

Discourse, Ideological Power & Symbolic Contestation

Finally, I consider theories of discourse, specifically those focusing on the structuring of symbolic fields of contestation. Here I specify ‘discourse’ and trace its key forms in contemporary carceral politics and institutions, working to re-embed hunger strike scholarship and theories of social movement mobilization within broader theoretical approaches to hegemonic and revolutionary discursive power and the specific iterations taken within immigration and carceral regimes. In this way, this section operates as a roadmap for seeing and understanding the primary hegemonic and official discursive forms at play in the production and legitimation of carceral systems of migration surrounding prisoner and detainee-led hunger strikes, working to both constrain discursive opportunities for hunger strikers and their supporters, as well as creating opportunities for contestation.

Discourse is a system of thought that takes form in language and that informs belief, conduct, and practice (Hall 1978; Rose and Miller 1992; Carrabine 2000; Camp 2016). Discourse moreover structures experiences and ways of seeing and making meaning in the world, and through this process, operates as the crucial and perhaps most insidious form of power (Foucault 1977; Gramsci 1992; Lukes 1974). Hegemonic power produces dominant discourses with institutional implications, through its interlocking relationship with other forms of power beyond the ideational realm and into the production of policy, and institutional arrangements and practices (Collins 1990; Gramsci 1992). Discourse can in this way manufacture consent and compliance and lead to “consolidations of political power” (Wood 1998). As such, theories of discourse and power, are crucial in understanding the development of hegemonic institutional regimes and the symbolic

processes by which they are made legitimate, bearing on the interpretation of framing strategies as a form of discursive contestations and in particular, the shaping of dominant and subversive hunger strike discourses of hunger strikes.

Perhaps more so than any other scholar of discursive power, Hall develops our understanding of the structured nature of the field of discursive and hegemonic struggle (1978; 1982). Hall brings into play Bourdieu's concept of 'the field' and how discourse operates to structure dominant symbolic meanings and contestations. By locating the role of social and symbolic fields, Hall pushes analysis of discursive contestation beyond a two-sided dialectic, binary model of opposition, instead allowing us to identify the field of symbolic contestation as *polyvalent*. This model highlights and interprets power within other social spaces and institutions beyond the state, while still centering and recognizing the key role that the state plays in the production of dominant frameworks of meaning (Hall 1978). This allows us to theorize the interrelated roles played by different institutional actors alongside that of the state, such as private detention corporations, particularly crucial in the context of neoliberal transformations.

Media furthermore plays a key role in shaping and reproducing discourses and as a result, is a primary structure that inhibits access and participation in the development of 'public opinion' and official narratives, keeping participation and influence largely limited to 'primary definers' and those with the most social power and access to the means of symbolic and ideological production (ibid.). Structured collusion between corporate and governmental officials and major media outlets produces dominant ideologies with particular normative assumptions and imperatives that authorize and legitimize status quo arrangements. Media and politicians circularly create the primary definition of the situation, not exclusively as a result of corruption, but also because of the structure of mass media production and the 'fit' between professional media ideology and dominant ideas (ibid.). These theoretical perspectives put into full relief the central and interconnected role that both media

and institutional elites, such as detention officials, play in the construction of hegemonic discourses and the structuring of the discursive field surrounding hunger strikes.

Discursive Repertoires of Carceral Migration

Scholars of discursive power additionally suggest that discourses relate directly to particular consolidations of power and dominant institutional arrangements (Rose & Miller 1992; Welch 2009; Carrabine 2000). It is necessary, then, to trace the development of specific discursive repertoires for legitimating state responses and carceral practices, as well as the discursive means by which these dominant arrangements are contested. These include struggles over notions of criminalization, security, risk, and crisis (Martin & Mitchelson 2009; Mountz et al 2012; Whitt 2015; Camp 2016); law-and-order policy (Hall 1978; Camp 2016;), racially coded and gendered discourses (Bigo 2002 & 2005; Luibéid 2008; Golash-Boza 2012; Anguiano 2015; Chávez 2015; Bassichis et. al. 2016; Young 2016) and more recently, a market-driven discourse of carcerality (Carrabine 2000; Flynn 2016)

Central to the rise of the carceral state are security discourses that criminalize immigration (Carrabine 2000; Martin & Mitchelson 2009; Whitt 2015). By constructing migration as a ‘crisis,’ the state affords itself a state of exception in which typical legal expectations and, indeed, legal requirements, can be suspended for an indefinite period, and additionally shores up state authority and expertise and monopoly on the official narrative at carceral facilities. This rhetoric also allows for privatized immigrant detention (Flynn 2016). Overall, an indefinite period of crisis and fear extends the authority of the state and legitimates investments in state carceral power. Part and parcel to security discourse, and central to immigrant detention and the carceral state, is that of law-and-order discourse which insists on the legitimacy of legal systems specifically for producing order, and therefore safety and security in the midst of a criminal or unknown threat, locating authority within the state (Hall 1978; Carrabine 2000; Camp 2016; Flynn 2016). Taken together these discourses

operate in contradictory ways, between on the one hand championing legalistic state-based solutions, and on the other, turning to privatization as a solution, thus suggesting important complications for how privatization of carceral regimes bears of the power of the state within neoliberal contexts.

Furthermore, the discursive legitimation of carceral regimes of migration management relies on deeply racialized, coded, rhetoric to legitimate carceral solutions to supposed crises (Whitt 2015; Camp 2016). Racialization operates as a mechanism of legitimation for authoritarian state policies and counterinsurgent violence against poor communities of color (Camp 2016). These carceral processes operate as state strategies for re-consolidating power and regaining sovereignty challenged by globalization and deterritorialization, as well as the challenges to state power and legitimacy leveraged by freedom struggles of the sixties and seventies (Whitt 2015; Camp 2016). Despite the official classification of Latino as a nationality and the often colorblind rhetorical means by which migrants are constructed, Latinx people are constructed in deeply racialized ways through immigration and citizenship as political subjects discourse (Bigo 2002; Luibéid 2008; Vasquez 2011; Golash-Boza 2012; Anguiano 2015; Chávez 2015; Bassichis et. al. 2016; Young 2016).

Racial formation is a historically flexible process of racial category construction that works to serve specific political, social, and economic purposes (Omi and Winant 1994: 2). Through racialized discursive practices, “the state shapes and is shaped in turn by the racial contours of society and the political demands emanating from them” as an “intensely political process” (Omi and Winant 1994: 3 & 4). The racialized construction of Latinx communities as “illegal” and “foreign” is historically embedded within and through discourse, as well as immigration law (Ngai 2004; Vasquez 2011). Yet, these “narratives of exclusionary nationalism emerge throughout the history of the United States, and while they adapt over time to shifting political tides as well as demographics, they consistently favor the white elite within American society, granting it the power to rhetorically construct and

enforce a hegemonic narrative of what it means to be American” (Anguiano 2015: 158). As such, processes of citizenship and notions of nationality and Americanness are, in this way, constitutive of broader racial formations and institutionalization of racial exclusions, even when discourses are coded and devoid of explicit racial references (Ngai 2004; Bhambra 2015). In this sense, all discourses of carcerality, immigration, and nationalism are deeply racialized.

Conversely, and importantly, the racialized and exclusionary nature of pleas for migrant innocence that works to combat claims of migrant, particularly Latinx “illegality,” can actually reproduce exclusions for those who cannot claim legal innocence and cannot assimilate into normative citizenship (Chávez 2010; Chazaro 2015). While mainstream progressive movements for immigrant rights work to construct immigrants through normative frames that cast them as essentially American, hard-working members of stable, nuclear families, these discourses ultimately reproduce exclusive imaginaries of who is worthy and deserving, and consequently, who is not. Therefore, it is necessary to interpret discourses of immigration, citizenship, and incarceration in broader contexts of symbolic racialization beyond the direct referent alone and to engage critically with even progressive discourses that reproduce underlying systems of power, particularly at of carceral migration regimes and the stifling of migrant resistance.

At the same time, the formation of citizenship boundaries and meanings is a deeply gendered process rooted in sexual politics (Luibéid 2008; Chávez 2015). Through the gendered, raced, and sexualized process of constructing the national political community, patriarchal heteronormativity becomes infused into racialized assumptions and constructions of migrant peoples, policy, and questions of who belongs and who is deserving. These discursive assumptions simultaneously construct Latinos as hypermasculine sexual predators and work to further invisibilize and criminalize queer Latinx migrants and migrant women (Luibéid 2008; Chávez 2015; Bassichis et. al. 2016; Young 2016). Resultingly, more national resources go toward the building up of the

infrastructure and industries dedicated to controlling “illegal” and deviant migrants in accordance with these racialized and sexualized national imaginaries, including that of border control, exclusionary citizenship and migration policies, and carceral systems (Bigo 2002; Golash-Boza 2012; Anguiano 2015; Bassichis et. al. 2016; Young 2016). Scholars further note the gendered nature of constructed Latinx dependency, describing the feminization of Latinx poverty as a process of producing migrant Latinx subjects as unfit for assimilation into the citizen body politic (Chavez 2004; Huerta 2013). In particular, representations of Latinx families and Latina reproduction, alongside that of Black women, construct them as sexual and reproductive threats to the normative, white civic order (Chavez 2004). In this way, discourses of migration, citizenship, and nationalism draw simultaneously upon racial, gendered, and sexualized imaginaries.

There is therefore also an intimate relationship between notions of ‘good citizenship’ and ‘family values,’ and the ways that neoliberal, racialized, gendered, sexualized processes work to mutually construct normative subjects of the nation-state through the harmoniously operative ideations of the ‘worthy’ immigrant and the ‘deserving’ family (Chávez 2010). These logics thusly shape political and discursive opportunity structures and as subaltern peoples, Latinx communities and other migrant communities of color are challenged to vie for political belonging through racialized, gendered, and sexualized logics that ultimately reproduce their conditions of marginalization within the national community.

There is, finally, an additional penal discourse growing out of the increasing privatization of carceral facilities and the neoliberal ethos of these institutions — a neoliberal, market ethos of carcerality. The shift to private ownership and operation of carceral facilities relies on and is justified through a “language of agency and personal responsibility” infused within carceral regimes (Crewe 2007: 266) and a marketing strategy based on selling ‘bed-space’ and thus erasing the people posed to occupy those beds. Indeed, “Privatization still signals efficiency and cost-saving,

and...entrench[es] an economic motive” (Mountz et al. 2012: 524). Private ownership of institutions previously operated by the state thus draws discursively on notions of corporate authority and responsibility, raising important questions regarding the role and power of the state in an increasingly neoliberal, privatized carceral geography. This marketization of carceral migratory regimes suggests the need to understand incarceration as a state strategy for containing and punishing freedom struggles arising in reacting to crisis and resistance brought on by specifically neoliberal transformations.

Discursive Struggle

In addition to these discursive modalities as a site of state power, they specific frames are continually contested and thus operate as a site of resistance (Bosworth & Carrabine 2001; Camp 2016). There is always a struggle over representation, signification, and prisoner imaginaries embedded within hegemonic discourse (Foucault 1990 [1978]; Bosworth & Carrabine 20001). Material, structural domains and the cultural and ideological are deeply contingent, and thus political, institutional, and material power relations are largely rooted in struggles over the telling of history and the present. In this way, it is imperative to study discursive resistance, and to re-contextualize mobilization framing strategies through their role in the contestations of and engagements with hegemonic narratives of carcerality, immigration, and resistance itself — in particular those undergone by hunger strikers and their allies.

Sandoval’s (2000) concept of differential consciousness offers a key tool for understanding how marginalized communities strategically work both within and yet beyond the confines of material and symbolic structures of power to overcome limitations on which discourses can be understood and deemed legitimate. Differential consciousness invariably accounts for the multiple, divergent, and sometimes contradictory discursive framings which subaltern subjects use to struggle

against hegemonic frames. The notion of differential consciousness reveals the self-reflexive framing strategies undergone by the subaltern in order to be heard — indeed, to even be registered as participants in the structured field of discursive opportunity and contestation. This concept furthermore corroborates what scholars of prisoner resistance and struggle by the socially marginal have argued: “Unless subordinate groups believe they can overturn their domination...it makes sense for them to negotiate using the terms of hegemonic discourse, but this does not mean that they have internalized hegemonic norms” (Crewe 2007: 315). Dominant discourses of power thus implicitly create the possibility of resistance: “These discourses created the conditions for subsequent dissent...often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories” by which they are made delegitimate, in this way asserting the ways that the power-laden meanings of rhetoric shifts over time and the fact that actors may engage in resistance while still ostensibly using the language of dominant frames (Carrabine 2000: 315). From this perspective, mobilization frames — particularly those invoked by subaltern actors — should be seen as engaging iteratively within broader structures of discursive, political, and mediation opportunity, drawing upon hegemonic discourse to draw legitimacy and authority from the colonial center of power. Marginalized subjects may, through mobile frames, confer legitimacy to their causes, while working to shift that very structure of power, legitimacy, and opportunity. One significant example of this is Cabezas (2009)’s analysis of the strategic and contradictory use of human rights discourse among organized sex workers in the Caribbean. In spite of the political limits of this framework for radical contestation, this group of subaltern women of color strategically draws upon human rights discourse to garner legitimacy and moral authority (Cabezas 2009). Despite the liberal assumptions and claims of human rights discourse, “the absence of sex workers’ experiences in the human rights dialogue of violence against women raises significant questions about what voices are heard” (Cabezas 2009: 156). Articulation through the mainstream human rights discourse is, for these women “crucial in expanding ...

authority and legitimacy” and for granting them entry into the field of political participation and contestation (Cabezas 2009: 158). But this strategy is not without its political drawbacks. Discourses of human rights are developed largely out of a global system of colonial, capitalist power, meaning that at a foundational level, they do not challenge the overall power structure:

The foundational premise for conceptualizing human rights – the liberal-democratic rights characteristic of the European Enlightenment – does not accommodate other definitions of rights, cultures, and values systems ...and imposes a worldwide regime that excludes other epistemologies. Further...redress within this system comes from the nation-state, which is often the most violent offender of human rights (Cabezas 2009: 152).

In this way, human rights discourse, and other rhetorics rooted in assimilationist, Western, liberal humanist ideals are varyingly drawn upon in the midst of revolutionary actions, conferring legitimacy and, indeed, recognizability to those engaged. Differential consciousness helps make sense of this tension, offering a central tool for considering discursive resistance as multi-faced, complex, and as still always embedded within broader structures of political and discursive power.

In addition, subaltern and marginalized subjects, particularly those excluded from white, heteronormative notions of citizenship and political belonging can be seen engaging in creative and alternative methods of constructing themselves within and a part of communities outside of these exclusionary models, through the notion of differential belonging. This rejection of logics of isolation and alienation and the cultivation of a sense of belonging outside of heteronormative nationalisms through operates as,

an alternative mode of cultural citizenship, which can challenge the national social imaginary that figures queers and migrants as threats to family values and the good citizen. Instead of bargaining, compromising, or representing the interests of few, differential modes function by coalescing differently-situated groups and demanding that policy address the deep causes of interlocking oppressions (Chavez 2010: 137)

Through this modality, those excluded from the racialized and gendered national imaginary create new discursive and symbolic means of vying for participation and inclusion through alternative logics of citizenship, community, and familial belonging.

Overall, integrating theoretical approaches to hunger strikes within broader movement framing and political opportunity theories, and theories of discursive power and contestation demonstrates how hunger strikes operate through symbolic rather than instrumental means of contestation. Furthermore, re-embedding framing approaches within structures of power allows analyses to move beyond the descriptive limits of framing and political opportunity structure in isolation, making space for a more robust theoretical interplay between cultural and structural power dynamics surrounding hunger strikes and the strategies they engage. Finally, analyzing these discursive strategies within the broader structural and structuring contexts within which they are embedded helps us to make sense of the contradictory nature of power surrounding and within hunger strikes, both constraining them and also supplying the discursive resource by which they may achieve legitimacy and shift not only frames of the hunger strikes, but of what is politically possible.

