

The Militant Suffragettes and the Politics of Self-Destruction

Abstract:

This paper, utilising archival documentation, aims to examine the Edwardian women's suffrage movement (1904-1914), exploring the relationship between the **politics of self-destruction** (namely hunger strikes) and the weaponization of life within carceral space. It discusses the findings of a critical discourse analysis focusing on digital documents – predominantly, newspaper articles and government/medical reports – found within the *Women of the National Archives* collection. The analysis discusses how modalities of self-destruction (namely hunger strikes) transform and weaponize the corporeal body – predominantly by embodying the principles of martyrdom and self-sacrifice; and through weaponizing the societal ideas of sex hierarchy. Additionally, a theoretical framework – coined **bio-sovereignty** by Bhat (2019) – is used to examine the ways in which the state, in turn, weaponizes the corporeal body through violence and disciplinary mechanisms within Holloway Prison, in order to delegitimise the women's suffrage movement.

Forcible feeding, as a response to self-destructive politics within carceral landscapes, employs [1] various modalities of scientific knowledge; and [2] a biopolitical hierarchisation of populations to justify, and legitimise, both corporeal violence and disciplinary-based mechanisms – serving to preserve the lives of protestors in the name of humanitarian action, while concealing and justifying the inhuman nature of its methods.

This paper concludes that both self-destructive politics (namely hunger strikes) and forcible feeding both weaponize the corporeal body – serving to transfer the *power of life and death* between various political parties through embodied protest and government response. As such, self-destructive politics (and the weaponization of life) raise future questions regarding political legitimacy - what kind of *life* is allowed to be political within carceral institutions?

Key words: women's suffrage movement, carceral geographies, self-destructive politics, hunger strikes, bio-sovereignty, political legitimacy, weaponization of life.

1. Introduction:

In June 1909, Marion Wallace Dunlop – a prominent member of the Women's Social and Political Union) stencilled the following statement onto a wall within the House of Commons: "*It is the right of the subject to petition the King, and all commitments and persecutions for such petitioning are illegal*" (Mayhall, 2003: 3). The statement originated in the Bill of Rights (1689), protecting the right of British subjects to protest the Government and King. For this act of vandalism, Dunlop was quickly incarcerated under criminal charges, rather than political ones – upon this adjunction, Dunlop began the first hunger strike of the women's suffrage movement (Howlette, 1996; Mayhall, 2003). Within mere days, other Suffragette prisoners – incarcerated under criminal charges – adopted the hunger strike method. In September 1909, Herbert Gladstone (the then Home Secretary) implemented so-called artificial feeding practices – wherein suffragette prisoners incarcerated within Winson Green Gaol (in Birmingham) would be forcibly fed through medical intervention (Mayhall, 2003). Thus, through the adoption of self-destructive politics, the Militant Suffragettes weaponised the concept of life itself.

This paper uses the term self-destructive politics to refer to the utilisation and weaponization of life – predominantly through techniques that directly cause harm to the corporeal body – to support a political statement or advance a series of political goals. This paper focuses on hunger strikes as a medium of self-destructive politics – referring to the voluntary refusal to consume nourishment, as a socio-political tactic to achieve some political goal through non-violent action (Scanlan *et al.*, 2008). Within the carceral landscape, self-destructive politics is often the only means through which an individual can reject their dehumanisation – transforming their heavily regulated bodies into weapons, which re-assert their political voice; and exert moral pressure upon higher state authorities. Thus, these discussions raise questions regarding which kinds of political life are seen as legitimate both within the carceral landscape and beyond.

Overall, this paper aims to chronicle the Edwardian women's suffrage movement (1904-1914), exploring the relationship between the politics of self-destruction (namely hunger strikes) and the weaponization of life within carceral space. As such, this paper utilises a Foucauldian understanding of power modalities – wherein life itself becomes an object of regulation within marginal landscape. More specifically, this paper will address and examine the ways in which the corporeal body was weaponized, by both Suffragettes and state authorities, within the carceral landscape. This paper begins by providing an overview of self-destructive politics, particularly enacted within carceral institutions, before further examining the ways in which life itself has become an object of regulation and weaponization. It will then go on to [1] examine the ways in which the hunger strike enabled incarcerated Suffragettes to reject the atomising and individualising force found within carceral space; and [2] the means through which state authorities used the corporeal body as a mechanism through which to politically delegitimise the women's suffrage movement.

