3,006

Dying Without Killing: Self-Immolations, 1963–2002

Michael Biggs

> Flames were coming from a human being; his body was slowly withering and shriveling up, his head blackening and charring. In the air was the smell of burning flesh . . . Behind me I could hear the sobbing of the Vietnamese who were now gathering. I was too shocked to cry, too confused to take notes or ask questions, too bewildered to even think. (Halberstam 1965: 211)

David Halberstam, an American journalist, witnessed the self-immolation of Thich Quang Duc on 11 June 1963 (see also Browne 1965, 1993). It began when a Buddhist procession stopped at a major intersection in Saigon. The elderly monk assumed the Lotus position; other monks doused him with petrol. He set himself alight. A student, Chân Không, watched him 'sitting bravely and peacefully, enveloped in flames' (1993: 38). 'He was completely still, while those of us around him were crying and prostrating ourselves on the sidewalk.' This act was a dramatic escalation of conflict with the dictatorship of President Ngo Dinh Diem, which had persistently favoured the country's Catholic minority. A month earlier, police killed several Buddhist demonstrators. 'Before closing my eyes to go to Buddha', wrote Quang Duc, 'I have the honour to present my words to President Diem, asking him to be kind and tolerant towards his people and enforce a policy of religious equality' (quoted in Joiner 1964: 918).

Making Sense of Suicide Missions, ed. Diego Gambetta, Oxford University Press, 2005

This is my type specimen of 'self-immolation'. Like a suicidal attack, an act of self-immolation involves an individual intentionally killing himself or herself (or at least gambling with death) on behalf of a collective cause. Unlike a suicidal attack, an act of self-immolation is *not* intended to cause physical harm to anyone else or to inflict material damage.[1] The suicidal attack is an extraordinary weapon of war whereas self-immolation is an extreme form of protest. As an act of protest, it is intended to be public in at least one of two senses: performed in a public place in view of other people, or accompanied by a written letter addressed to political figures or to the general public. One point of terminology should be clarified at the outset. Although the word 'immolation' strictly means 'sacrifice', since the 1960s it has become synonymous with fiery death.[2] My definition of self-immolation encompasses other methods of self-inflicted death. In addition, this is not always a solitary act; two or more individuals may coordinate their sacrifice.

Self-immolation, as an ideal type, can be clarified by distinguishing it from other actions. Personal suicides pertain to individual grievances (including conflict with other family members) rather than a collective cause. (The parallel distinction is between murder-suicides and suicidal attacks.) Suicides by members of a cult may be collective, but the believer seeks to attain a more exalted existence after death (what Baechler 1975 calls 'transfiguration'). The Hindu practice of a wife (*sati*) joining her husband on his funeral pyre defies precise characterization, but the intent is not to advance a collective cause (Hawley 1994).[3] Martyrdom can resemble self-immolation. Consider the archbishop of El Salvador, killed in 1980 after denouncing military repression. He had anticipated his own death as a sacrifice, and even made it more likely by refusing to employ security guards (Nepstad 2002). But he did not actually kill himself. Even more closely related to self-immolation is the hunger

strike. Hunger strikes involve self-inflicted suffering, but few are undertaken as a fast until death. Even when a hunger striker seriously 'threatens' to starve to death, death can be averted by concessions.[4] 'No hunger striker aims at death', observed a Jesuit theologian in 1920, after an Irish patriot starved himself to death in a British prison. 'He aims at escaping from unjust detention, and, to do this is willing to run the risk of death, of which he has no desire, not even as a means' (quoted in Sweeney 1993: 428). With self-immolation, by contrast, death is not conditional on the opponent's (in)action.

These criteria and distinctions serve to define self-immolation as an ideal type. Needless to say, some actions are ambiguous enough to complicate this classification, as will emerge in the course of our investigation. In my estimate, there have been between 800 and 3,000 individual acts of self-immolation (including non-fatal attempts) in the four decades since 1963. Apparently, Quang Duc was the progenitor of the great majority of these acts, including almost every case in which fire was used. They were modelled either directly on his action or indirectly on another's action that can in turn be traced back to him. Thus, self-immolation describes an historical lineage as well as a conceptual abstraction. We may apply the concept to cases before 1963 (some of these are discussed below). Significantly, however, Durkheim's discussion in 1897 of 'altruistic' suicide (Durkheim 1952) excludes anything resembling self-immolation as defined here.

Self-immolation became a subject of academic study at the end of the 1960s. Initial studies by psychologists and psychiatrists defined their subject as self-inflicted death by fire, thus including personal suicide (Bostic 1973; Bourgeois 1969; Crosby, Rhee, and Holland 1977). Medical professionals contribute to a specialized literature on suicide, which includes two diagnostic studies of Indians who attempted self-

immolation in 1990 and survived (Mahla et al. 1992; Singh et al. 1998). Pacifists have evaluated self-immolation from a normative standpoint (King 2000; Ryan 1994). Film-makers have documented and dramatized individual acts (Puhovski 1997; Park 1995). Yet, with two important recent exceptions (Kim 2002; Uehling 2000), self-immolation has not attracted the attention of social scientists—which is surprising given the vast literature on collective protest and the classical importance of suicide for sociologists.[5]