METHODS

Research Questions

Drawing on existing literature on hunger strikes, social movement theories, and theories of discursive power and contestation, my thesis asks several key interrelated research questions, including: How have participants, supporters, detention officials, and media framed hunger strikes at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, WA? How have these frames challenged, conflicted, or aligned with hegemonic values, objectives, and symbolic frameworks? Lastly, what does this tell us about the role of discourse in reshaping relations of power between hunger strikers and the state?

Qualitative Approaches

To answer these questions, I designed and conducted a case study using qualitative research methods to engage in a relational discourse analysis. Qualitative methods are uniquely equipped to allow researchers the opportunity to study discourse and framing in a variety of discursive contexts (Babbie 1999). They allow researchers to account for and delve into the nuanced and divergent ways that participants engage in meaning-making processes, as opposed to quantitative approaches that would perhaps seek to streamline small differences or “noise” in the data to speak to larger overall trends and direct relationships (Babbie 1999; Sofaer 1999; Cheek 2004). Scholars highlight the value of qualitative research methods for studies that seek to highlight differences among actors “with widely differing stakes and roles,” (Sofaer 1999: 1101, see also Cannella & Lincoln 2009) a characteristic that has been vital for understanding the voices and interpretive frameworks employed by my participants. This quality is moreover paramount for including and centering voices of key,

yet marginalized actors in their own words, a theoretically and methodologically significant aspect of this study (Cannella & Lincoln 2009).

Feminist Epistemology & Methodology

My research also follows in the footsteps of scholars that emphasize the importance of feminist methodological considerations in how power shapes knowledge production. Feminist research highlights themes of relationality, positionality, marginalized perspectives and knowledges, and strategies of resistance and survival (Smith 1990; Keller 1997; Collins 1998; Fletcher 1998; Tuck 2009; Reinharz & Davidman 2012; Tuck & McKenzie 2015; Montagne 2017). The legacy and insights of this scholarship have pushed me to not only interrogate and shape my methods to mitigate extractive mechanisms of knowledge creation, but additionally the direct linkages with theoretical questions of interpretation within my analysis. Standpoint theory has remained relevant throughout my research — informing not only the influence of my own standpoint as a researcher on data collected, but additionally shedding light on how the diverse positionalities of my participants might play a role in their own processes of knowledge production — a point that I will develop later.

Relationality is another primary feminist principle that is foundational to my research design. Through the concept of relationality, researchers work to re-contextualize subjectivities, ideologies, and practices within a larger field of social and symbolic interplay, solidarity, and contestation (Keller 1997; Fletcher 1998; Montagne 2017). In particular, Desmond (2014) encourages ethnographers to reach beyond the study of singularly-constructed groups as essentialized and bounded entities, instead seeking to study the web of symbolic and material relations and processes that connect and locate people in social fields. I draw upon these relational approaches in constructing my own ethnographic object, taking the field of relational discursive contestation as my unit of analysis. In

this way, I seek to resist the analysis of delimited groups in isolation, recontextualizing these processes and subjectivities.

Finally, I invoke the feminist commitment to centering agency and strategies of empowerment among marginalized communities (Tuck 2009). The plethora of scholarship documenting how undocumented and incarcerated people of color are marginalized has been invaluable to formulating a rigorous understanding of the violence and functions of current systems of immigration and incarceration (Bosworth & Kaufman 2011; Golash-Boza 2009a; Golash-Boza 2009b; Golash-Boza 2012; Golash-Boza 2016; Doty & Wheatley 2013; Douglas & Sáenz 2013). Yet, drawing on Tuck (2009)'s "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," documenting sites of oppression and mechanisms of brokenness is necessary, but insufficient to altering those systems. Indeed, Tuck (2009) leads us to understand how one-dimensional accounts of marginalized communities offers a dangerously limited picture of these communities: "the danger in damage-centered research is that it is a pathologizing approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community" (Tuck 2009: 413). In response, Tuck (2009) encourages researchers to engage in "desire-based research." This requires centering community modalities of survival, healing, and resistance: "Desire, yes, accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities. Desire is involved with the *not yet* and, at times, the *not anymore*" (Tuck 2009: 417). Tuck's approach has great potential to guide social movement research on hunger strikes by focusing on how communities wrestle with power, oppression, and incarceration, and actualize visions for the future. For the purposes of this research, I emphasize the symbolic means by which hunger striking detainees and their communities contest polyvalent hegemonic narratives that underpin existing structural arrangements, understanding the discursive realm as one site in which power is maintained and contested, and therefore as a crucial site for social movement mobilization (Lazar 2005).

I therefore center marginalized perspectives and knowledges by bringing in the voices of detained participants in hunger strikes (Smith 2002; Smith 1990; Sprague 2016). It is necessary to center the voices of those most impacted by carceral and immigration systems, and those most obviously at the center of resistance efforts in exploration of how these systems operate – and are contested – on the ground. Given that my study seeks to better understand discursive processes as mechanisms of contestation, my research design interrogates the role or lack thereof that detainees have had in shaping the public conversation and dominant discourses, to understand their unique strategies, and how from their particular position, they have influenced public discourse. For this reason, it has been necessary to directly engage with hunger strikers as key participants — as well as NWDCR — whose discursive frameworks and strategies are of particular interest given their centrality to the hunger strike and detention field, and due to their current marginalization within existing literature on hunger strikes.

Case Study & Site Selection

I designed this project as a case study, a research strategy that offers researchers the opportunity to undergo in-depth study of a particular setting and instance of a phenomena (Eisenhardt 1989). I selected hunger strikes at Northwest Detention Center with a purposive, rather than statistical sampling procedures (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Eisenhardt 1989). This site is distinct within the spatial and political geography of immigration detention. Located much farther north than the popular US/Mexico border immigration imaginary, NWDC is one of the largest detention centers on the West Coast and the largest owned by GEO Group with a current capacity of 1575 (Freedom for Immigrants 2018). Despite its powerful presence in the Pacific Northwest, NWDC is a young facility founded in 2004. The facility lies just beyond Seattle, a major metropolitan area that makes news as a ‘liberal haven’ and sanctuary city (Gregory 2015; Scott 2016; Prestigiacomo 2018),

not known for being a hub for detention and deportations, and in this way poses a theoretically interesting contradiction. The facility is also located within Washington, which along with California is one of the costliest states for immigration detention (Freedom for Immigrants 2018). However, by industry standards, NWDC is highly typical. As a private detention facility, NWDC is owned by GEO Group, one of the two largest private contractors with ICE (Freedom for Immigrants 2018). GEO Group receives the most taxpayer dollars of all ICE contractors, \$184 million dollars in 2017 (Freedom for Immigrants 2018). According to federal statistical data, sixty percent of immigration detention facilities in the United States are private (Freedom for Immigrants 2018). While it is not the objective of this study to make claims of generalizability and representativeness with regards to this site, NWDC remains a valuable site for study given its significance in the national immigration and detention landscape, both based on it being extreme, as well as its being all-too-common (Seawright & Gerring 2008).

Data Collection

My study uses semi-structured interviews, letter-based correspondence, and content analysis of news articles, Facebook posts and events, press releases and public statements, and video coverage of activist events and interviews with media. Triangulation of many forms of data is often understood and employed as a validating strategy through an emphasis on convergence (Campbell & Fisk 1959). Yet, triangulating across multiple methods can also work to reveal and “to place disparate findings in dialogue with one another” (Hesse-Biber 2012). Indeed, some researchers encourage the retention of “noise” in the data as theoretically fruitful and utilize methodological pluralism in order to achieve this end. Similarly, my research design allows for discovering different manifestations of a similar phenomenon, as well as more nuance and interpretative potential (Flick 1992; Seale 1999; Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil 2002; Perlesz & Lindsay 2003). In these ways, triangulation

allows me to construct a richer and more complete depiction and analysis of my findings. Methodological pluralism furthermore led me to opt for data collection methods that were both most accessible and most relevant for each set of participants, selecting for the key platforms of communication and framing utilized by each. Finally, qualitative triangulation across all the aforementioned data has enabled me to partially overcome the inherent limitations of any one research method, including institutional and ethical limitations to conducting research with vulnerable and institutionally isolated participants.

Sample Groups

I collected data to account for and sample among four distinct participant perspectives, namely media, detention officials, detainees, and activists. For each group, I selected and implemented methods based on their theoretical and methodological relevance, as well as the technical and institutional accessibility. For media, I conducted a media review of three major news outlets local to the research site, including the *Seattle Times*, a daily newspaper with the largest circulation of any newspaper in the state of Washington and in the Pacific Northwest region; *Seattle Weekly*, one of the area's major weekly newspapers; and *The Stranger*, a major alternative bi-weekly paper. Together these news outlets represent an array of media perspectives. My sample comprised a comprehensive review of all articles published between 2014 and 2018 that included coverage of hunger strikes at NWDC for a total of 28 *Seattle Times* articles, 11 *Seattle Weekly* articles, and 42 articles from *the Stranger* – a total of 81 articles with which I engaged in content analysis. This news coverage of the hunger strikes represents dominant media narratives, and therefore, in large part, the hegemonic narrative on the hunger strikes at large, as major news coverage is a common way for the public to learn about and engage a fairly isolated group. For my purposes of analyzing discursive contestation, I have sought to pin down this somewhat mobile target through the sampling of media

representations as an imperfect point of comparison, recognizing a more dynamic relationship between mainstream media narratives, so-called public opinion, and hegemonic ideologies than this method would suggest. Second, and relatedly, I use this sample of articles to draw detention official perspectives and discourse for content analysis. I constructed an account of official discourse with direct quotes from official public statements by detention center representatives, including ICE and GEO representatives.

The third type of sampling and data collection that I conducted was with people detained at the detention center who have participated in or been witness to the hunger strikes there. I engaged in an existing pen-pal program, tapping into a database of detainees at NWDC interested in finding pen-pals. I mailed all 23 people currently enrolled in the program with a request to participate in my study. From this initial pool, I received 14 ‘return-to-sender’ messages informing me that these detainees were no longer detained at this facility. I also received one direct response from a detainee declining to participate in my study. I also secured participation from one person through convenience sampling after being put in contact by another person detained at the facility. I ultimately secured participation from 8 different detained participants and collected a total of 15 letters about their experiences and perspectives of engaging in or witnessing hunger strikes at the detention center, for a final response rate of about 30 percent. I additionally drew upon 5 different official public statements issued by detainees on hunger strike for content analysis. I have assigned a code to each participant, as a way to preserve their privacy and confidentiality. In making reference to the words of my participants throughout my discussion of findings, I refer to this code (P 101, P 102, etc.) to identify the source of the quote.

In designing this study, it was important to center the voices and perspectives of detained hunger strikers themselves for several ethical, methodological, and theoretical reasons. Most scholarship on hunger strikes, and particularly hunger strikes and resistance in carceral contexts, is

rooted in macro-level quantitative data analysis, historical analysis, philosophy, and media-based content analysis alone (Sweeney 1993; Landzelius 1999; Waismel-Manor 2014; Wright 2014; Hagesæter 2014; Hopkins 2014; Bargu 2017). Therefore, I wanted to foundationally incorporate the voices and perspectives of hunger strikers themselves. Prisoners and undocumented populations pose both institutional and ethical dilemmas to researchers as vulnerable populations, partially explaining researchers' hesitations and omissions. However, from a theoretical perspective, by excluding the voices of hunger strikers, existing research seems to suggest that they are uninvolved in shaping hunger strike meanings and outcomes and are thereby implicitly robbing hunger strikers of agency. By incorporating data that explicitly centers voices and strategies of hunger strikers, I assume that they have a key effect on the formation of discourses surrounding the strikes, in spite of structural and discursive barriers. In this way it is my hope to work to more fully acknowledge hunger strikers, undocumented peoples, and prisoners, as agents through my research design.

One of the key ways that I gathered data with those detained was through letter-based correspondence. Harris (2002) writes about the use of this method as a valuable form of qualitative data collection in cases in which face-to-face interviews are inaccessible or problematic. Access to detainees at NWDC is institutionally challenging, if not impossible, and is furthermore problematic as it carries with it the potential for putting detainees at risk of retribution by detention center officials. For this reason, letter-writing offers an alternative avenue for hearing detainee perspectives and narratives. In addition, Kralik, et. al (2000) offer several significant advantages to letter writing. One such advantage is that this correspondence operates over longer periods of time, is less intrusive, and allows participants the opportunity to consider questions for a while at their own convenience before responding (Kralik, et. al 2000). Letter writing has the potential to offer more nuanced and deeply considered responses to interview-like questions, can be less intrusive in the lives of participants, and potentially increases participation and response rates (Kralik et. al 2000).

Moreover, the distance offered by writing letters can mitigate some researcher impacts. Because responses are not given in person, perceptions and effects of identity are possibly somewhat less pronounced. To this end, letter-based correspondence can overcome some research limitations caused by stigma or the engagement with sensitive topics. Participants often find it more comfortable to write openly about challenging topics than to do so when speaking directly to a researcher (Kralik et. al 2000). However, there are also some limitations. One limitation to letter-based correspondence is the inability to gather additional data that can only be accessed visually and audibly, such as body language and vocal inflections (Letherby & Zdrodowski 1995). Furthermore, while letter-writing is partially understood as an alternative format for interviewing, I found throughout the data collection process that, in contrast to an in-person or phone-based interview, delays inherent in a letter-writing process limit the capacity for researchers to ensure that participants respond thoroughly to questions asked and to probe for additional details.

And yet, from the perspective of a feminist decentering of the researcher, one of the effects of this lag was that I was unable to steer the conversation in a particular direction as would perhaps occur in a more formal interview context, and as a result, my participants had a much greater level of control over the topic of discussion. This left me largely in a position to receive the kinds of responses that my participants were interested in providing. Given that my primary analytic focus is on discourse and participant framing, in many ways this effects of the research process was advantageous. The letters I received implicitly highlight how detained participants frame and describe their experiences when given the opportunity to speak freely and specifically to those elements that are most salient and relevant to them. This is true in large part because they were not limited to simply responding to my own pre-determined questions but had greater freedom to write to me about whatever it was they wanted to say, which often meant not responding to my questions.

This was ultimately beneficial from the perspective that it reduced my ability to implicitly shape my findings.

Overall, I found my detained participants eager and enthusiastic to participate in my study. I have interpreted this response as stemming from a desire for the even limited social connection offered by this ongoing pen-pal relationship and the opportunity for them to tell their story in their own words to someone who would listen. In many ways, this enthusiasm ran counter to the institutionally-imposed reluctance to study this group stemming from their classification as a vulnerable group and the assumed risks stemming from this status. Yet, scholars have criticized this assumed link between the vulnerability of research participants and the officially determined risks associated with such research (Opsal et. al 2016). While it is certainly necessary to remain vigilant to the potentially exploitative nature of research encounters, Opsal et. al (2016) makes the point that this research paradigm is rooted in an institutional history of biomedical research and as such, is ill-equipped to adequately assess the range of potential risks and benefits inherent in qualitative social research. Opsal et. al. (2016) furthermore underlines the paternalistic nature of this approach, which partially denies officially vulnerable and socially marginal participants the opportunity to determine their own participation and thus to reap the potential benefits of participation. While the IRB limits consideration of benefits to material gains, participants often stand to benefit in other less tangible ways, such as “political empowerment or amelioration of social inequalities” (Bradley 2007: 345). Therefore, in addition to bringing these marginalized voices into the academic literature, I came to understand the potential for my data collection processes, and study overall, to benefit my participants in a variety of ways I could not entirely predict or quantify. Most importantly, participants exercise their agency by opting into research that might otherwise seek to avoid the challenges of incorporating their voices and by strategically engaging in the research encounter to their benefit. In this way, consideration of research risks and benefits to participants aligned with my

overall theoretical exploration in how these participants, as hunger striking detainees, strategically utilized discourse and discursive opportunities to shape understandings and meanings of their contentious action, including within the research process.