2. Hunger strikes and self-destructive politics:

For the past two decades, there is no doubt that the corporeal body has played a predominant role in both feminist and geopolitical theories – exploring the body as both an object and subject of analysis (Moss and Dyck, 2003; Mountz, 2018). In particular, two strands of feminist geopolitics, focusing on conceptualisations of the corporeal body, have emerged: [1] the corporeal body as a means of investigating scales and patterns of power; and [2] the corporeal body as a site wherein notions of power are enacted (Mountz, 2018). Within discussions of political action and resistance, the corporeal body is often framed through the lens of '*embodied protest*' – a term referring to acts of physical resistance, ranging from feigning sickness to dramatic performances of violence (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004; Cassanova and Jafar, 2016).

The politics of self-destruction refers to the utilisation and weaponization of life – predominantly through techniques that directly cause harm to the corporeal body – to support a political statement or advance a series of political goals. As a technique of resistance, the weaponization of life encompasses a variety of practices that range from non-lethal injury (including, the practice of maiming, sewing of mouths, amputation, temporary starvation, etc.) to far more fatal actions of indefinite hunger strikes; fasts unto death; self-immolation; and various forms of suicide attacks (Bhat, 2019). Within this framework, it is very important to emphasise the role of the individual body – both as an intermediary stage for political action; and as a living being. In particular, the self-destructive act *utilises* the body as a key site of intervention, while *weaponizing* the *life* it contains. Acts of self-destruction allow protestors to “reclaim their position as human... even if they die [or suffer permanent injury] in the process” (Kaku, 2020: 587). Thus, in discussions of self-destructive politics, one cannot separate the individual act from the broader commentary, it makes upon metaphysical ideas on the meaning of life.

As an enduring form of self-destructive politics, the hunger strike exemplifies the themes of martyrdom and self-sacrifice that epitomise the weaponization of life. For Sharp (1973), cited in Scanlan *et al.*, (2008: 5), a hunger strike can be defined as a “refusal to eat to force the opponent to grant certain demands”. In presenting the hunger strike, Sharp (1973) situates the hunger strike as a fast of moral pressure – wherein the self-destructive practice forces the authority, and/or wider public, to examine their conscience while confronting the voluntary suffering. Thus, hunger strikes are “conscious attempts to exert moral influence” through the weaponization of life and human suffering (Sharp, 1973: 363). Similarly, Scanlan *et al.*, (2008) argue that a hunger strike involves the participant voluntarily refusing to consume nourishment, as a socio-political tactic to achieve some political goal through non-violent action. Thus, the core principle of hunger strikes – as a technique of self-destructive politics – is to raise awareness and, ultimately, correct a “societal wrong... an injustice so great that participants are willing to risk their lives” (Scanlan *et al.*, 2008: 20). Thus, hunger strikes – and more broadly, techniques of self-destruction – enable a seemingly powerless population to undermine an oppressive, higher authority.

Within carceral landscapes, hunger striking is the predominant form of self-destructive politics – being observed across the world, ranging from South Africa; America; and Israel/Palestine. Of these contemporary examples, the series of hunger strikes carried out in Guantánamo Bay – and the resulting artificial force-

feeding – have received the most public and academic attention. Since 2020, several waves of hunger strikes have taken place amongst Afghan prisoners, often detained without trial, in protest of physical, religious, and psychological abuse (Crosby *et al.*, 2007; Hasian, 2014; Bhat, 2019). In particular, inmates' religious items – including homemade turbans and the Qur'an – were regularly removed and purposely damaged by prison authorities (Velasquez-Potts, 2019). The initial waves of hunger striking ceased when Guantánamo's officials proclaimed that the institution would develop a 'detainee council' and would operate according to the Geneva Conventions – however, the hunger strikes soon re-started as prisoners were informed that the 'detainee council' had been disbanded after only two weeks (Velasquez-Potts, 2019; Bhat, 2019). For Guantánamo prisoners, the hunger strike became a means through which they could reject their dehumanisation – transforming their lives and corporeal body into weapons, to re-assert their political voices and exert moral pressure on higher authorities (Bhat, 2019).