Finally, the fourth group whose discourse I study is Northwest Detention Center Resistance (NWDCR), a grassroots activist organization that was created in 2014 with the explicit intention of providing support to those detained at NWDC. As an organization that developed specifically as a community response to deportations and detentions, and to support detainee resistance efforts, this organization has participated in shaping the local conversation surrounding the detention center and hunger strikes, in large part being the voice of detainees on the outside. As a young organization, having only been formally in existence for five years, the group poses a unique methodological opportunity to engage in a quasi-exhaustive review of the group's public discourse. Although I conducted one semi-structured interview, the more central data for this study was digitally available content. In order to understand the group's discourse and framing strategies, I compiled and engaged in content analysis of 524 Facebook posts and 170 Facebook events from 2014 to 2018, 15 press releases, and 12 videos of public community events and interviews with media outlets over this same period. Content analysis of this social media is central to understanding NWDCR's discourse in relation to the other participant groups.

Content analysis is a particularly valuable method for studying the discourse of social movements (Baylor 1996; Stein 2009). Social movements often lack agency of representation within mainstream media and thus rely heavily upon alternative and self-guided media sources to communicate their analyses, actions and objectives (Stein 2009). Scholars highlight how the use of social media allows organizations a platform for building transparency and trust with various publics (Rawlins 2009). Furthermore, due to my focus on the discursive strategies and frames utilized by NWDCR, content analysis allowed me to tap into the more specific and intentionally crafted

language than what emerges in direct conversations or interviews. Indeed, these public and crafted forms of discourse are based not on my predetermined set of questions and what I assume to be relevant but are instead determined by these participants in these ‘natural’ discursive settings in which they are engaged in contestation. Content analysis of social media and other forms of public movement communications allows a somewhat ‘purer’ form of discourse to emerge than a manufactured interview setting would allow.

That said, I also conducted one in-depth interview with a NWDC Resistance activist. This was useful for drawing out framing, meaning-making, and discursive techniques *in situ* (Babbie 1999). Interviews are a valuable research method for gathering insight into the perspectives and attitudes of respondents, as well as the specific discursive tactics and processes utilized by respondents in a way that is inaccessible via other research means (Babbie 1999). Semi-structured interviews offer space for researchers to respond in the interview moment to emergent findings, as well as offering greater opportunity for the researcher to probe responses with great depth. Interviews create a unique opportunity for positioning the participant as storyteller, an approach that seeks to replace ‘stimulus-and-response’ perspectives of interviews that understand interview participants as merely communicating their actions and beliefs in a transparent way (Mishler 1986). Rather, this re-imagining of the method understands speech and language as actively achieved processes of meaning construction that draw upon larger symbolic structures (Kogan 1998). My one interview is not so important for how it reflects one person’s beliefs directly, but more so for creating a context for strategic and politicized discursive construction and engagement. Overall, my interview offers another data point to triangulate across multiple discursive settings and thus an additional vantage point for observing and analyzing discourse in action.

Limitations

Despite my deployment of feminist methodologies, there remained several impediments to eliminating power differences in the research process. Several feminist scholars have critiqued and complicated the assumption that simply through a reflexive desire to remove power from research that the effects of power can be truly and completely mitigated (Spivak 1988; Behar 1994). In particular, Spivak's work demands scholars attend to the presence of *the subaltern*, or those subjects who are totally outside of the social, economic, and political sphere of hegemonic power, and in particular outside the sphere of hegemonic knowledge production. Spivak's primary critique is rooted in the extent to which the bourgeois intellectual is persistently located at the unnamed center of their work as Subject, "the unacknowledged Subject of the West" (1988: 87). She critiques European — and presumably Euro-American — scholars who believe that they have enabled themselves to directly reflect the understandable voice of the subaltern. In doing so, Spivak argues that intellectuals continue to represent only their own version of the Other. While a generation of feminist scholars have insisted upon the need to excavate and highlight marginalized voices and, in this way, shape new theories beyond those representing dominant perspectives, Spivak complicates this impulse, insisting that to assume the ability to accurately and honestly understand, interpret, and represent what one is hearing from the subaltern is ultimately a form of epistemic violence.

Thus, a power imbalance between myself and my subjects exists and persists, perhaps all the more so because of institutionally imposed barriers to communication, and the extent to which I have positioned myself to speak on behalf of my participants while claiming to present their own stories and 'give them voice.' Rather than evade these complications by offering this reflexive passage merely as a thin disclaimer, or by picking a different research subject altogether, I have instead drawn on Behar (1994)'s teachings for a better theoretical path forward. Behar (1994) argues that, rather than rest at ostensibly mitigating the influence of power in the research encounter, researchers should be theorizing how their participants act as agents in strategically utilizing the

research situation, and their responses, to their own advantage. Behar (1994) urges researchers to go beyond questioning the validity and truthfulness of insights offered by their participants, instead questioning how their participants various responses are reflective of their positionality and strategic engagement within fields of power. In this way, the research encounter itself becomes a site of symbolic contestation and struggle, and thus a site of potentially fruitful analytic engagement for researchers. I have sought to incorporate this insight into my analysis of my own data and findings, in explicit and implicit ways. It is my hope that drawing on the insights of Spivak (1988) and Behar (1994) has and will continue to allow me to better navigate data collection and analysis with humility and better analytic precision.

Data Analysis

I used NVivo to code my data. NVivo is a data analysis software utilized frequently by qualitative researchers for the purposes of organizing and applying a variety of codes to multiple forms of data in one digital location. This software enabled me to better put various data forms into communication with one another and to easily move between different data sets. It additionally allowed me to visually apply various codes to data, to quickly and easily access previously applied codes, to recode in the context of other data, and overall to build broader themes from the meticulous comparison of various codes and data sets.

Drawing on existing methodological literature, I proceeded with coding my data guided by a set of questions I asked of the data in order to develop codes in a grounded way. Specifically, I utilized Critical Discourse Analytic approaches, with a focus on political discourse, that emerge out of the understanding of discourse analysis as a way to explore how abstract systems of inequality and domination emerge in practice and everyday life (Ramamoorthy 2011). Ramamoorthy (2011) asserts the significance of political discourse analysis, describing “the role of discourse in the instantiation

and reproduction of power and power abuse, and hence particularly interested in the detailed study of the interface between structures of discourse and the structures of power” (Ramamoorthy 2011). My coding process was guided in part by a series of questions drawn from Ramamoorthy (2011), including: “1. How are persons named and referred to linguistically? 2. What traits, characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to them? 3. By means of what arguments and argumentation schemes do specific persons or social groups try to justify and legitimize the exclusion, discrimination, suppression and exploitation of others? 4. From what perspective or point of view are these labels, attributions and arguments expressed? 5. Are the respective utterances articulated overtly? Are they intensified or are they mitigated?” (Ramamoorthy 2011). These questions helped direct my initial phase of coding and data analysis toward how discourse is organized, draws upon popular and alternate symbologies, and constructs the problem, possible solutions, and stakeholders.

I additionally utilized Versus coding, a technique that allows researchers to highlight tensions and oppositions between discourses and framings utilized and operationalized by different participant stakeholders. Saldaña (2016) argues that Versus coding is particularly useful for exploring power issues between participants, bringing to the forefront of the analysis “The actual and conceptual conflicts within, among, and between participants” (Saldaña 2016: 71). Given my theoretical interest in the many ways discourse is used as a form of symbolic contestation among various stakeholders, this coding technique proved useful in bringing these issues to the forefront within the data. Some prominent themes that emerged through Versus Coding were ‘*Protocol vs Justice*’; ‘Hunger Strikes as *Medical vs Revolutionary*’; Hunger Strikers as ‘*Not Criminals*’ vs ‘*Still Human*’ and Hunger Strikers as ‘*Detainees*’ vs ‘*Family- and Community-Members*,’ among others. I was able to

analytically contend with the presence of more than two oppositional sides via the incorporation of other additional coding approaches layered within and simultaneous to this approach.¹

I also used Descriptive coding in my first phase of coding. Descriptive coding is often understood as a generic and non-analytic coding approach that fails to unpack deeper meanings beyond the surface level of the data (Saldaña 2016). Nonetheless, for the purposes of my research, I found that descriptive coding allowed me to explicitly identify the primary topics that my participants were bringing into the conversation, and the processes, structures, and types of information that they referenced as relevant to the hunger strikes. This proved to be a vital first step for grounded data analysis and for bringing to the forefront both topics and framings that might otherwise go unnoticed, as well as those that were more unexpected or surprising, putting both at the center of analysis. For example, Descriptive coding allowed me to document the reoccurring and patterned emergence of references to ‘family’ and later develop a larger thematic argument regarding how these appeals fit into the broader discursive repertoires deployed by hunger strikers and their supporters. In this way, the process of Descriptive coding allowed me to document topics that arose at a basic level, and in this way, take notice in moments that might otherwise fall into the background as not clearly linked to my theoretical questions and assumptions – a necessary characteristic of grounded theory approaches.

Finally, a key component of my first phase of data analysis was my use of In Vivo coding. In Vivo coding consists of the verbatim extraction of words and phrases from data transcripts and

¹ In writing my results, I have been forced to grapple with the political and theoretical implications of my own word choices, in selecting how to refer to participants and the detention center itself. Embedded within this discursive analysis of how my participants strategically draw upon key rhetorics to frame themselves and their causes and concerns, I have had to make politically and theoretically loaded choices. Through this thesis I use a variety of languages to refer to detained participants, including ‘hunger strikers’, ‘detainees’, ‘detained hunger strikers’, etc. I additionally use different terms to refer to NWDC, including ‘detention center’ and ‘detention facility’, but these terms are contested, including by those who argue it should more properly be called an ‘immigrant prison’ or ‘the Tacoma Cages’. I highlight this point here as a way to avoid reifying any one categorization and to remain transparent about the choices made in this setting, yet retain clarity in my discussion and references.

the production of codes from them (Saldaña 2016). In Vivo coding “can provide a crucial check on whether you have grasped what is significant” to the participant and may help crystallize and condense meanings” (Charmaz 2014: 135). Furthermore, methodologists highlight the unique role of In Vivo coding in preserving “a subculture’s unique vocabulary” and fundamentally as an approach that allows researchers to “prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (Saldaña 2016: 106). Beyond its capacity to preserve colloquialisms, In Vivo coding helps identify ideological and strategically crafted language. Thus, In Vivo is vital for discourse analysis in which it is not merely the thematic content of discourse, but the specific words themselves, which are of theoretical interest. In practice, this looked like drawing on hashtags and catchphrases that continually re-emerged within social media communications, such as #ChingaLaMigra and #AbolishICE, as well as the reoccurring words as contained within public statements by detention officials regarding the hunger strikes, such as repeated references to ‘hunger strike protocol’.

In my second round of data analysis I underwent the reorganization of my codes and the deepening and development of subcoding schemes. Subcoding allowed me to highlight the intercode tensions, consistencies, and discrepancies within and between participant groups. The development of subcodes revealed the various discursive approaches, framings, and strategies contained within seemingly the same topics and language. My use of subcoding allowed me to deepen and explore the nuances within codes and therefore to move toward the development of broader themes and more complex theoretical findings. These include the ways that, by subcoding ‘Legal and Rights-based’ as including ‘Illegal’, ‘Not Criminal’, ‘human rights’, ‘free speech’, and ‘ICE is Criminal’; this coding approach allowed for the realization of slippage and multiple applications and political conclusions *within* appeals to rights and the law, as opposed to flattening all of these appeals to one monolithic framing and meaning.

Throughout the first and second phase of coding, and in between, I engaged in analytic memoing. Analytic memoing is a crucial element of the data analysis process which “attempts to bring together disparate moments of detail work into more coherent meanings” (Saldaña 2016: 80). Through analytic memoing, I explored tensions within the data, reflecting on “the reasons why the opposition exists; to try to explain how the two oppositional characteristics may exist in the same empirical space” (Gibson & Brown 2009: 141). The process of analytic memoing was particularly crucial in making sense of nodes emerging from Versus coding, in which different and seemingly contradictory discourses emerged not only from different participant groups, but also within groups, such as seemingly contradictory appeals to ‘Immigrants Aren’t Criminals’, ‘Worse than Prison’ and ‘No One is Criminal’ and ‘No one Deserves This.’ In this way, memoing was necessary to the development of nuanced themes and relationships within and across codes. Memoing has furthermore been an iterative process crucial to the development and re-development of codes, allowing me a space to continually challenge my assumptions and initial interpretations; as my assumptions were challenged and I reflected on this experience, new interpretations and themes emerged.

Through this process of research design, data collection, and data analysis, I was able to develop a number of themes and, ultimately, piece together these themes to build an overall analytic argument about how various participant actors connected to the hunger strikes drew upon different discursive frames strategically to build power. In this sense, through the research process, I was able to build and refine an argument that goes beyond describing the discourses that various participant groups used, to reflecting upon the strategic nature of these discourses and how they fit into and drew upon broader fields of power, an argument which I will outline and develop in the following section.

FINDINGS

BACKGROUND

Legions of scholars have documented the expansion of U.S. carceral systems, drawing links between the exponential rise in incarceration rates, the rise of for-profit prisons, and the corresponding rise in the indefinite detention of immigrants. For decades, the United States has been unique in its rates of incarceration, locking up residents five times more than most other countries, not including the detention of immigrants (Wagner & Walsh 2016). The number of migrants that are incarcerated within the United States has also been steadily increasing, with promises to up the ante through the contracting and development of additional detention centers (Wamsley 2017). In the first 9 months of the newest presidential administration, ICE arrested over 28,000 undocumented immigrants with no preexisting criminal record, an increase of one hundred seventy nine percent from the same period in 2016 under the previous administration (Miroff and Sacchetti 2018). Rates of non-citizen detention continue to rise in no small part due to the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act signed by President Obama, which allows for the indefinite detention of citizens and non-citizens alike (112th Congress 2011-2012). It is estimated that, as of 2017, ICE was detaining between 30,000 and 40,000 people a day at 205 facilities across the country (Campos and Cantor 2017; Network 2017).

The detention landscape has also been characterized by the merging of immigration detention and citizen incarceration systems. This is being accomplished in part through the combining of local law enforcement and federal immigration functions and informal means of cooperation (Cházaro 2012; Cházaro 2015). This is no less true in Seattle and Tacoma, where King County Jail “now functions as a gateway to detention and deportation for noncitizen residents of

Seattle” (Cházaro 2012: 133). Despite ordinances passed by Seattle and King County in 2003 and 2009 that bar city and county employees from acting on the basis of documentation and national origin, King County Jail has been intentionally exempt from these rules, making it a key site in the local detention and deportation geography (ibid.). The collaboration and intertwining functions of local law enforcement and federal immigration enforcement has also occurred through the development of more formalized programs to facilitate local law enforcement and ICE cooperation. These programs, and the informal mechanisms of cooperation, together create “a direct conduit to federal imprisonment and deportation for those noncitizens who come into contact with local law enforcement” (Chazaro 2012: 132).

Detention in the U.S., and in the Seattle-Tacoma area, is furthermore characterized by the rising use of minor charges to revoke immigration authorization, and to detain and deport non-citizens. As Bosworth and Kaufman (2011) have pointed out, many undocumented immigrants both serve a criminal sentence and then are transferred to immigration detention centers, which they refer to as "inverted double jeopardy." In these cases, a single undocumented person can be "tried once but punished twice" (Bosworth and Kaufman 2011). In these ways, immigration detention structures not only draw upon the prison model for managing migrant populations, but often tap into existing carceral resources and networks to facilitate the criminalization and extra-legal incarceration of immigrants.

One of the functions served by and driving continued investments in immigration detention is the role that incarceration and immigrant detention play in state-building (Martin & Mitchelson 2009). As physical, social, and political boundary-making mechanisms, borders and prisons operate as institutions of state sovereignty that are productive of political community, and these institutions and functions increasingly converge in the form of immigration detention (Whitt 2015). Immigrant incarceration operates as a state strategy of reorganizing raced and classed logics and bodies to

manage national identity and crisis (Mountz et al. 2012; Camp 2016). Incarceration is, thus, increasingly a central means of building power in the neoliberal state.