In discussions concerning the politics of self-destruction, it is integral to discuss Foucault's thesis on differing modalities of power – as practices of resistance are, often, interlinked with the domineering form of power. In other words, practices of resistance – as well as participating subjects – are "shaped by the dominant characteristics of the prevailing power regime; and the technologies of violence it enacts upon its subjects" (Bhat, 2019: 54). In the case of self-destructive politics, the corporeal body (and the life it contains within) is transformed into a symbolic site of *embodied resistance*; wherein the corporeal violence that is perpetrated *against* the subject (i.e., protestor) is reflected back onto the state, through the practices of self-destruction (Hohle, 2010). Thus, Foucault's reflections upon the different modalities of power are an essential element in any discussion of self-destructive politics and protest – especially within the carceral landscape.

2.1 Foucauldian notions of power

For Foucault, the advent of democracy resulted in power becoming depersonalised from individual sovereign-leaders, transforming the '*people*' into the new objects of power. Through the rise of legitimised law and the appointment of democratically elected leaders, absolute sovereignty became overshadowed by a new regime – disciplinary power (Bhat, 2019). Under a discipline-based regime, the individual, corporeal body transforms into the subject and vehicle of power – the corporeal body becomes an object to explore, dominate and utilise. In other words, disciplinary power transforms the corporeal body into a machine, with the development of practices and fields of knowledge focusing on "its disciplining, the optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic control" (Foucault, 1995: 139). Under disciplinary power, surveillance becomes the mechanism through which power can be asserted upon the individual body – where a mosaic of coercion is used to identify, punish and '*correct*' the aberrant body (Glenn, 2019). For example, Bentham's proposed model of the panopticon exploits this mechanism through the coercive power of visibility – wherein prison cells would be back-lit and positioned in a ring, surrounding a central watchtower (Foucault, 1995; Glenn, 2019). Within the panoptic space, individuals are fixed in place, with each movement fully visible and recorded – resulting in individuals, in effect, 'governing' themselves and transforming the individual into a docile member of society (Bhat, 2019). In contrast to *judicial-sovereign* power, disciplinary mechanisms atomise and individualise, controlling the corporeal body through panoptic surveillance and institutional enclosure.

Since the 19th century, the central characteristics of power have transformed, from an atomising and individualising force to a modality that focuses on the optimisation of life. Biopolitics refers to a mode of power that focuses, predominantly, on the wellbeing of a population, transforming it into an administrative object (Foucault, 1990; Grove, 2013; Bhat, 2019). Through the creation of new areas of knowledge; and the regulation of a population's wellbeing (i.e., sanitation, urbanisation, immunisation, hygiene, etc.) and life processes (i.e., nutrition, sexuality, health, fertility, and mortality) biopolitical regimes of power transform sovereignty's '*to take life and let live*' into the power *to make live and let die* (Foucault, 1990; Foucault, 2007; Bhat, 2019). In other words, knowledge and biopolitical mechanisms (such as statistical population measurements) make a population *legible*, allowing for the identification and classification of various key biographical groups – creating a snapshot of the population, rendering it vulnerable to monitoring and

management (Kalpagam, 2000; Ruppert, 2011; Lemke *et al.*, 2011; Grove, 2013; Busse, 2015; Bhat, 2019). In particular, technologically enhanced identification practices (such as e-Borders databases; biometric passports; and health apps) constitute a new, contemporary means of biopolitical monitoring, allowing authorities to classify and standardise populations – to *make life* (Ruppert, 2011). Thus, biopolitical processes transform life, itself, into an object of administration and optimisation – from power over *individuals* to power over a *population*.

Bio-sovereignty is a newly established term referring to the ways in which the amalgamation of sovereignty; disciplinary; and biopolitical mechanisms within a singular landscape serve to conceal the utilisation of corporeal violence (and the broad mechanisms of death and punishment) behind a veneer of biopolitical narratives concerning wellbeing and the sanctity of life. Concerning self-destructive politics, bio-sovereignty is used as a justification - preserving the lives of protestors in the name of humanitarian action, while concealing and justifying the inhuman nature of its methods. Overall, *bio-sovereignty* can be defined as *practices that utilise biopolitical narratives, concerning the wellbeing of the population and the sanctity of life, as justification for the deployment of corporeal violence and disciplinary mechanisms*.