NWDC, and immigrant detention centers broadly, additionally play a key role in the realm of political economy. The rise of neoliberalism as the dominant political philosophy and policy framework globally over the last several decades has led to broad privatization and massive profits made by those invested in caging people (Mountz et al. 2012). Through this process, the for-profit prison or detention center operates as a cornerstone of the neoliberal state. Furthermore, private detention centers demonstrate that state power is *not* dwindling within neoliberalism (Wacquant 2010; Camp 2016). This is particularly relevant in the case of NWDC, as a for-profit detention facility owned by one of the two largest firms in the incarceration industry, alongside CoreCivic (GEO Group 2019).

Yet, neoliberalism is at work in shaping carceral outcomes in the Seattle-Tacoma area and across the United States beyond for-profit institutions alone, through its impact on global labor markets, its approaches to managing destabilized populations, and investments by in incarceration as a means of managing state crisis. Incarceration and deportation regimes create and regulate subordinate statuses, conditioning undocumented migrants into states of vulnerability (Whitt 2015). Alongside neoliberal emphases on deregulated markets, and rollbacks on labor protections and government oversight, criminalization and the very real threat of incarceration produce a more vulnerable, docile, and exploitable labor pool (Golash-Boza 2012). Carceral regimes relatedly operate as a central state response to unrest and crisis. Neoliberalism has destabilized communities domestically and throughout the Global South, as the liberating of capital has operated simultaneous to and largely *through* the destabilization of laboring populations, hitting communities of color and those within the Global South uniquely hard (Roberts & Mahtani 2010; Wacquant 2010a). In turn, carceral regimes stigmatize and control displaced workers through the criminalizing of mobility and

strategies of survival. This process of neoliberal restructuring produces profit from the fallout and dislocations of these people.

Hyper incarceration regimes also act as a response to state crises of legitimacy produced through both neoliberal transformations and the cultural and ideological contestations of freedom struggles. Incarceration functions as a management strategy to contain and punish freedom struggles reacting to social and economic crisis brought on by neoliberal transformations (Wacquant 2010a & 2010b; Camp 2016). Carceral institutions, and NWDC in particular, have developed and operate to stifle resistance by already marginalized communities. This function is particularly notable in the case of NWDC, considering the extent to which the Seattle-Tacoma area made headlines and became a major site in the anti-globalization movement in 1999 during the Battle in Seattle — a series of mass protests against the World Trade Organization’s Ministerial Conference and efforts to advance new free trade agreements (Wood 2012). This interpretation re-centers the role of insurrectionaries struggling to contest carceral development; contemporary carceral regimes are as much a state response and effort to contain freedom struggles as they are of profit-production through racially-stratified means (Camp 2016). Despite the neoliberal philosophical tenet of small government and the free market as sovereign, the state plays a crucial role in constructing and maintaining power and one key part of this has been the role of carceral institutions such as NWDC. In this way, it is critical to understand and analyze even private immigrant detention centers as a part of larger carceral regimes of state control, labor management, and profit production (Golash-Boza 2009a, 2009b & 2016), and to turn our theoretical attention to migrant resistance occurring at these sites, understanding immigrant detainees engaged in hunger striking as taking part in a long legacy of prisoner resistance movements.

In the following discussion, I argue that in order to fully understand the diverse forms of discursive contestation at play surrounding the hunger strikes at NWDC over the last five years, it is

necessary to trace the relations among key discursive actors. In the following analysis, I draw upon and analyze the discursive strategies and repertoires of four groups: the media, GEO-ICE, hunger striking detainees, and NWDCR. The hegemonic public discourse surrounding the hunger strikes, constructed through and represented by the news media, is characterized by a focus on the hunger strikes as a product of the Trump administration, and a benevolent, though limited and ultimately harmful, use of the frame, ‘immigrants aren’t criminals.’ The official account, produced and deployed by detention officials including ICE and GEO as representative of state-corporate interests, primarily draws upon discourses of bureaucratic rationalities, medicalization, and broadly, a reliance on denial and silence as a means of maintaining a monopoly on legitimate, symbolic power.

Yet, others contest these dominant hegemonic discourses through the power of hunger strikes. Some of the primary frames of detainees and NWDCR work to re-appropriate and reconstitute ‘immigrants aren’t criminals,’ and ideas of ‘family values.’ I argue that both detained hunger strikers at NWDC and members of NWDCR engage in complex, dynamic, and subversive forms of symbolic contestation which can best be understood by drawing on Chela Sandoval’s (2010) theory of differential consciousness. I demonstrate how the lack of discursive and ideological purity deployed by both groups demonstrates a strategic symbolic politics that eschews purity and ideological absolutism in favor of flexible and strategic framing that depends on political conditions and emergent needs. Hunger strikers and NWDCR select among discursive and symbolic tools that at times reproduces hegemonic discourses, also strategically resists and deconstructs neoliberal state power.

MEDIA

Local media play multiple, unique roles in the construction of the hunger strikes at NWDC, including operating as a producer and representation of hegemonic discourse and as a tool and platform for engagement and contestation among other discursive actors. The three news outlets — *Seattle Times*, *Seattle Weekly*, and the *Stranger* — have played a key role in constructing the hunger strikes. The media therefore influences discursive opportunity structures. Local media outlets offer opportunities for detention officials, detainees, and NWDCR to shape narratives around the hunger strikes and frame them in diverse and distinct ways; yet, they also pose a variety of challenges for hunger strikers and NWDCR seeking to shape dominant discourses and narratives around immigration, incarceration, and the hunger strikes. The primary frames drawn upon by media limit the conversation to more moderate, assimilationist problematizations and solutions, and frame out of the conversation some of the more radical rhetorics that NWDCR and detainees might otherwise draw upon. In this sense, media accounts of the hunger strikes establish the legitimate and authoritative boundaries of the hunger strike narrative, forcing hunger striking detainees and members of NWDCR to in some way grapple with the mainstream discourses and limiting capacities for absolute rejection of dominant frames. In the following section, I delineate the primary discursive repertoires invoked in media accounts to frame the hunger strikes at NWDC. These include an emphasis on the role of the Trump presidency and the use of the ‘immigrants aren’t criminals’ frame. In this section I argue that, while the media discourse represents a liberal, and generally sympathetic disposition, it also poses limits for detainees and members of NWDCR to challenge and craft hunger strike narratives beyond limited, binary, assimilationist frames.

Trump and Trump Alone

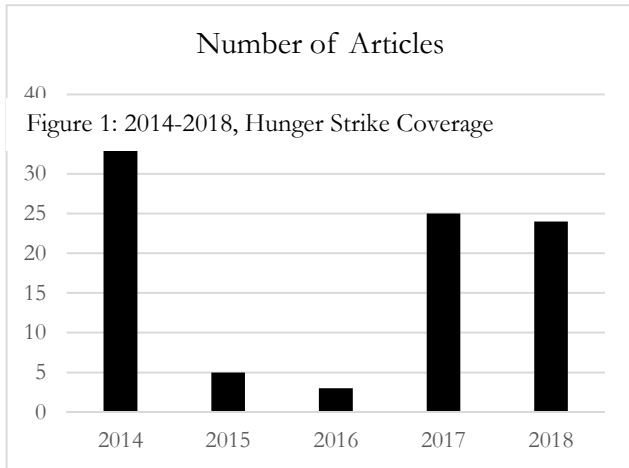
The primary frame the media uses to construct the hunger strikes at NWDC draws directly — and often exclusively — on immigration policy changes by the Trump administration. In 2017, one article stated: “The strike couldn't be more timely. It comes as the Trump administration moves to loosen regulations on immigration detention centers, including regulations on medical care, suicide prevention and solitary confinement” (Knauf 2017b). Through this lens, the hunger strikes are constructed within a political binary that portrays Trump as the source of unrest and as the problem-creator. Implicitly, through this discourse, Democrats, and Obama in particular, are constructed as politically innocent on the topics of immigration and incarceration, while demonizing and in some ways, scapegoating Trump alone.

The hunger strikes have at times been constructed within the media as a response to the cruel approach of the so-called Family Separation Policy. One article, in describing this context of the hunger strikes as NWDC, writes:

Trump’s family-separation policy has sparked widespread outrage, including from evangelical leaders considered a key part of his base. Just days ago, Rich Stearns, president of World Vision, a Christian relief agency in Federal Way, tweeted, “I don’t care where you stand on immigration America — but tearing young children out of the arms of their mothers and then warehousing them in ‘camps’ is sickening” (Shapiro 2018).

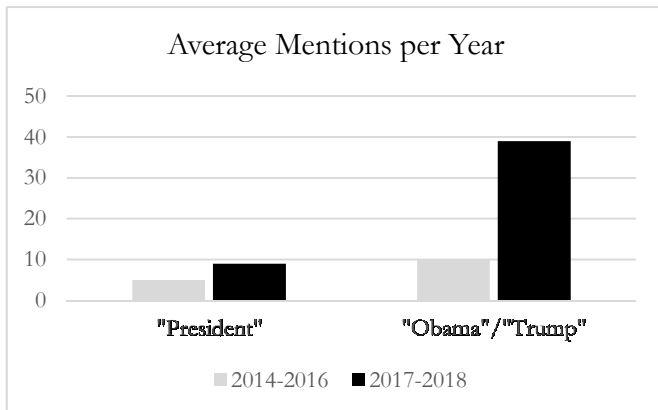
Media coverage, in drawing on the family separation policy as context for the hunger strikes, implicitly suggests that the problem with detention and deportation is the cruel separation of families and that state-sanctioned separation of children from their parents is a novel and new turn of events. This ignores longer histories of structured, state-sanctioned disruption of black and brown families and communities through institutions of slavery, residential schools among indigenous communities, domestic incarceration, and contemporary global labor markets predicated on the seasonal mobility of laborers outside their communities (Unger 1977; Hagan, Eschbach, & Rodriguez 2008; Chambers 2009; Williams 2012; Ngai 2014). In addition to this focus on Trump-specific policies, however, there has been a sheer increase in media attention and coverage of the

hunger strikes since the inauguration of Trump. The surge in news coverage of the hunger strikes after Trump took office in Seattle’s three major paper is notable, with only 45 articles in 2014, 2015, and 2016 together, and 50 articles in 2017 and 2018 alone.



In 2017 and 2018, the news coverage of the hunger strikes included seventy-eight mentions of Trump and eighteen references to the presidency in those two years alone, in comparison to just thirty references to Obama and fifteen mentions of the presidency across the previous three years, which, when taken together, constitute 62.5 percent more mentions in half as many years.

Figure 2: ‘Trump’ v. ‘Obama’ Average Mentions per Year



Through this uptick in media coverage the subtle implication for producers of news media and those who consume it is that the hunger strikes, as well as immigration, detention, and deportations more broadly, have only recently become a problem and are attributable to Trump's policies.

Furthermore, articles published during the period of the Obama administration are characterized by a distinct lack of detail in terms of identifying causes of the hunger strikes and demands of strikers, as well as any allusion to larger national-level policy drivers. One article published during the Obama presidency reads, in its entirety:

After six days of refusing food, the last four immigrants on a hunger strike at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma ate Thursday. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement says the four detainees had a few bites of breakfast, but remained under medical observation because of how long they've been without nutrition. The hunger strike began Friday with hundreds of participants refusing to eat in a call for better food, better treatment and an end to deportations. They also want to be released on bond while their cases are heard. The agency says that the four people skipped dinner Wednesday night in protest, but ate breakfast Thursday (Seattle Times Staff 2014).

The focus of media accounts shifts away from the broader political and institutional problems that hunger strikers go at great lengths to problematize, to the simple fact that there has been temporary unrest at one facility, and in this sense localizes the issue, rather than drawing on broader national policy as cause or explanation. The lack of causal identification furthermore implies that the hunger strike is, itself, the source of the issue and unrest, obfuscating the conditions that have led detainees to strike.

When articles between the 2014 to 2016 Obama years identified specific causes of the hunger strike, they tended to emphasize living conditions alone as the primary driver of unrest, as opposed to national policy contexts. News coverage used the terms 'policy' or 'policies' fifty-one times and used the terms 'nationwide' or 'national' forty-one times. This means that, on average, each article in that period used the first set of terms seventeen times and referred to national contexts on average 13.6 times per year. In comparison, in just the following two years, the terms

‘policy’ or ‘policies’ were used eighty times, or, on average forty times per year, and the terms ‘nationwide’ or ‘national’ were used ninety times, on average forty-five times per year.

Period of Publication	Term	# of Mentions	Average Mentions per Year
2014-2016	‘policy’ or ‘policies’	51	17
2014-2016	‘nationwide’ or ‘national’	41	13.6
2017-2018	‘policy’ or ‘policies’	80	40
2017-2018	‘nationwide’ or ‘national’	90	45

Table 1: Policy Context Mentions

Overall, media coverage of the hunger strikes took on a variety of emphases at different points, depending on who was president at the time. These emphases, when considered together, work to direct focus toward the harms created within immigration under Trump, while omitting and directing attention away from longer historical trends and policies of state-based violence enacted through deeply rooted structures and ideologies of exclusionary citizenship and criminality instituted under previous administrations. In highlighting this discrepancy, I point to the ways that this particular framing constructs the hunger strikes in a politically and discursively limited capacity.

Within a broader structure of political opportunity, these narrative shifts over time pose challenges *and* opportunities for hunger strikers and members of NWDCR. The increase in news coverage of the hunger strikes creates more opportunities to spotlight harms, and garner public attention and support; at the same time, the discursive focus on partisan politics and policies of the Trump administration restricts the public discourse to specific, recent events and policy changes, limiting opportunities for hunger strikers and NWDCR to frame the hunger strikes in more abolitionist, revolutionary means. We should understand the structure of political, discursive, and

mediation opportunity as creating and restricting opportunities for contestation along more complex lines than supportive and sympathetic, or not. Rather, political and discursive opportunities are structured in more multidimensional ways, including through imposition of sympathetic, but ultimately limited, normalizing and assimilationist discursive frames that force subaltern actors to engage in more dynamic, subversive methods of contesting narratives.

Immigrants Aren't Criminals

The second primary media frame of the hunger strikes is that of ‘immigrants aren’t criminals.’ Much of the coverage constructs hunger strikers, and detainees generally, as sympathetic by emphasizing their lack of criminal records. This framing draws upon dominant liberal democratic discourses of the ‘good’ immigrant that largely arises as a response to conservative rhetorics of immigrant criminality and therefore emphasizes the extent to which claims of migrants as criminal are, by and large, *not true*. One news article makes the case that, due to the myth of immigrant criminality, immigrant detention is economically irrational: “[It] wastes taxpayer dollars and makes Americans no safer. Detainees often are asylum seekers, refugees, human trafficking victims or individuals who overstayed their visas” (Seattle Times Staff 2014). This frame of ‘immigrants aren’t criminals’ is tethered to legalization strategies by mainstream immigrant rights groups to advance protections for undocumented migrants — “by deploy[ing] imagery of the undocumented as law-abiding, hard-working, and family-oriented—the ideal respectable candidates for an invitation into the protected sphere of citizenship” (Cházaro 2015: 358). Thus, the invocation of detainees’ law-abiding nature is linked to a broader set of rhetorical and legal tactics that construct hunger strikers and detainees as deserving of freedom and mobility on the basis of their being normatively sympathetic, ‘good’ immigrants. This discursive repertoire is furthermore rooted in a broader respectability politics and underlying notions of exclusionary citizenship that put the responsibility

on the immigrant to construct themselves and perform as English-speaking, well-educated, hard-working, part of a nuclear family, and non-reliant on public assistance.

In one article from 2014, the dual moral symbology of family and law-abidingness frame hunger striking detainees at NWDC as innocent and unworthy of detention: “Many detainees are fathers and mothers who have committed no crime, yet are being held in unacceptable conditions for a prolonged period of time” (Kiley 2014). What is particularly notable in this example is the extent to which this suggests that the *reason* that their detention and its specific conditions are “unacceptable” is because of their familial belonging and lack of criminality. ‘Family values’ became an established rhetorical platform of the U.S. political right in the 1990’s (Cloud 1998). Developing in this context, this language is rooted in deeply racialized and classed sexualized politics, constructing and invoking a specific and exclusionary neoliberal imaginary of ‘family’ (Cloud 1998; Collins 2000; Briggs 2018). Despite being a discourse that at its face champions and advocates protecting families, this discursive repertoire of ‘family values’ can simultaneously serve to justify the stigmatization and criminalization of black, brown, and immigrant parenthood and the reliance on public assistance (Briggs 2018).