3. Methodological approach:

This paper, utilising archival documentation, aims to examine the Edwardian women's suffrage movement (1904-1914), exploring the relationship between the politics of self-destruction (namely hunger strikes) and the weaponization of life within carceral space. To achieve this research aim, this paper will address questions of: [1] how modalities of self-destruction (namely hunger strikes) transformed the corporeal body into a key site of resistance through the weaponization of life; and [2] in what ways was the Suffragette body subjected to Foucauldian notions of power within the Edwardian prison. In addition to these research questions, this paper will discuss how the relationship between the politics of self-destruction (namely hunger strikes) and the weaponization of life raises questions regarding which kinds of political life are seen as legitimate – who is '*alive*' in the eyes of the state?

This paper will employ a critical discourse analysis of digital documents found within the National Archives – particularly, focusing on the '*Women in the National Archives*' collection. The '*Women in the National Archive*' collection is a fully, digitised collection of primary source documents regarding the campaign for women's suffrage in Britain and the wider British Empire; biogeographical information on individual suffragettes; prison conditions and forcible feeding; parliamentary debates and committee reports; newspaper articles and medical reports.

This paper will employ a critical discourse analysis of digital documents – predominantly, newspaper articles and government/medical reports – found within the '*Women of the National Archives*' collection. This methodological approach involves recording important reference information; contextual information; textual analysis; and collecting discursive statements from the archival documents. Relevant key words and selected coding categories, will be used to search within the archival search engine, allowing for the identification of relevant documents within the collection. The key terms and coding categories, used for each archival search, will be recorded within a research journal – alongside the date of search; archival reference information; and any initial thoughts/connections to both other archival documents and existing literature. Discursive statements, collected from archival documents, will be assigned various coding categories (e.g., suffragist, forcible feeding, hunger strikes, etc.), before being further analysed through social, historical, and geopolitical contexts.

In reference to ethical issues – particularly confidentiality and non-maleficence – all documents used during this methodological approach were fully encrypted; and identifying information (i.e., personal names) of individual, ordinary people were change/removed in order to protect the participant's dignity and welfare.

4. The corporeal body and the weaponization of life:

In reviewing historical accounts, one can safely assert that the women's suffrage movement, within Edwardian Britain, derived its theoretical premises from Enlightenment philosophy and nineteenth-century social theory – in particular, the influential works of John Stuart Mills' *The Subjection of Women* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (Wollstonecraft, 1891; Holton, 1988). These two exemplar theorists both share a fundamental, *humanist* premise, that both men and women share common characteristics and attributes; and, thus, unequal treatment between the sexes is a great social injustice (Holton, 1988). For both Wollstonecraft and Mills, women's enfranchisement was built upon the assumption that motherhood was the most important, central element of a woman's life. For Wollstonecraft, artificial restrictions forced upon women (e.g., unequal access to education) disturb and hinder the creation of future, moral citizens – with women acting as the predominant “moral guides of children” (Wollstonecraft, 1891; Holton, 1988: 10). Thus, for Edwardian philosophers and social theorists, motherhood and the maternal, corporeal body was viewed as a natural, universal experience. Under such assumptions, the women's suffrage movement believed women's involvement in politics would enable the creation and development of a more *nurturing state* – predominantly, in the fields of education, healthcare, and support for the so-called ‘feeble-minded’ and poor (Holton, 1988).

On the other hand, the corporeal body became an essential component to anti-suffragist arguments – with the female body trapped within narratives of biological determinism. In 1913, Sir Almroth Wright (an extremist anti-suffragist campaigner) released his book *The Unexpurgated Case Against Women's Suffrage*, wherein Wright argued fervently against women's enfranchisement on the premise of so-called ‘essential’ physiological differences between the sexes (Wright, 1913; Jones, 2020). For Wright, the sexes were seen to have distinct, and separate, virtues and attributes, wherein women's minds were not “implements for the pursuit of truth, but [were instead] instruments for providing her with creature comforts in the form of agreeable mental images” – thus, due to her “intellectual defects”, women could never be given the parliamentary vote (Wright, 1913: 22-23). Similarly, other Edwardian scholars maintained that women's enfranchisement – in the form of the parliamentary vote – would divert women from their domestic duties – thus, reinforcing the link between the corporeal body; and its social, domestic role in Edwardian Britain.