Additionally, ‘immigrants aren’t criminals’ remains limited to a binary of good versus bad (i.e., criminal or otherwise deviant) immigrant, which produces harms for those it is intended to protect. This frame strengthens the underlying logics of carceral immigration regimes through the “the delegitimization of migrants by immigrant enforcement bureaucracies that transform them into plausible targets,” making those who cannot or will not fit into the standards of the good immigrant even more incarcerable, deportable, and deserving of their poor conditions (Cházaro 2015: 357). This media frame legitimizes and validates the logics that call for greater investments in immigration enforcement and detention in so far as it relies on the construction of the bad, criminal, and deviant migrant as a foil to construct the exceptionally deserving opposite.

This relationship and policy outcome is visible furthermore in the call within mainstream liberal immigration discourses for a crackdown on immigrants who break the law as an alternative to indefinite, arbitrary detention for all undocumented migrants, a rhetorical move exemplified in one article about the hunger strikes that emphasizes a “focu[s] on sensible, effective immigration enforcement that focuses on convicted criminals, immigration fugitives and those apprehended at the border while attempting to unlawfully enter the United States” (Le 2014). The dominance of the ‘good’/‘bad’ immigrant binary in public discourse in the development of policy, forces immigrants, or those presumed to be, to vie for inclusion into the political community on the basis of assimilation into these norms (Chávez 2010). The central media frame of ‘immigrants aren’t criminals’ and the broader assemblage of discursive moves within even sympathetic media coverage work to position hunger striking detainees as the ‘good’ ones, at the expense of those who cannot claim legal innocence or assimilate into these norms, and pose challenges for detainees and community activists to rhetorically engage outside this frame and call for more radical, structural solutions, beyond cracking down on immigrants who do violate the law. Overall, the hegemonic discursive frame of ‘immigrants aren’t criminals’ and evocation of the ‘good’/‘bad’ immigrant binary to frame the hunger strikes, focuses attention to the criminality – or lack thereof – of the hunger striking detainees and linking this fact to their deservingness – or lack thereof – of indefinite detention and poor living conditions; in this way, it delimits the conversation to the culpability of the hunger strikers themselves and whether their actions and demands are worthy of state-based protections or violence sanctions. As such, it directs attention *away* from harms caused by the state – the very thing that the intervention posed by hunger strikes makes possible.

As major local newspapers, this sample represents primarily progressive perspectives that nevertheless exist within larger national discursive contexts. By framing the hunger strikes, and immigration broadly, as a ‘Trump issue’, the hunger strikers and what it is that they are resisting

become much more narrowly defined and possible political solutions are delimited to a narrow range of alternatives. As a result, hunger strikers and their supporters are made less able to make deeper critiques regarding the nature of incarceration and exclusionary immigration as inherently violent and damaging for those defined out of normative ‘goodness’; there is little space within these dominant media frameworks for articulating radical structural solutions that hunger strikers and members of NWDCR might seek. In this sense, the nature of the discursive opportunity structure is not straightforward or clear.

The surge in media coverage of the hunger strikes under Trump furthermore indicates the complex nature of political opportunity structure. Broadly the theory of political opportunity structure centers the need to understand the support that social movements have within political institutions as a primary variable impacting movement activity and success. Yet, the above findings suggest a need for a nuanced interpretation of the structuration of political opportunity. Local media outlets were generally supportive of ‘progressive’ immigration reform while a charismatic Democratic president who spoke about progressive immigration reform was in office, yet media discourses largely refrained from engaging in critique of existing policy and their harmful outcomes and, were consequently less engaged in coverage of the hunger strikes at NWDC. The more explicitly racialized and criminalizing platform and discourse by the Trump administration has opened new political opportunities for hunger strikers and NWDCR to engage in discursive contestation. Under the Trump administration, it appears that media discourses have shifted to create new rhetorical space to directly critique larger political transformations and to frame the hunger strikes as a response to broader political contexts of carceral immigration, rather than constructing the story of the hunger strikes in an exclusively localized way. Nonetheless, media frames during the Trump years continue to spin a relatively narrow story that more easily critiques

executive policies, but still refrains from some of the structural critiques of exclusionary immigration, carcerality, and the hunger strikes at NWDC specifically.

Due to the structure of media and ideological production, the predominance of particular, limited narratives within mainstream public discourse, and the marginal position of both groups in relation to major media outlets and more broadly, hunger strikers and members of NWDCR often struggle to craft and contest narratives of the hunger strikes in ways that challenge dominant frames, even when engaged with a largely sympathetic media. For this reason, NWDCR, and through them, detainees, largely engage in contesting dominant framing of immigration, detention, and the hunger strikes through social media platforms which allow them greater control over the narratives they tell. Nonetheless, even through alternative platforms, these subaltern actors must carefully and strategically contest with an eye toward hegemonic discourses in order to be deemed legitimate. On top of this, major media news coverage is largely structured through the prioritization of official, authoritative accounts drawn from state-corporate actors, positioning GEO-ICE representatives as primary definers, an account that I will unpack in greater depth in the following passage.

DETENTION & STATE OFFICIALS

The ability to structure public debate is often largely limited to ‘primary definers’ and those with the most social power and access to the means of symbolic and ideological production (Hall 1978). This tends to include the structured collusion between corporate and government officials and major media outlets that centers dominant ideologies that reproduce structural imperatives. While the media and other powerful state and corporate powers should be understood as distinct entities, news media by and large draws on the narratives and ideology espoused by the ‘dominant definers,’ and this is no less true in media coverage of the hunger strikes at NWDC. Within media accounts, ICE and GEO officials are frequently called upon first to provide the official account of

happenings within the detention center. Media and politicians often circularly create the primary definition of the situation, not exclusively as a result of corruption, but also because of the structure of mass media production and the ‘fit’ between professional media ideology and dominant ideas. In the case of the hunger strikes at NWDC, state and detention officials develop and deploy official accounts through a few primary discursive repertoires, including bureaucratic rationalities and the medicalization of hunger strikes. GEO officials and ICE furthermore communicate through denial, refusal, and silence. These discursive strategies shore up their monopoly on symbolic power, indicating the structural challenges facing detainees and NWDCR for contesting dominant discourses.

Legal-Bureaucratic Rationalities

Bureaucratic rationalities and authority are primarily present in references to protocol and official procedure, official definitions of a hunger strike, and ‘industry standards.’ As a whole, bureaucratic rationalities are characterized by consistency, calculable rules, instrumental rationality, systemization and regulation, impersonality, objectivity, and efficiency (Weber 1946).

Official accounts that frame the hunger strikes through the language of protocol mirror bureaucratic mechanisms of control by the state (Carrabine 2000). GEO representations and responses to the hunger strikes, through reference to ‘protocol,’ invoke a language of public sector management, even as a private firm, drawing upon the state-like authority that this discourse bestows in order to quell public concern and detainee complaints about safety. ICE and GEO regard detainee exposure to harm and related hunger striker demands through a language of bureaucratic control and expertise: “ICE spokesperson Roman maintained that ICE followed proper protocol during the Simon Metals scrapyards fire” (Hellman 2018). Through this rhetoric, GEO draws upon and taps into the authority bestowed on state officials, even as a private entity

contracted by the state to deliver ‘services’ historically exclusive to the public sector. This extension of state legitimacy to the privately owned and run facility through bureaucratic discourses should be understood in direct contrast to potential reference to actual detainee health and safety outcomes, constitutional law, or even compliance with international human rights standards. What remains unnamed is the fact that such protocols are largely self-determined as a private entity and are largely unmonitored, unregulated by state or public bodies, and not subject to democratic decision-making processes.

Official accounts of hunger strikes also reference ‘routine’ as a means of restoring order. Bureaucratic organizational discourses and forms of control are characterized by stabilizing conditions in pursuit of efficiency (Weber 1983). As a means of characterizing the official response to the hunger strikes, one ICE official stated that the agency is "simply pursuing our routine" (Herz 2016). In this instance, the discourse of bureaucratic procedure and routinization is deployed as objectively organized and patterned to ostensibly deny potential or implicit claims of mistreatment, abuse, or retribution against hunger strikers. Implied within this official account and emphasis on routine and protocol is the claim that it is the detainees who are operating outside protocol and are responsible for disrupting the organized routine of the facility. The hunger strike itself becomes implicitly identified as the problem, as opposed to a symptom of larger issues.

Bureaucratic rationalities also frame the hunger strike through official definitions and procedure of what qualifies as a ‘true’ hunger strike. In describing and situating the process by which officiality becomes constructed, Bourdieu writes, “The thought of the bureaucratic thinker ...is pervaded by *the official representation of the official*” (Bourdieu 1994: 2, emphasis added). The state, working within and through bureaucratic rationalities, constructs events and itself via the language of officialdom and, therefore, as rationally and objectively constituted beyond the personal interests of any one person, group, or entity. Therefore, official definitions of a hunger strike oppose the

actively organized definitions by detainees: “They will also be advised about the protocols that will be instituted *should the threshold for a hunger strike be met*,” ICE said, referring to the 72-hour period to refuse food or nine meals in row that trigger a hunger-strike protocol and a medical response....calling it instead a meal refusal” (Hsieh 2017; emphasis added). This frame in essence sees no strike at all, but a “meal refusal” not meeting the official ‘hunger strike protocol.’ This definition and associated protocol ostensibly transcends any one particular hunger strike event through a supposed language of “neutrality and disinterestedness” (Bourdieu 1994: 3).

Through the process of renaming via official definitions, ICE and GEO reimpose control over the official narrative, and in some ways, the hunger strikes themselves. ICE and GEO also leverage these official definitions to disqualify detainee activities, renaming and redefining the hunger strikes out of existence: “In the past, ICE has disputed advocates' claims about hunger strikes in Tacoma, sometimes saying the actions don't qualify as hunger strikes because detainees still buy food from the commissary and other times denying that detainees are refusing meals at all” (Groover 2018). The goal is to contain resistance within the facility and regain control over the meaning of the hunger strikes.

Yet, ICE and GEO’s bureaucratic-rational discourses also reflect a neoliberal penal ethos. Within this neoliberal moment, the social state is deconstructed, rebuilt, re-empowered through carceral control operating through material and symbolic bureaucratic capital to naturalize and legitimize penal expansion largely through market logics and state sovereignty (Bourdieu 1994; Wacquant 2010b). In the discursive construction of the hunger strikes by official accounts, this merging of bureaucratic penal rationalities and neoliberal market logics emerge in references to ‘industry standards’ and internal ‘inspections’ as equivalent or perhaps even paramount to state regulation and as demonstrative of reasonable economic action. ICE and GEO emphasize their own internal monitoring and self-regulation in response to charges made by hunger strikers. They draw

upon the logics of reduced regulation by state bodies in favor of private and industry-based regulations and standards: ““The facility ensures that air circulation within the facility meets or exceeds required standards and provides access to onsite medical staff if detainees have medical concerns,”” (Hellman 2018). In this instance, officials constructs their legitimacy without the need for public and democratically-determined standards. Alongside this rhetoric, GEO furthermore institutes a language of “quality service” that most explicitly signals a customer service mindset, positioning those detained within the facility as ‘clients’: “The company insists it meets industry standards, providing “high quality services in safe, secure and humane environments, and ... strongly refutes allegations to the contrary” (Seattle Times 2017). Through this language, GEO further instills and normalizes market logics, alongside bureaucratic rationalities, to constitute detained hunger strikers as a group of disgruntled clients, as opposed to members of political communities worthy of state-based protections. In so doing, official accounts deployed by ICE and GEO further draw upon neoliberal market-based logics in *fusion* with bureaucratic rationalities of the state to frame the hunger strikes through depoliticized and neoliberal modalities that tether state and corporate authority via parallel rhetorics and in this way, strengthen state power within and through privatized carceral institutions.

Medicalization

The second primary discourse used by state and detention officials is medicalization. This individualizes and depoliticizes the hunger strikes, as well as stigmatizes and further de-legitimizes hunger strikers and their demands. In part, this is done by responding to demands and allegations of abuse by symbolically taking on the role and position of medical care provider for detainees. In response to the question of how officials were responding to the hunger strike, ICE described the medical care thusly: “The situation is very fluid... Detainees who formally declare their intention to

undertake a hunger strike will be transferred to a dedicated housing unit so they can be closely monitored to ensure their welfare” (ICE Spokeswoman quoted in Carter 2017). This language constructs the hunger strikes as a medical condition first and foremost, and hunger strikers as subjects in need of treatment — as opposed to politically engaged dissidents. In this way, state-based medicalizing discourses depoliticizes the hunger strikes and furthermore legitimate the transformation and re-assertion of hunger striker bodies as objects of state control by repositioning officials as medical service providers with authority to diagnose and determine treatment. Through the biomedical model, medicalization individualizes harms to hunger strikers, locating responsibility for harms to hunger striker bodies — whether through starvation, force-feeding, or other conditions — on detainees themselves. The biomedical model of illness and physical harm largely ignores environmental factors that contribute to harm, not to mention structural forms of violence perpetrated on populations and resulting in disproportionate harm to marginalized communities as a whole, instead focusing on individual-level behavior, choices, and symptoms (Cable, Shriver & Mix 2008). The state and corporate firms are relieved of responsibility or accountability for harms and violence, and therefore alleviated of the requisite to respond to hunger striker demands.

One manifestation of the emergence of the individualizing biomedical model is the construction of force-feeding as treatment. This frame allows NWDC officials to obfuscate responsibility for the harm to detainee bodies, as well as claims of torture and human rights violations. In particular, officials make claims about force-feeding as ‘medically necessary’: “ICE’s hunger-strike policy says officials won’t force anyone to eat unless it’s determined to be medically necessary and ordered by a court. ICE’s policy is to seek a court order to obtain authorization for involuntary medical treatment” (Le 2014). The characterization of force-feeding as a medical treatment, as opposed to a tool for squashing resistance, a means of torture, or broadly a form of institutional violence, works to limit the responsibility of the state for harm done in the process.

Medicalization models finally delegitimize detainee concerns and sacrifices, minimizing detainee and hunger striker experiences to individual medical issues as opposed to broader political indictments or rights violations. This reduces hunger striker bodies to their biology, an enactment of biopower that further subjects hunger strikers to the sovereign power of the state through paternalistic languages of the incapacity of the medicalized body. Through this construction, detainees are reduced to a state of bare life, in attempts by the neoliberal state to erase the possibilities inherent in detainee agency and through medicalizing discourses that officially constitute them as without the legitimate power to refuse.

Refusal and the Monopoly on Symbolic Power

Finally, official discourses from ICE and GEO frame the hunger strikes through denials, refusals, and silences. This power stems in part from the structure of media production, and the professionalization and privatization of migrant detention, which allows for a lack of transparency about events occurring within the facility. Through this monopoly, ICE and GEO are able to widely delegitimize the actions of hunger strikers simply by denying that a hunger strike is truly occurring, denying claims of retaliation, denying that ongoing fasts count as ‘real’ hunger strikes, or simply by refusing to comment: “U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials have repeatedly denied any retaliation” (Johnson 2018). By occupying the position of primary definers, state and corporate elites hold the power to decide whether to engage or not, in this way retaining narrative authority. Indeed, one of the additional means by which ICE and GEO maintain symbolic power is by limiting the capacity of detainees to communicate with outside activists and media: “Activist groups supporting them such as NWDC Resistance had a hard time keeping in touch; numbers were cloudy and information was scarce. This was because of ICE officers and their policies toward

hunger strikes” (Graham 2018). By silencing hunger strikers, ICE-GEO shape official framings of the hunger strike and maintain the upper hand.

This silence and refusal are part of a larger discursive framing of the hunger strikers as illegitimate through the simultaneous construction of the ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ hunger strike.