The core components of essentialist, anti-suffragist arguments, thus, utilises medical and scientific knowledge (by the standards of the Edwardian period) to administrate and hierarchise the sexes, in efforts to employ control on both the biological lives of women; and the social, political role they play within broader society. For example, Wright (1913: 23) utilised scientific/medical reasoning – wherein physiological elements within the female brain would cause “intellectual analysis and suspense of judgement [...] to be felt as neural distress” – as justification for withholding the parliamentary vote from women. Thus, anti-suffragist arguments utilised biopolitical knowledge (predominantly, medical knowledge) as a means through which to control the lives of its female population – to illegitimise women as a form of political life. Through this, narratives of biological determinism render an artificial population into being – transforming pro-suffragist women into “unwomanly deviants”, and rendering the movement in opposition to “normal, feminine women” (Jones, 2020: 83). By branding the women's suffrage movement as the *social enemy*, bio-sovereignty opens the door for both corporeal violence and disciplinary mechanisms to *intervene* in the administration of the *suffragette population* – through incarceration within carceral spaces and state-mandated violence, in the form of forcible feeding.

In the case of the incarcerated militant suffragettes, hunger strikes served to exert *moral influence* through the weaponization of the maternal, corporeal body through its destruction – where the threat of maternal destruction (the supposed-moral guides of future generations) aims to generate political action. In other words, the use of hunger is effective due to the connotations of suffering, victimhood, and pain – wherein the corporeal body, alongside the *life* it contains, is weaponized in a “conscious attempt to exert moral influence” over a governing authority (Sharp, 1973: 363). One such form of weaponization was the adoption of political and historical narratives, brought to life through hunger striking bodies. In particular, in response to anti-suffragist claims, particularly those expressed by Sir Almroth Wright (1913), the WSPU began to

embrace historical and fantastical symbols of maternal, self-sacrifice – both [1] publishing essays, within ‘Votes for Women’, focused on examples of militant women through European and British history; and [2] utilising the image of historical women during suffragette processions, as seen in Figure 1. The most predominant figure of historical militancy, used for this purpose, was undoubtedly Joan of Arc – providing a model of strength and devotion for those enduring voluntary starvation (Mayhall, 2003; Collette, 2021).

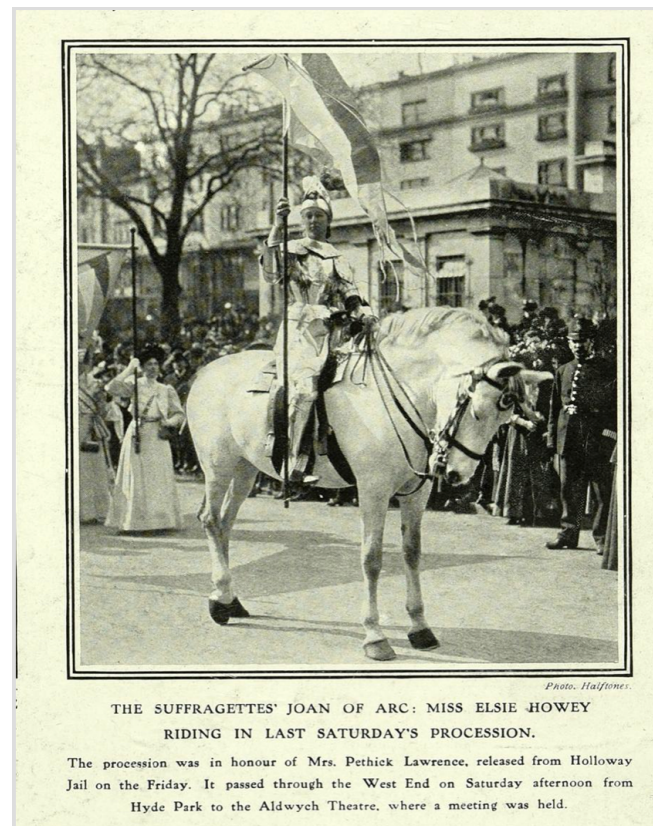


Figure 1: An extract from the ‘Illustrated London News’, depicting Elsie Howey leading a Suffragette procession on horseback, dressed as Joan of Arc (The Illustrated London News, 1909).