Bourdieu writes of social and political contestation as ultimately “a struggle over the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence,” understood as the power to dominate and refuse other definitions and meanings (Bourdieu 1991: 168). In this sense, at the crux of this struggle is the ability of hunger strikers to cast their own framing of the strikes as legitimate over and against the authority of ICE and GEO officials. As such, one of the overarching tactics of detention officials is to deny that hunger strikes are legitimately occurring at all, evinced in one statement by GEO regarding the hunger strikes: "Several other detainees have been randomly refusing the facility’s prepared meals over the last several days, but all of these individuals still have access to the extensive selection of food and drinks offered through the commissary," (Knauf 2017a). This frame questions the legitimacy of hunger strikers as truly engaged in self-sacrifice and, therefore, as legitimately engaged in resistance worthy of support. Through the discursive tactic of denial and refusal, ICE and GEO tap into silence as a unique capacity of power. As Foucault writes, “silence and secrecy are a shelter for power” (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 101). Through a refusal to engage transparently, state power maintains its position and the status quo. The burden of proof therefore lies on detainees and community organizers such as NWDCR to demonstrate harm.

In this section I have argued that the rise of carceral regimes generally, but particularly as a tool of border and migration management, ultimately always operates as a means of state-building. In the preceding analysis, I drew upon interpretations of various discourses as representing not a receding of the role of the state, but as a transformation, building, and sharing of state-like power with private corporate non-state actors, represented here within the discursive collaboration of ICE

and GEO. This symbolic and functional partnership indicates that the state is very much a present and engaged player in the field of contestation surrounding the hunger strikes. By contracting GEO in its carceral processes of border and migration management, the state transforms and shares state-like power and legitimate authority with GEO as a means of statecraft. This collaboration is evinced in the deployment of bureaucratic rationalities alongside neoliberal market-ethos discourse. GEO and ICE officials not only represent a united front, but a concerted effort to build neoliberal state power. Via medicalizing narratives, ICE and GEO furthermore reinstitute depoliticized power over the hunger strikers, subsuming the hunger strike under their own official authority. Through persistent refusal and denial – through silence – they maintain a monopoly on symbolic power. By identifying major ICE and GEO discursive frames, I establish the dominant state and institutional discourses of power which contribute to structuring the symbolic field and official narrative, and which hunger strikers and NWDCR must work to contest alongside the broader public discourses represented in the media. Together, these official discourses and the hegemonic public discourse within the media structure political and discursive opportunity for detainees and NWDCR.

DETAINEES

Debate over immigration occupies increasingly more space on the public airways and print media. Mainstream immigrant rights discourses have played a large role in shaping this public discourse and its discursive repertoires, primarily working to combat imagery and narratives espoused by conservative, white nativists. This frame primarily draws upon discursive frameworks rooted in decrying the illegality and criminality of immigrants, demonstrating exceptionality and deservingness, and emphasizing their capacity for hard work. As a result, this hegemonic framework delimits and shapes possibilities of symbolic contestation for progressive actors, including hunger striking detainees themselves, creating challenges as well as opportunities.

Overall, detainees at NWDC construct the hunger strikes through multiple and, at times, ostensibly contradictory framings through the use of differential consciousness. Sandoval's (2000) theory of differential consciousness offers a key tool for makes sense of this discursive dynamism, guiding understanding of how subaltern communities strategically work both within and beyond the confines of this material and symbolic power structure to establish legitimacy. Differential consciousness helps to make sense of the multiple, divergent discursive framings which detainees, as well as members of NWDCR, invoke. The theory describes a third space between quiescence to the mainstream oppositional discourse and an out-and-out rejection and resistance to it. Rather than understanding discursive positions as essential ideological standpoints, subaltern actors intentionally and strategically move between discursive frameworks, in the midst of dynamic political conditions. In essence, differential consciousness operates simultaneously as a survival strategy and a way to leverage symbolic power in shifting structures of political opportunity. This theory offers a powerful tool for making sense of detainees', as well as NWDCR's, engagement in multiple, overlapping, and at times seemingly contradictory discourses. I therefore trace how subaltern actors, such as detainees and NWDCR, can and do navigate structures of discursive and political opportunity and engage with hegemonic media frames, as well as those of officials.

I focus most on unpacking how detainees can subvert hegemonic discourses selectively and strategically by drawing on a diversity of rights-based and more assimilationist frameworks *and* more abolitionist frameworks to confer legitimacy and comprehensibility to their own political engagement. Among hunger striking detainees at NWDC, these positions emerge in the form of rights-based frames *alongside* framing the legal system itself as illegitimate; the 'immigrants aren't criminals' frame *as well as* the re-humanizing framing that 'nobody deserves this'; and finally, a nuanced re-articulation of 'family values.' The leveraging and deployment of multiple discursive repertoires, some of which appear at varying points to be in tension with one another, demonstrate

detainees' engagement in differential consciousness as a discursive strategy arising out of their unique subject positions and locations within the field of contestation.

Rights Discourse

Detainees use rights-based discourses and appeals to the law in order to construct the causes, meaning, and aims of the hunger strikes at NWDC. In some instances, hunger striking detainees talk about rights to describe the hunger strikes as a response to rights violations within the facility, painting the hunger strikes primarily as a means to ensure their rights be upheld: "We are on hunger strike in segregation because of how we are treated. The guards do not respect our rights" (P 106). Through the discursive repertoire of rights, detainees construct the hunger strike as operating within the law. As a community broadly criminalized at every turn, appeals to the law offer a powerful opportunity for detainees to grapple with and decry stigmatizing hegemonic discourses of 'illegality,' and position their own claims as having a kind of legal authority. Nonetheless, rights-based discourses rely on the authority of the state to uphold existing legal strictures, thereby working to discursively legitimate the state and its authority. In this way, rights discourses provide a legitimating path for detainees, while also reproducing the power of the state to confer this legitimacy.

Detainees also use rights-based discourses through the construction of the hunger strikes as a form of free speech, as a means of overcoming the silencing nature of detention. One hunger striker contextualized his decision to participate in the hunger strikes at NWDC in this way: "I was and Im been [*sic*] discriminated by these Ditution because they don't like people that speak up...they want to do whatever they want and wee are supos [*sic*] to stay silent" (P 101). Rights-based frames are hegemonic in the United States: "Nothing is more deeply rooted in the American political tradition than the vocabulary of rights" (Lacey & Haakonssen 1991: 1). Free speech rhetoric

constructs the state as arbiter of rights claims and protector of individual liberties, and, within this model, it is the state alone that has the authority to bestow these rights. In invoking this discourse, detainees reify state authority, reproduce exclusionary constructions of national identity, and are fundamentally rooted in claims to universality, thus operating through and reproducing assimilationist mechanisms (Stychin 1998).

Detainees additionally discuss rights, specifically as human rights, in order to construct their own participation in hunger striking and their experience in detention, thus framing the hunger strikes as a reaction to human rights violations: “What role activist groups played in hunger strikes? Well they gived us support and sent attorneys daylee [*sic*] to see so our human rights are not violated in any new ways” (P 105). However, detainees are somewhat limited, within this discourse of human rights, in their ability to make broader critiques of state and global neoliberal, colonial power and to construct their own activities outside the frameworks of discrete, interpersonal violence at the facility. Human rights discourses remain rooted in notions of victimhood of the marginalized subject and state paternalism and protectionism; through their inability to problematize the state, these rhetorics reproduce “the State’s monopolization over the means of violence” (Cabezas 2009: 154).

And yet, true to Sandoval’s insights regarding differential consciousness, invoking the hegemonic discourse of rights allows detainees to politicize their experiences within detention and immigration systems broadly through discursively legitimate means. This ‘rights-based’ framework allows detainees to construct themselves as recognizable participants under the law and within the public discourse, and to discursively produce the hunger strikes as over and against attempts by officials to construct them and their resistance strategies as lawless. As subaltern subjects preemptively stigmatized and criminalized in a variety of ways, the stakes are high. Butler (2009) identifies that, for the subaltern, the ability to perform in a recognizable form that aligns with established norms of embodiment and personhood governs one’s experience of precarity and ability

to receive protections, and to avoid or limit state-based violence. For this reason, detainees must work within established discourses for making political claims and establishing themselves as not only worthy recipients of protections, but as legitimate players within the field of contestation. Thus, detainees refuse the privatization and therefore invisibilization that their political and institutional status imposes and force the issue and their own recognizability into the public discourse.

Detainees' discursive deployment of 'rights' also goes beyond the discrete implications of rights-based rhetoric in order to stake claims that are *not* legally guaranteed or implied by these frameworks. Detainees work to discursively manifest and actualize these rights for themselves, as "a way of articulating a right to free expression, to freedom of assembly, and to the broader rights of citizenship by those who do not have that right, but exercise it anyway... expos[ing] the modes of disavowal through which the nation constitutes itself" (Butler 2009: v). As a subversive speech act, the hunger strikers *enact* a right to speak and be heard. As Butler articulates, "There is no freedom that is not its exercise; freedom is not a potential that waits for its exercise. It comes into being through its exercise" (Butler 2009: vii). Detainees, through the hunger strike and their framing of it, seize and project rights for themselves that are *not* guaranteed by the state.

Perhaps contradictorily, detainees use rights-based discourses to assert the illegitimacy of the state and of broader immigration and carceral systems. In one instance, a detainee described the great lengths he had gone to in navigating these systems, attempting to appeal his case, and ultimately being caught in a system that set him up to fail:

Seeing people like me who serve their time and then have to be detaned [sp] further or people who got picked up from the streets and as a result of that lost their job and all their possessions [sp] because there was no warning or given any time to put all your affairs in order. *Then there is a fact that the ligal [sp] process is boguse [sp]*. After six months you supposed [sp] to get Rodriguez bond. Well you get a hearing but no bond. You see it goes down like this. You go to the bond hearing in front of the same judge who denied your case in the first place. That means that judge won't really rull against themselves and grant you bond. So as a result your bond is denied period (P 105).

By delineating the vast network of damaging, counterintuitive, and improperly applied legal processes that shape many detainees experience of immigration and detention, this participant questions the legitimacy of the system. Some detainees draw upon a deep tacit knowledge of the immigration and judicial systems to contextualize the hunger strikes and their experience generally to demonstrate the inconsistency, irrationality, and illegitimacy of the law. This particular form of opposition demonstrates the double-bind of not having the luxury to disregard or refuse engagement with the legal system, while at the same time understanding from experience the extent to which they are set up to fail. This opposition between the broad hegemonic imperative to construct themselves through rights-based, legal logics, only to have this system fail them leads them to engage in hunger striking as an extra-legal means of resisting their detention, while drawing upon the discourse of rights and legality for legitimation.

Detainees also leverage the language of rights to politicize their experiences of medical neglect and harm as a form of state violence. While detention officials actively construct the hunger strikes and their own retaliatory force-feeding through frames of medicalization, detainees stigmatize the state through ‘rights’ talk. Detainees argue that their experiences of wrongful detention, medical neglect, and placement in solitary confinement, constitute human rights violations:

Detainees for human rights, immigrant rights. We are taking part in a hunger strike nationwide, demanding closure of this, detention centers. We are action in solidarity for all those detained wrongfully...now, warden is violating many human rights. Every Thursday he demand us to stand and salute him...Some detainees are on medication and cannot comply. So many that do not stand for him are being reprimanded and send to solitary confinement, for not standing up next to our beds as he walks in (Detainee Public Statement, quoted during solidarity rally outside detention center in 2018).

These human rights frames invoke notions of violence beyond the individual and interpersonal that harm an entire class of incarcerated people. In this way, the hunger striking detainees position themselves as actors with political belonging and inherent agency, as opposed to merely economic actors or ‘clients’ within for-profit institutions. By making the state responsible, the hunger striking

detainees shift blame from individual criminality or behavior, from vying for deservingness, to state and detention official culpability. This in turn helps to restructure the field of discursive and political opportunity away from individual worthiness and belonging, to harms produced by the state.

Immigrants Aren't Criminals//Nobody Deserves This

Detainees additionally frame the hunger strikes and their demands through the hegemonic progressive frame of 'immigrants aren't criminals.' In many ways, this discourse draws upon many of the same logics embedded within legalistic, rights-based discourses that draw upon the state as arbiter and protector of legality and criminality. As in the case of rights-based discourses, however, their engagement with this frame is characterized by hybridity, woven into their narrative alongside other, contradictory frames that refuse to claim legal or moral purity. Instead, a secondary discourse emerges alongside the first, working to direct attention back to the harms of the broader system and to make claims not based on innocence, but based on humanity and other forms of belonging. Therefore, a tension exists in detainees' framing of the hunger strikes both through dominant hegemonic narratives about the 'good' versus the 'bad' immigrants and visible attempts to resist them and shift the meaning of the dominant discourse.

Several detainees spoke about their experiences of migration, detention, and the decision to participate in hunger striking largely by decrying their implied criminality. One participant with emphasized, "My only crime is bein an Immigrant." (P 102). In essence, detainees work to counter conservative discourses of migrant criminality that stigmatize border-crossers as inherently "illegal." In a public statement from 2017 regarding their ongoing hunger strike, detainees wrote: "We came here fleeing from our countries so that we could be heard and to ask for help. We are not criminals, but we have been forgotten here" (Public Statement 4/2017). The reasons that immigrant detainees frame themselves as 'good' immigrants are clear; this is one of the primary logics organizing

discursive opportunity structures on the issue of immigration, and the pressure — and stakes — for migrants to effectively frame themselves and their experience as politically and legally innocent are vast. Nonetheless, one of the significant limitations of this frame is the implication it bears for those who have indeed committed and/or been convicted of crimes. In this sense, the hegemony of this discourse further limits their capacity for arguing against the violence they experience while incarcerated. To claim innocence in order to escape judgment reproduces this damnation for those who are incapable of doing so.

Yet, alongside this exclusionary rhetoric of migrant innocence, many hunger striking detainees also resisted this binary of migrant criminality and goodness by taking a third discursive path — arguing not for worthiness on the basis of innocence, but by framing the hunger strikes and experiences of detention through the alternative discourse that ‘nobody deserves this.’ One participant asserted, “I’m not trying to paint myself as this saint or anything. But I’ve paid my dues...We are not demanding this on a whim, but rather asking that you understand our unique needs” (P 106). We see an instance in which, rather than claiming purity, this detainee asserts dignity and deservingness via alternative logics that make space for accountability, forgiveness, and imperfection. We can see that some detainees challenge ‘immigrants aren’t criminals’ by decrying the imperative to prove themselves as one or the other. Merely by resisting the discursive imperative to qualify worthiness through the predominant frame, some detainees instead tap into broader abolitionist indictments of existing structures. This is to say, through the frame of ‘nobody deserves this,’ the focus shifts from the deservingness of individual detainees to the violations of the state.

As a criminalized, stigmatized subaltern group, detainees at NWDC have struggled to even get basic bodily needs and comforts taken seriously. This denial of their right to ‘creaturely needs’ operates as part of their dehumanization and thus, the demand for better food and clothing through a hunger strike is a political act of asserting humanity and personhood (Guenther 2015). One

participant articulated a clear understanding of the precarity of engaging in hunger strikes, speaking to the ability of detention officials to easily delegitimize detainee voices and forms of resistance through the frame of criminality: “Almost anything else could be called Riot or not following Directive Order that can be labeled as disturbance and possibility of charging as a crime” (P 107). In this way, the hunger strike is constructed not as politically innocence through the idiom of non-violence alone, but rather as a tactic that offers space for detainees to self-consciously navigate the double-bind in which they are held. The ambiguity of hunger strikes creates discursive opportunities for hunger strikers to not necessarily prove innocence, but to avoid being easily written off by officials and the public. While they are largely forced to construct themselves and their actions, in demanding basic necessities, as not fickle, as worthy, as respectable, we can see detainees as engaged in a dance of working within these hegemonic frameworks at the same time as they struggle to deconstruct them. Detainees are thus abundantly aware of how they are ensnared in a system that gives them very few choices, and how they must contest carefully and strategically — both through their framing of the hunger strike, as well as the hunger strike itself — in an attempt to resist criminalization.

Family Values

The final primary discursive strategy detainees use centers on language of ‘the family.’ On the surface, this reference may appear to dovetail with the language of the American political right over the last few decades. Within this particular political context, the discursive idiom of ‘family values’, while claiming the valuation of ‘family,’ ultimately works to construct and protect a singular, normative notion of the institution. However, when criminalized, undocumented, largely Latinx

detainees draw upon the notion of ‘family,’ they produce something very different. The invocation of family reconstructs detainees through notions of belonging and care. This re-articulation of ‘family’ occurs in part through the indictment of Trump’s family separation policy:

We are taking part in a hunger strike nationwide, demanding closure of this, detention centers. We are acting in solidarity for all those detained wrongfully, and in a stand together to help support all the women who have been separated from their children. We want to stop all the family separations happening today, for a lot of us here who have been separated and who have US citizen children...We demand from ICE approval of contact visits after 80 days. Our family and most detainees are not criminals, we are, um, no reason why we cannot hold our children after prolonged detention. *It is damaging to our loved ones to not be able to have a contact visit available* (Public Statement 2018, emphasis added).

This statement draws upon the media focus on family separations, a Trump-specific policy, to induce moral outrage by speaking to the harms of immigration policy on immigrant families. This discourse also capitalizes on the discursive and political opportunity to make demands regarding the sanctity of family. This discourse thus broadens the scope of discussion to incorporate harm on a community level, becoming thus another means of contesting discourses that construct carceral systems in isolating and individualizing ways, by drawing upon state-based institutional violence and calls for accountability that cannot be meted out and or reconciled through state-building carceral systems.

Detainees also work to constitute themselves as first and foremost mothers, fathers, and members of communities. Many participants describe their families, recounting experiences of migration primarily in relation to members of their family, and broadly speak about detention experiences through its isolating effects from their families and broader communities, and the family as inspiration to speak out. One participant wrote, “We have *families*, we have loved ones, and as humans *we do make mistakes*, but at the same time it is also in our human nature to learn from those mistakes. And all we ask is just an opportunity to fight for our *rights*, which is here since we invested so much time into this great country” (P 109). The discursive idiom of family, when deployed in the construction of the hunger strikes, hunger strikers, and their broader communities, allows hunger

striking detainees to construct alternate definitions of criminality, harm, and belonging, and to re-embed themselves symbolically within their communities. Some participants drew upon this discourse to frame the hunger strikes as not simply for themselves, but on behalf of their families and for other immigrant families separated by detention and deportation: “we cannot rely on Congress to do the right thing. They haven't done it, we know they won't, we've been used by them in their campaigns, in their political work, and *we are here for our families* and we're willing to risk everything because *these are human rights*” (Villapando 2014). By emphasizing a kind of human rights-based ‘family values’ they counter official discourses by flipping broader hegemonic discursive repertoires in the media and public opinion to articulate and seize a *right* to family.

Prisoners and detainees often cast themselves as moral and good in isolating and demoralizing contexts by centering relationships of care and by leaning into the roles of “mother” (Smoyer 2014), or in this case, Father, Uncle, and Brother. Through the hunger strike, detainees overcome the isolation of detention, especially if they have experienced retaliation in the form of solitary confinement. Food, and therefore hunger, are intimately linked to questions of care (Smoyer 2014). By hunger striking as a collective, detainees resist the paternalistic ‘care-like’ service offered by the state, primarily utilized as a means of control. In this way, detained hunger strikers construct themselves through notions of differential belonging (Chavez 2010) and thus, outside hegemonic frameworks of ‘family values’ and ‘the good citizen’. Through this differential belonging, they reject the logics of isolation and alienation and the cultivation of a sense of belonging outside of heteronormative nationalisms. Detainees claims of belonging operate as a third way, allowing them to overcome the discursive double-bind by which they are expected to frame themselves as innocent, pure, and worthy, by locating themselves within the trope of the ‘good’ immigrant and ‘family values’ — neither of which can fully embrace them, as these notions are fundamentally oriented toward the maintenance of raced and class hierarchies.

Detainees work within and alongside frames that exist outside of dominant binaries, in order to shift their meanings. Hegemonic discourses in particular are deployed to assert a new meanings and identity, while at the same time maintain broad legitimacy and recognizability. As Foucault observes, “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault 1978: 101). Through this lens, it becomes possible to interpret how, through the ideological tactic of differential consciousness, detainees draw strategically upon a multiplicity of different frames to create space for themselves within and to shift public discourse.

NWDCR

Northwest Detention Center Resistance (NWDCR), a grassroots volunteer group led by undocumented women of color, identifies largely with an explicitly abolitionist position in support of detainees at the facility with a shared name (NWDC) and in particular solidarity with those engaged in hunger strikes and resistance. Despite this radical position, their discourse is not always pure, absolutist, and easily definable as this espoused position might suggest. While much of their rhetoric centers on the need to end detention and close all facilities — not merely make them nicer places to live — at various points the group engages in additional divergent and ostensibly contradictory discourses. NWDCR, too, engages in differential consciousness as a survival strategy and a way to leverage symbolic power. By selectively and tactically drawing on a diversity of discourses rooted in both “equal rights,” and “revolutionary,” frameworks, the organization subverts

hegemonic discourse while also conferring legitimacy and recognizability to their own political engagement.

In the following discussion, I delineate how this group of community organizers and abolitionists engages with hegemonic frames. NWDCR uses ideological fluidity to shift the conversation. NWDCR works within the within a rights-based discourse, yet with subtle discursive modifications to ultimately work beyond and outside of it. Within references to rights, I identify a spectrum of frames and implications. Their multiple premises and conclusions constitute intentional and self-reflexive symbolic activity to move the conversation toward a revolutionary discourse, while at the same time tapping into more mainstream, legitimated framings. Alongside detained hunger strikers, NWDCR additionally engages in a discursive repertoire of ‘family values,’ which, while largely tapping into a conservative rhetorical tradition, becomes rearticulated as a means of resisting hegemonic discourses and their assimilationist implications.

Rights Discourse

One of the primary discourses deployed by NWDCR is legalistic and rights-based. Sandoval argues, “Practitioners of this particular ideological tactic [civil rights] demand that their humanity be legitimated, recognized as the same under the law, and assimilated into the most favored form of the human-in-power” (2000: 56). As such, the rights form of oppositional consciousness makes demands for treatment equal to that of powerful social subjects, and demands the state as arbiter and authority to extend rights. Rights discourses are primarily invoked in NWDCR’s narratives to draw attention to ICE and GEO’s failure to uphold the law and individual rights of immigrants and detainees. Within the most basic instances of this frame, they highlight the conditions that detainees are living in, but not necessarily the fact that they are detained in the first place. The implied solution

is greater legal oversight and improved conditions at the facility, possibly implying an expansion of the detention center itself in order to offer more resources and better living conditions.

In one Facebook post, NWDCR relays anecdotes of rights violations for migrants who ought to receive legally-afforded refugee:

Fourteen Cuban asylum seekers imprisoned at the Northwest Detention Center (NWDC) in Tacoma, Washington went on hunger strike on Sunday morning -- they refused to work, eat food, or drink any water.....Immigration authorities have certified all of them as having “credible fear” of returning to Cuba and having family members waiting to receive them in the US...one woman has vowed to leave Miami and travel to Tacoma to “fight for his rights... because I am afraid for his health.” Her struggle is a powerful reminder that these hunger strikers have family in the US who are concerned for their health, [and] angry about their rights being violated (FB post: 9/2/2017).

This post constructs the hunger strikes as a response to legal violations by the facility, and the premise of the argument is the failure of state and corporate bodies to meet the basic standards of constitutional rights and human rights guaranteed by law. Relatedly, members of NWDCR again raise the issue of healthcare conditions in the facility, highlighting the discrepancy between these conditions and those at other carceral facilities:

If you were in a federally run prison, you would receive much better medical care than you will in here. There was one person in detention who had cancer and was not getting the care that he wanted. And then once they determined that he really needed a surgery, they released him. ...They delayed for months the surgery that the gentleman needed (Video coverage of public event, 8/2017).

In this framing, members focus on the unequal treatment of prisoners at NWDC in comparison with treatment of those in federal prisons. As an assimilationist approach, this application of an equal-rights framework focuses on achieving access to protections for undocumented migrants that equal those of other, ostensibly more empowered subjects — that of incarcerated citizens. In these instances, NWDCR’s argument remains limited to inclusion within broader rights extended to incarcerated citizens, without a broader critique of the carceral system itself or the ways citizens within these facilities experience degradations.

At various points, however, members of NWDCR seem to go beyond arguing for better conditions on the basis of equal rights by drawing upon constitutional law to articulate a critique of retaliation experienced by hunger strikers at this facility and to argue for their right to engage in resistance:

Yesterday American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) lawyer Enoka Herat sent a letter to the Northwest Detention Center (NWDC) warden and the US Attorney of the Western District Annette L Hayes expressing concerns over the treatment of people detained participating in civil disobedience at NWDC. The letter emphasizes the right of people to refuse food and engage in First Amendment speech, which includes hunger strikes (FB Post 9/7/2017).

They frame the protest, to an extent, as uncontroversial, merely an appeal to individual liberties — that of free speech. In another moment, NWDCR proclaims of retaliation against hunger strikers, “[ICE’s] targeting of activists is anti-democratic and it threatens the free speech rights of anyone engaged in protest of ICE, an agency that sits at the forefront of the President’s anti-immigrant agenda” (FB Post 10/25/2018). Within these rights-based appeals, there is a kind of discursive slippage. Rather than casting this framing as essentially a liberal approach through appeal to constitutional rights, we should understand that, in the midst of an urgent health crisis for detainees, organizers draw upon existing legal protections for detainees and freedom fighters at large, in spite of the limited nature of such an appeal. We should not overlook the significance of couching revolutionary tactics within the frame of equal-rights, garnering broad legitimacy for an insurrectionary tactic of resistance. As with other examples of rights-based framing, the manifestation of differential consciousness is “ideology-as-tactic,” drawn from a “never-ending interventionary fund” for making political appeals and for garnering power and safety for subaltern subjects where and when possible (Sandoval 2000: 55 & 59). NWDCR highlights inhumane conditions in the facility as a violation of human rights, misapplication and arbitrary exercise of immigrant and refugee law, failure to uphold constitutional law, and inequality between detained immigrants and incarcerated citizens.

Within a broader use of discursive appeals to ‘rights’, NWDCR specifically draws on the language of human rights and, despite its complex location within discursive power relations (Cabezas 2009), the group uses it to garner legal legitimacy and moral authority. They provide an example of how subaltern and marginalized actors assert agency not only via rejection of dominant discourses, but also through a creative and subversive appropriation and deployment of that which appears hegemonic, but nonetheless contains within it possibilities for transformation. Sandoval (2000) recognizes the role of differential consciousness in strategically constructing oneself as authoritative to engage meaningfully in the field of symbolic struggle. Simultaneous to reworking hegemonic narratives of the hunger strikes, the facility itself, and the broader social and political context, members of NWDCR must construct themselves and detainees as worthy of being listened to by strategically navigating and capitalizing on discursive opportunities within media and public discourse. Through the mainstream legitimacy of the equal-rights framework, NWDCR, as subaltern actors, insert themselves into the public debate and work to overcome their subaltern status as undocumented women of color. This also means that their work to engage with and simultaneously challenge detention regimes through frames of both rights and more abolitionist imaginaries has implications for how they themselves are seen and understood by larger publics. In particular, as the primary voice for detained hunger strikes outside and in the community, the stakes are high for NWDCR to garner attention and support through strategic and selective discursive frames. Yet, as primarily undocumented migrants and women of color, they nonetheless must contend with norms of respectability and deservingness rooted in their social position and their knowing violation of administrative rules by remaining undocumented. NWDCR’s use of hegemonic rights-based discourses allows them to work within the tension of a desire and need to be politically heard, alongside their inability and perhaps refusal to assimilate into a normative, legitimate positionality.

NWDCR furthermore utilizes the ‘rights’ mode to come to alternate, abolitionist conclusions. In the following example, NWDCR again emphasizes living conditions within the facility as a human rights violation, with a particular emphasis on a medical crisis within the facility. In this framing, however, the line of thought is taken one step further — calling not only for improved conditions, but for the release of those with untreated medical conditions and the closure of NWDC:

Organizers and supporters will demonstrate at NWDC Sunday September 23 in support of hunger strikers, demanding immediate release of all those with medical issues including those with varicella or exposed to, and the permanent shut down of the facility that continues being a center of exposure to medical neglect and human rights violations (FB Post 9/21/2017).

While still restricted to arguing on the basis of legally-extended rights alone, the offered solution diverges subtly, yet meaningfully from basic reforms. The argument here implies not an expansion of the services within the facility to better serve detainee needs, but instead calls for a closure of the facility itself. We can begin to see how, despite a continually engaging with rights framing, NWDCR shifts the discourse beyond a call for a strengthening of regulation and enforcement of existing law to the project of abolition.

NWDCR additionally uses equal-rights to explicitly speak to the limits of the paradigm itself:

Today we held a vigil outside the Northwest Detention Center for the #hungerstrikers detained and a Cuban asylum seeker and hunger striker was released after indefinite unlawful detention! This kind of repression is what happens when we allow policy makers the discretion to decide who deserves human rights and who doesn't (FB Post 9/6/2017).

Here we see NWDCR not simply highlighting the fact that the law was broken and speaking to detention as unlawful. Rather, organizers begin to speak to how rights are inherently unequal, describing the law as unequally and arbitrarily applied, according to the discretion of the state. Additionally, by incorporating this skepticism, organizers of NWDCR begin to deconstruct assumptions rooted in classical liberalism. This rhetorical move opens up a discursive space for

speaking about the constructed and power-laden nature of labeling undocumented migrants as “illegal” while still drawing upon the limited existing legal tools at their disposal to advocate for detainee resistance and protections. Through differential consciousness, NWDCR, alongside hunger striking detainees, expand the scope of discursive and political opportunity.

Overall, there is a spectrum of premises within NWDCR’s use of rights-based discourse, including, 1) This facility is engaging in rights violations because of poor conditions and conditions within the facility should be improved; 2) Immigrants who are detained have fewer rights and worse treatment than that of legal residents and citizens, and should be improved to be equal to those of people incarcerated in federal prisons; 3) The facility and government is engaged in legal rights violations and the law should be better upheld and enforced; 4) Detainees’ right to engage in hunger strikes and protest should be observed as free speech; and 5) The facility violates human rights and should be closed, along with the release of medically vulnerable detainees. Through these interconnected, but flexible conclusions, it is clear that, NWDCR utilizes rights discourses to accomplish broader political goals than reform and assimilation, not only in spite of the hegemonic nature of these discourses, but because of it. Holding a spectrum of framings side-by-side, it is possible to simply, but wrongly, conclude that the organization lacks a discrete and consistent ideological and rhetorical framework or goal. The reality is more nuanced than this. Instead, we should look to how NWDCR tactically engages in specific and dynamic ways, to shift the boundaries of discursive opportunity and make space for revolutionary discourses within the mainstream.

Immigrants Aren’t Criminals//ICE and GEO are Criminal

NWDCR additionally engages in framing the hunger strikes through the ‘immigrants aren’t criminals’ frame, parallel to that of detainees. They use the terms ‘crime,’ ‘criminal,’ ‘criminality’ and ‘criminalization’ sixty-three times in various ways between 2014 and 2018, indicating a frequent

engagement with the notion of migrant criminality. Yet, these terms are invoked in a multiplicity of ways, various times in statements that ‘immigrants aren’t criminals’ and in other moments, to proclaim that ‘no one is criminal’ and in this way, simultaneously upending the logical underpinning of the frame itself. In many ways this discursive trope can be understood as an extension of legalistic discursive frameworks as elaborated above, and suggests additional avenues through which NWDCR draws upon dominant discourses prominent within media coverage that work to structure and delimit discursive opportunities. In one post, NWDCR writes, “Today we met with a hunger striker who is being held in prison-like settings for over a year even though they are not charged with any crime” (5/2/2017). Here NWDCR invokes familiar frames that decry migrant illegality and criminality as a means for further legitimating the hunger strike and demands of those fasting. In doing so, like that of detainees, NWDCR’s discourse is not altogether free of appeals to legitimacy on the basis of innocence and defenses against migrant criminality. These appeals draw upon one of the primary discourses operating to structure the hegemonic discourses within media – that of appeals to the ‘immigrants aren’t criminals’ frame. In this way, they draw upon those discourses that construct the field of discursive and political opportunity.