The figure of Elsie Howey wearing shining armour, while riding a white horse, became synonymous with celebrations associated with a suffragette prisoners’ release – and a subsequent end of her hunger strike. Thus, through the adoption of historical figures of female self-sacrifice, the hunger-striking suffragette came to *embody* the ideals of maternal, self-sacrifice – serving as the site, and narrative, through which the ‘humanist’ case for women’s suffrage can be rendered into being. Speaking at a WSPU meeting in 1913, Mrs Drummond (on behalf of the incarcerated Pankhursts) called upon militant suffragettes to “*sacrifice for a great cause [...] and declare their resolve never to surrender and never to submit*” – thus, *embodying* the principles of martyrdom and sacrifice found within these tales of historical, militant women (The Standard, 1913: 184). It is the very principles of martyrdom and self-sacrifice that inspired the militant suffragettes to “*endure the pains of starvation*” (Nevinson, 1909: 32). Thus, hunger strikes (within the carceral landscape) become a means through which the women’s suffrage movement can restore power into the female, corporeal body – weaponizing the societal ideas of the hierarchy of the sexes and, ultimately, reclaim their position as human.

4.1 Forcible feeding practices in carceral landscapes:

Prison landscapes (and their broader carceral systems and networks) take an active role in reconstituting the ways in which power interacts with the individual body – often providing a space, on the margins of society, wherein sovereignty- and disciplinary-based mechanisms can be enacted upon the corporeal body at both great intensity and minimal mediation. In particular, carceral spaces act as a mosaic of coercive forces – wherein the individual is transformed into a *docile body* through the mechanisms of visibility, atomisation, and repeated punishment (Foucault, 1995; Moran, 2015). For example, carceral landscapes remove choice and bodily autonomy from the individual – from spatial layouts that serve to hierarchise individuals, to strict

daily schedules – transforming the corporal body into a docile object, more suitable for administration. Thus, it is within carceral landscapes, that processes of bio-sovereignty become truly visible – where the veil of biopolitical concerns is lifted to reveal a far more complex entanglement of power.

From 1905-1914 (up until the outbreak of World War One), about 1,000 suffragettes – predominantly, from the ranks of the WSPU – were incarcerated due to political activities linked to the militant suffrage movement (Purvis, 1995; Purvis, 2005). During this period of mass incarceration, suffragettes were initially sent to Holloway Prison. However, due to a combination of [1] the sheer number of women being incarcerated for suffrage-related activities; and [2] the intensification of disruptive behaviour within Holloway, many suffrage prisoners were transferred to various carceral institutions around the UK (Jones, 2020). These carceral institutions included Winson Green Gaol (Birmingham); Maidstone Prison; and Aylesbury Prison (Jones, 2020). This spatial churning of suffragette prisoners can, arguably, be described as a weaponized form of mobility – wherein incarcerated suffragettes were removed from support communities, as a means of atomising the individual through a lack of permanency (Gill *et al.*, 2018: 187). Once incarcerated, suffragette prisoners were “*called to silence by the wardresses, locked in reception cells*” where the women were “*searched, ordered to undress and their clothes and possessions [...] removed*” (Purvis, 1995: 107; Purvis, 2005: 97). From 1909, incarcerated suffragettes were required to wear a prison dress, marked with the “*prison broad arrow*” – a symbol used to mark the property of the government, thus signifying that both their clothes and bodies were considered a form of property within the carceral institution, as seen in Figure 2 (Purvis, 2005: 98; Ash, 2010). Thus, the bodies of incarcerated suffragettes became a site of dehumanisation and discipline – wherein, a mosaic of coercions were asserted to create and maintain its docility.



Figure 2: Incarcerated suffragettes in Holloway Prison, between 1909-1910 (Jones, 2020).

In particular, Holloway Prison (the site of numerous suffragette-led hunger strikes) was designed, and constructed, in a ‘New Model’ design – serving to intensify disciplinary-based mechanisms. ‘New model’ institutions employed cellular confinement, designed to inflict a form of maximum visibility upon its incarcerated population (Jones, 2020). Such carceral spaces were influenced by the prominent work of Jeremy Bentham – a *panopticon* wherein incarcerated prisoners were isolated within separate cells, overseen by a central observation tower, as seen in Figure 3 (Foucault, 1995; Glenn, 2019; Jones, 2020). Within the panoptic space, individuals are fixed in place, with each and every movement fully visible and recorded but never knowing when or if they are being observed. For Foucault and Bentham, such architectural designs allowed for the isolation, regulation and disciplining of the individual corporeal body – rendering the prisoner docile through mechanisms of visibility; surveillance; solitude and silence (Foucault, 1995; Glenn, 2019; Jones, 2020). Thus, incarceration within Edwardian prisons served to *internalise* discipline into the

minds of incarcerated prisoners – transforming the individual into a more administrable object, optimised for its so- called place within society.