Yet, throughout their discursive engagement, NWDCR’s appeals to the law are not so straightforward as this moment might suggest, and they are not simply pandering to the dominant media frames. It appears that NWDCR draws upon these frames to arrive at more abolitionist conclusions. Their discourse flips the notion of legality itself on its head: “The immigration and detention system is a part of a broader dehumanization of migrants. There is no distinction between good and bad immigrant we are all human and deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.” In this sense, NWDCR reframes migrant criminality to constitute a rejection of state authority and bureaucratic rationalities imposed by official accounts, deconstructing and delegitimizing state and carceral power subtly and from the inside.

One form that this takes is framing not the criminality of detainees, but of ICE and GEO. NWDCR works to escape the ‘good’/‘bad’ immigrant binary, as did detained hunger strikers, by obfuscating the push to prove innocence altogether – instead pointing back at the state as violator of laws. NWDCR does so by arguing for the creation of community tribunals to judge GEO and ICE right outside NWDC: “As ICE takes me to court, I’m taking them to the People’s tribunal in our community” (Participant (P) 202), and by seizing the power of judgement: “We have the power to judge the immigration system, instead of them judging us” (P 202). This discursive maneuver reverses the gaze of power, “exercising a defiant ‘right to look’” (Wall & Linneman 2014: 140) and therefore to judge, and disrupts the state’s monopoly on symbolic and moral power. Members of NWDCR at several points explicitly draw on the language of criminality to speak to the constructed nature of this discourse:

you can't talk about immigration without talking about the broader criminal justice system and the incarceration of people in mass and that. You know, I mean I think there's a lot of things at play here, when you think about the prison industrial complex its one, both a direct impact of, you know, the history of racism in this country and targeting black and brown people. And then...there's also this sort of, you know, economic negotiation and the fact that you have this whole sort of system that is dependent on incarcerating people..in terms of jobs, in terms of companies that are involved. When you look at the detention system, a lot of that plays out in having all these counties that get funding from the federal government to detain people, and they're really dependent on it...yeah, detention exists...because it's such a key part of the expansion of the incarceration of people of color in this country...so that's the bigger extension of mass incarceration...and *criminalization* (P 201, emphasis added)

NWDCR also engages in judgement and deauthorization of the state in its efforts to “document” ICE practices by community members made fearful by their own lack of documentation. This reversal is discursively manifest in the reoccurring hashtag organized by NWDCR, “ICE Show Us Your Papers!” NWDCR contests dominant narratives of the hunger strikes composed within both detention official accounts and media frames by refusing the state’s monopoly on legitimate symbolic violence through the exercise of *unauthorized* synoptic power, and by therefore refusing the imperative to claim innocence. The logic goes, by highlighting the

criminality of ICE and GEO, and the extent to which ‘the law’ itself is lawless, legality and criminality itself becomes deconstructed.

NWDCR’s discourse of GEO and ICE criminality furthermore rejects fear-based discourses and respectability politics that charge immigrants and people of color with being respectable and assimilable enough to be worthy of state protection and inclusion, to be worthy of making demands. By rejecting the respectability idiom requiring immigrants to plea for innocence, NWDCR challenges the power of the state to judge and reconstitutes the authority of its members and of hunger strikers. NWDCR instead proclaims ‘Undocumented and Unafraid,’ dismantling the power that the trope of ‘illegality’ holds. The hunger strikes work broadly to delegitimize the authority of the state and to build broad legitimacy for hunger striking detainees and NWDCR to determine other means of community belonging and right to mobility beyond state-based authorization alone. NWDCR not only resists the gaze of the state that seeks to sort and criminalize undocumented migrants, and black and brown communities at large, but also reverses it by passing judgement upon the state.

Discourse of Family

Similar to detainees, NWDCR draws on a language of family to frame the hunger strikes, make claims, and contest dominant discourses. In particular, NWDCR’s counters conservative narratives that stigmatize and criminalize Latinx and immigrant parenthood, through the implication that immigrant and Latinx families are “illegal.” By combining this rhetoric of rights *in order to* criticize the state, NWDCR re-articulates it to claim rights that are *not* extended by the state, and in this way, positioning detainees over the authority of the state: “We’re gonna have more updates. Uh, especially José Ignacio that wants you to know, he um, sent us some pictures of his family. *He wants you to know the family that he’s missing and that is missing them and that he should have the right to be with them*”

(FB Video 2018). NWDCR amplifies detainees voice to delegitimize state power and invoke a power to summon these rights into existence.

Another particular articulation of ‘family’ as a means to frame the strikes induces moral outrage at Trump’s Family Separation policy to more broadly build a narrative beyond this isolated incident. NWDCR claims, "People forget that the separation of families has been happening since the inception of this country....genocide against Native Americans and for 15 years since the inception of ICE" (P 202). Another activist goes on to note the much longer, deeper, and broader patterns of state violence against families:

My problem is, if we can look at the indigenous people of Canada and recognize that the border came down on their back and create policy to allow them in, why aren't we recognizing our indigenous brothers and sisters...We're family. Brothers, sisters, cousins, aunties, uncles. And so, think about that and *what family means*, and for me this is important because as I hear about the Ute that are being ripped from their families, I'm reminded of the boarding school experiences with this government. Through forced relocation, which is how I got to Washington to begin with, we're stripped and sent to boarding schools. People in this detention center, having not only a husband and wife separated and incarcerated, but can you imagine having your children taken away? Think about that for a minute. And for me, that's why this matters (P 203).

In this articulation, NWDCR draws upon the hegemonic discourse of family, yet deconstructs these hegemonic discourses in the U.S. that claim to value ‘families’ and to protect children, instead reminding us all that “family separation isn’t new” (8/2/2018). Unlike the more assimilationist mode, this abolitionist mode does not turn to the state as its ultimate authority. Instead activists see a state that engages in violence against residents in irrational and arbitrary, yet patterned and authoritarian ways; through this lens, the very premise of state authority to incarcerate and enact righteous violence is illegitimate.

As “violence is at the root of empire-making” (Cabezas 2009: 141), NWDCR must find ways to narratively construct the hunger strikes through re-articulations of violence that do not rely on interpersonal, criminalized forms of violence alone, but shift responsibility back onto the state. They achieve this through a more abolitionist discursive form, as well as that of the rights-based mode, to

symbolically contest state power, from within hegemonic media discourses of family and through a reworking of notions of violence. This link is made visible in NWDCR's framing of detention and hunger strikes as one further instance in which organizers link the ongoing hunger strikes and retaliation to broader histories of colonial violence:

Homegrown terror is the product of a long history of colonialism, including state and vigilante violence. It is the product of white supremacy and capitalism, which deforms the spirit and fuels interpersonal violence...From the forced migration of thousands of young people from the island of Puerto Rico to Orlando, to the deadly forced migration throughout Latin America and the Caribbean — *we know this is not the first time in history our families have been mowed down with malice, and we stand with you* (FB Post; emphasis added)

The organization goes beyond speaking to state abuses at this one particular facility as an anomaly, and beyond Trump policies, instead linking it to ongoing histories of racialized state violence and describing state and institutionally-supported racial violence as the root of other forms of violence. By bringing in the language of 'family' the group shifts the field of symbolic contestation, making way for new perspectives and, therefore, possibilities for engagement.

All these discursive strategies suggest that, like hunger striking detainees, NWDCR taps into mainstream, dominant discourses to make space for themselves in the political debate to advance one of their ultimate political goals — that of an abolitionist imaginary. It is less important whether activist's language represents a 'true' or 'authentic' political position, or that one is inherently more representative of NWDCR's ultimate beliefs and intentions. Rights-based discourses and abolitionist, more revolutionary frames, are both used in the service of a broader political agenda. As such, Sandoval's theory affords greater intentionality and agency to political participants who engage at a meta-ideological level, self-reflexively selecting among discursive and symbolic tools to draw power from the colonial center, while resisting and deconstructing colonial power. By way of the kaleidoscopic engagement with multiple, dynamic discourses, differential consciousness allows NWDCR to not only play the symbolic field, but also to shed light on different elements of the carceral state, maintaining strategic salience for a specific set of points at any given time, within an

ideological framework that is familiar and coherent — while at the same time inching the conversation toward an abolitionist framework.

Political organizers of subaltern status typically are challenged to engage in a total rejection and refusal of the dominant symbolic order if they hope to be truly effective in contesting it (Hall 1978; Spivak 1988). As subaltern peoples essentially outside the power structure of the colonial state, they must strategically work their way into the sphere of influence by drawing upon elements of the dominant discourse, while at the same time maintaining a broader critique. By working to deconstruct and contest these forms of symbolic power from the inside-out, organizers of Northwest Detention Center Resistance, alongside and guided by the leadership of detained hunger strikers, work to shift their own discursive and political opportunities and re-write the dominant narrative about immigrants, imprisonment, and who has the right to make demands and be heard.

CONCLUSION

In order to trace a fuller range of outcomes, impacts, and possibilities of resistance, it is necessary to study hunger strikes through the lens of discursive struggle and symbolic contestation, guided by questions regarding the political process of meaning-making, discourse, and legitimacy. Contestations over ideological and discursive power are always, to a degree, the terrain on which collective action is fought, yet this is particularly true in the case of hunger strikes, whose capacity to shift power rely on how their purpose and participants can be communicated and in this way, work to confer legitimacy to their cause. The challenges and the stakes of public appeal and the ability to narratively craft a powerful story of why hunger strikers and their demands are worth fighting for are high, as neoliberal states accumulate greater monopolies of wealth, technologies of warfare, and control of mass media platforms. Power is most insidious when it culturally produces consent and its own legitimate reign, and media institutions and narratives are particularly important to this process of consolidating symbolic power, and also to its contestation. Through the power to define the “common sense” and that which remains unspoken — not subject to debate — institutional elites and the white supremacist, capitalist, hetero-patriarchal state maintains quiescence. Yet, through symbolic contestations small and large, overt and covert, hunger strikes challenge the dominance and legitimacy of neoliberal immigrant incarceration regimes, as well as create the sense that there could be something else.

Through my analysis of media coverage surrounding the hunger strikes at NWDC, I found that mainstream media sources, in spite of ostensibly sympathetic coverage, delimited hegemonic public discourses of the hunger strikes through a focus on the political context of the Trump administration and the reproduction of ‘good’ immigrant imaginaries. While the shifting political context following the 2016 election resulted in increased coverage of the hunger strikes and, in this

sense, increased opportunities for detainees and NWDCR to gain public attention, it simultaneously restricted the conversation to specific and recent partisan policy changes. These shifts led to a strategic, albeit contradictory use of social media by NWDCR to contest and shift hegemonic discourses.

Through this thesis, most centrally I demonstrate how hunger strikers at the Northwest Detention Center engage in discursive contestation, evinced through the dynamic deployment of a few primary discursive repertoires, including legalistic rights-based discourses, and in particular the idioms of migrant criminality and the ‘good’ immigrant, as well as that of ‘family values.’ Detainees drew upon these particular frames within and through larger discursive and ideological strategy best understood through the notion of differential consciousness. Members of NWDCR can likewise be understood as engaging in differential consciousness simultaneously as a survival strategy and a way to leverage symbolic power, particularly through rights-based discourses, and specifically leveraging the idiom of criminality in counter-hegemonic ways, alongside a re-articulation of the rhetoric of family.

Drawing on this analytic resource suggested by Sandoval (2000), we are able to arrive at a better understanding of how marginalized and subaltern communities exert agency and strategically shift discourse as a means of building broader symbolic and ideological power despite structural and discursive limitations. This strategic politics eschews purity and ideological absolutism in favor of a flexible and strategic deployment of symbolic frameworks at different times depending on political conditions and needs. I argue that we can see hunger strikers and their supporters drawing upon mainstream discourses, yet re-articulating them in order to make space for themselves in the mainstream political debate to engage in a discourse that is more effective for their ultimate political goals — that of revolutionary consciousness. There is no ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ political position. Rights-based assimilationist discourses and explicitly abolitionist frameworks are both used in the

service of a broader political agenda. I therefore move beyond canonical social movement approaches that clearly distinguish between framing activities and movement ideology in favor of a more complex, nuanced coupling of these concepts. This allows me to identify the agency of political participants who engage at a meta-ideological level, self-reflexively selecting among discursive and symbolic tools to draw power from the colonial center, while resisting and deconstructing neoliberal, colonial power. This kaleidoscopic engagement reveals that detainees and members of NWDCR not only play the symbolic field, but also shed light on different elements of the carceral state, maintaining strategic salience for a specific set of points at any given time, within an ideological framework that is familiar and coherent — while at the same time inching the conversation toward an abolitionist framework. By working to deconstruct and contest symbolic power from the inside-out, hunger strikers and organizers of Northwest Detention Center Resistance together work to re-write dominant narratives about immigrants, imprisonment, and who has the right to make demands and be heard, from the inside-out.

Future Directions

Theoretically this research suggests the need to expand understandings of political opportunity structure to better account for the role and capacity of social media to tell new stories within political struggles and, in this way, its role in allowing marginalized communities to define reality and make demands outside the stories told within mass media. It is therefore critical that scholars pay greater attention to the connections between theories of political opportunity and the lens of symbolic power and discourse, in order to flesh out both the objective structural and symbolic components of this foundational theory, and how these components interact. While it has not been the focus of this thesis to concertedly interrogate how social media restructures fields of symbolic contestation or disrupts monopolies of symbolic power held by institutional elites,

corporate media, and the state, this is a continually fruitful site of exploration for future research. In this way, the study of framing strategies by hunger striking detainees and undocumented women of color-led supporters in the community shed light on the capacity for communities disinherited of various material bases of building power to nonetheless forge a formidable resistance through creative, strategic discursive maneuvers.

I also found that state and detention officials drew upon discursive repertoires rooted in neoliberal bureaucratic rationalities to frame hunger strikes. These findings provide an empirical and discursive basis to the argument made in particular by Wacquant (2010b) that, rather than being characterized by recession of the state, neoliberalism has brought on a consolidation of state power in conjunction with corporate and private apparatuses largely via carceral regimes. My focus on how these transformations are culturally and ideologically manifest, through discursive analysis, helps identify how neoliberalism operates in and through expansions of the penal state. The focus on discursive markers of privatization as a consolidation of state power, rather than a rejection of it, requires further study and more dedicated elaboration. Correspondingly, my findings demonstrate a need to unpack how neoliberalism via carceral regimes constitutes a consolidation of white power via building up the white state and the white corporate elite. This thesis offers a jumping off point for considering these questions within the terrain of symbolic power and discursive contestation, and therefore asking how these transformations and consolidations of power operate at a symbolic and ideological level in addition to an institutional one. Overall, these findings offer hope and a theoretical path forward for understanding how, in the midst of a seemingly totalizing domination of state and corporate power, communities subject to this power can nonetheless resist, and discursively manifest a different possible future.

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APPENDIX I

Table 2 – Media Discourse Codes

Media Discursive Repertoires	# of Coded Instances
Immigrants Aren't Criminals'	36
Trump and Trump Alone	78

Table 3 – Detention Officials Discourse Codes

Detention Officials Discursive Repertoires	# of Coded Instances
Legal-Bureaucratic Rationality	36
Neoliberal Ethos	60
Medicalization	15
Denial, Refusal, and Silence	21

Table 4 – Detainee Discursive Repertoires

Detainee Discursive Repertoires	# of Coded Instances
Immigrants Aren't Criminals	38
Nobody Deserves This	22
Re-appropriating 'family values'	15
Rights, Human Rights & the Law	15

Table 5 – NWDCR Discourse Codes

Detainee Discursive Repertoires	# of Coded Instances
Immigrants Aren't Criminals	38
Nobody Deserves This	22
Re-appropriating 'family values'	15
Rights, Human Rights & the Law	15