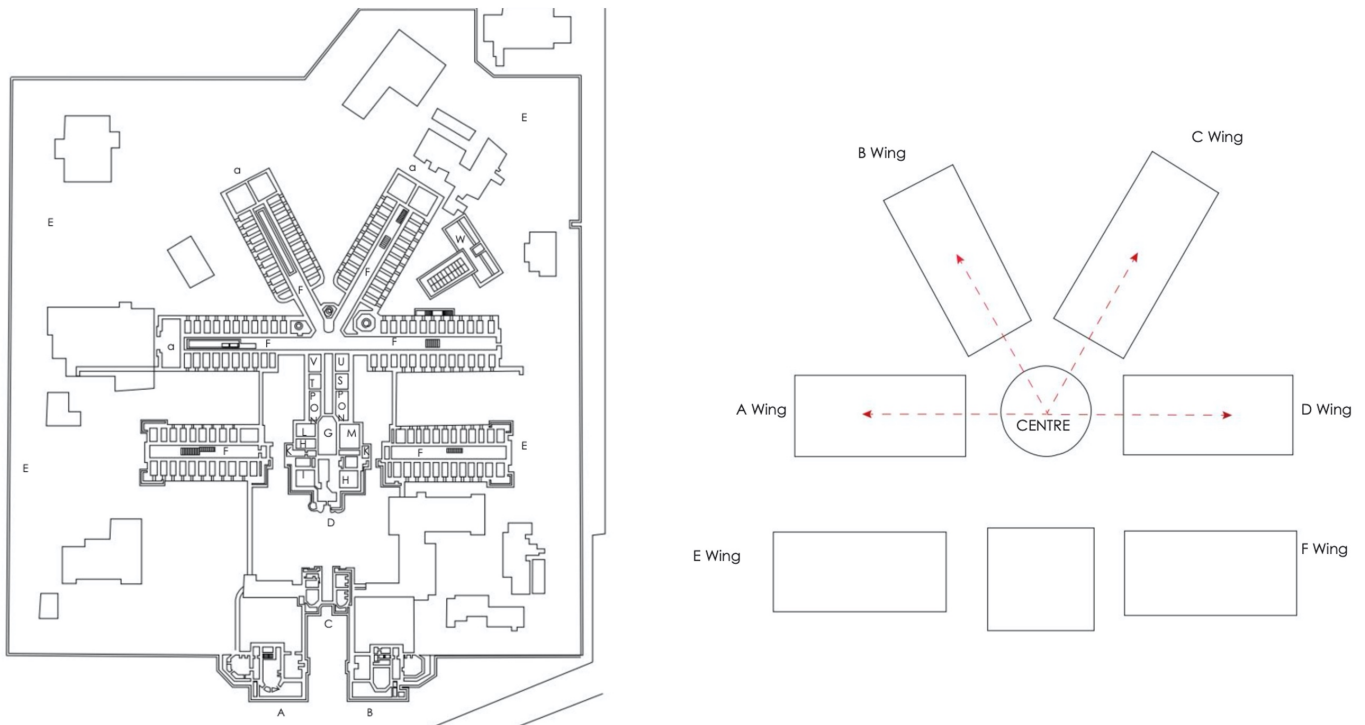


Figure 3: A floor plan of the old Holloway Prison; and an illustration demonstrating its similarities to the panopticon model (Cosmas, 2021).

Within Holloway Prison, incarcerated suffragettes participating on hunger strikes were subjected to forcible feeding practices – wherein the prisoners would be held (or tied) down to a bed or chair often by multiple wardresses and matrons. A male doctor would then insert a metal (or wooden) gag between the prisoners’ teeth (often causing injury to both the gums, teeth, and lips) to prevent the individual from closing their mouth, before inserting a thick (often rubber) feeding tube down the throat and into the stomach (Purvis, 1995; Howlette, 1996). In some cases, this feeding tube would be accidentally pushed into the windpipe, resulting in food being released into the lungs, instead of the stomach – causing life-threatening conditions (Howlette, 1996).

Within discourses surrounding the practice of forcible feeding, the responsibility for the act was often solely linked to the actions of the individual, rather than a decision made by the governing state and carceral authority– with various politicians asserting that *“it is by [the suffragette’s] own act that artificial feeding becomes necessary, and it can only be through their actions that it can become anything but a very trivial infliction”* (The Times, 1909: 30). Through this linkage (where the consequences of forcible feeding are placed upon the shoulders of the victim, rather than the perpetrator) the practice of forcible feeding is justified and legitimized under the assumption that women’s campaigning for their enfranchisement are *aberrant* and in need of *fixing* – thus, opening the door for both corporeal violence and disciplinary mechanism to *intervene* in the administration of the population. Additionally, governing authorities within the carceral system employed scientific/medical knowledge to grant legitimacy to the institution’s adoption of forcible feeding practices - by providing and publishing simplified, and often misleading, descriptions of forcible feeding processes. For example, anti-suffragist supporters would often employ medical professionals to write newspaper articles, dismissing genuine medical concerns as being unfounded or over-reactionary – often, to legitimise the adoption and continued usage of forcible feeding practices. The following statement is representative of numerous examples (found within archival documentation) of medical knowledge being publicised, as a means of ‘playing down’ both the physiological and psychological risks of forcible feeding:

*“What is the nature of the proceeding complained of? A soft rubber tube not more than 2/3in. in diameter, and with a soft, not a hard point, as stated by the Women's Rights Association, is slowly and gently conveyed from the mouth to the stomach; liquid food is allowed to flow along this tube into the stomach by gravity. If the patient refuses to open her mouth, a very soft fine rubber tube can be passed down one nostril and on into the stomach with **very little inconvenience and no pain**, and in skilled hands, **without the smallest risk or danger of any kind**”* (The Times, 1909).

Overall, under bio-sovereignty, the carceral authority utilises biopolitical *population construction* alongside various fields of knowledge (most predominantly, medical knowledge) as both [1] a means of illegitimizing the women's suffrage movement by weakening the ability of self-inflicted hunger strikes to exert moral influence; and [2] legitimising the adoption of forcible feeding processes by the carceral authority. In particular, the minimisation of the risks and dangers associated with forcible feeding aids the creation of bio-sovereignty-based narratives about to the sanctity of life.

5. Conclusions and Future Recommendations for Research:

This paper, utilising archival documentation, aims to examine the Edwardian women's suffrage movement (1904-1914), exploring the relationship between the politics of self-destruction (namely hunger strikes) and the weaponization of life within carceral space – addressing questions of: [1] how modalities of self-destruction (namely hunger strikes) transformed the corporeal body into a key site of resistance through the weaponization of life; and [2] in what ways was the Suffragette body subjected to Foucauldian notions of power within the Edwardian prison.

Firstly, the use of self-destructive politics allowed the women's suffrage movement to examine and challenge the moral conscience of the anti-suffragist movement – to weaponize the maternal, corporeal body. This weaponization aimed to create and exert moral pressure/fear over its deterioration and destruction. The adoption of historical figures of female self-sacrifice, by the women's suffrage movement, allowed the self-destructive suffragette to *embody* the ideals of maternal self-sacrifice through the use of hunger strikes. Thus, the politics of self-destruction becomes tools through which an individual can reject the atomising and individualising force found within carceral space and reclaim their position as human – transforming the corporeal body in a contested political site, wherein various narratives of power and purpose can be performed. Secondly, forcible feeding practices serve to transform the incarcerated suffragette into a docile body, through a mosaic of coercive forces. In particular, the suffragette body was situated within a 'New Model' Edwardian prison, designed to amplify the mechanisms of visibility and surveillance found within Bentham's panoptic model of incarceration – with forcible feeding practices acting to weaponize the corporeal body against the incarcerated individual.

Overall, this paper concludes that both self-destructive politics (namely hunger strikes) and forcible feeding both weaponize the corporeal body – serving to transfer the *power of life and death* between various political parties through embodied protest and government response.

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