This chapter is wider in scope than the others. It provides an overview of self-immolation in the last four decades, from an original database of over 500 individual acts. After introducing the sources used to compile this database, the chapter is divided into five main sections. The first sketches the history of self-immolation. The modern lineage originated with Quang Duc in 1963 and subsequently diffused to dozens of countries. The second section examines the prevalence of self-immolation among causes, across countries, and over time. The collective causes show great variation, but they are not associated with suicide attacks or other acts of violence. Vietnam, South Korea, and India are countries with the highest rates of self-immolation. Analysis reveals that self-immolation is most frequent in countries with Buddhist or Hindu religious traditions and with relatively democratic political systems. The clustering of self-immolation in waves reveals how one individual's action tends to inspire others to imitate it. The third section focuses on the orchestration of the individual action. Self-immolation is not generally preceded by threats, and it does not usually involve organization. By far the most common method is burning, which maximizes physical suffering but need not ensure death. The fourth section tackles the central question—why?—by elucidating the various motivations for self-immolation. Two are prominent: appealing to bystanders and inciting

sympathizers. The promise of supernatural rewards is not a significant motive, nor are suicidal tendencies or psychopathology. The final section considers the effects of the action. While most acts of self-immolation have no discernible impact, a small minority evoke a tremendous response, especially from sympathizers. Some episodes of self-immolation have shifted the balance of power between protesters and their opponents, albeit sometimes in an unexpected direction.

Sources

This chapter rests on a database of 533 individual acts of self-immolation—including attempts which did not prove fatal—from 1963 to 2002. The aim was to include every act for which minimal information (in English) is available. The database began with a systematic search of news reports. For the period from 1963 to 1976, the *New York Times* (*NYT*) and *The Times* are used because they are comprehensively indexed.[6] The superior search capability of the Nexis database becomes available from 1977 onwards. This provides access to global news-wires: the Associated Press (AP), United Press International (UPI) from 1981, and Agence France Presse (AFP) from 1991.[7] These news reports are used to compile a 'sample' of acts meeting my criteria for self-immolation. An act is counted whether or not the person actually died; that is often not reported when hospitalization is the immediate outcome. Thwarted attempts are included, but threats are not.[8] In many cases, only the most basic information was reported. This is an inevitable consequence of choosing *not* to select only the most notable or successful acts. A minimal amount of specific information is required for inclusion, namely, at least two of the following: name, date, and location. For this reason, it proves necessary to exclude self-killing by prison inmates. Whether a

prisoner's 'suicide' is actually murder is often impossible to judge. Even where we are confident that the inmate did kill himself or herself, whether this counts as an act of protest is usually difficult to ascertain. Even outside prison the distinction between personal suicide and self-immolation is sometimes ambiguous. Refugees who kill themselves after being refused asylum, for example, usually act on an individual—albeit political—grievance, without any declared intent to advance a collective cause. Therefore these cases are excluded.[9]

The more serious concern is the extent of coverage. Needless to say, these media sources did not report every act which could be classified as self-immolation. Lack of information, lack of interest, and self-censorship all act as barriers. Totalitarian states can effectively suppress information on protest, including self-immolation. In 1980 tourists in Moscow saw someone on fire in Red Square. One was knocked down as he attempted to take a photograph; others had their film exposed by KGB agents. The authorities insisted that it was merely a burning cigarette or a 'garbage fire' (AP, 2 August 1980; 17 June 1981). How many others committed suicide in more remote locations, out of sight of Western visitors?[10] There is an important offsetting factor, however. Self-immolation is intended as a public act, and so individuals have good reason to orchestrate publicity—by travelling to a public place where there will be witnesses or by alerting journalists to be on hand. In 2001, for instance, several Falun Gong followers travelled 350 miles from Kaifeng to Tiananmen Square to set fire to themselves—before cameras from CNN.[11]

A second barrier is lack of interest. Self-immolation is rare and spectacular, and so it is exceptionally newsworthy—far more than conventional protests like strikes or demonstrations (McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996). Nevertheless, the space for news is limited.[12] Journalists and their audiences have different levels of interest in

different parts of the world. During the mid-1960s, because Americans were focused on Vietnam, the *New York Times* reported every self-immolation there (ascertained by checking against more detailed accounts). But it never mentioned some incidents in South Asia—which we know about from reports in *The Times*. As this suggests, the bias can be partially offset by including news media from different countries. The sample also includes an additional forty-three individuals identified in historical accounts and other sources.[13] A rather different problem is posed by the massive wave of self-immolation in India in 1990 in protest against the plan to reserve more places for students and employees from lower castes. Western news-wires certainly reported this in some detail, but were overwhelmed by its magnitude. They provided specific information—sufficient to warrant inclusion in the sample—on only twenty individuals. Therefore, the sample was supplemented by a systematic search of the *Times of India* and the *Hindu*, from mid-September to the end of 1990. This yielded information on an additional 200 individuals.

A third barrier to news coverage is less obvious: self-censorship. Following studies by social scientists of the impact of publicized suicides, the World Health Organization in 1993 recommended 'toning down press reports' (Schmidtke and Schaller 2000: 691). Whether this has affected coverage of self-immolation—especially acts that could be construed as suicidal, committed locally—is not clear. One possible candidate is the death of Graham Bamford, who set himself on fire in 1993 to protest at British inaction over atrocities in the Balkans (Puhovski 1997). Although this occurred outside the Houses of Parliament, *The Times* did not report it.

Because of these barriers, the sample of 533 obviously underestimates the extent of the phenomenon. We can estimate the extent of the bias by comparing more comprehensive totals for particular times and places. The sample excludes slightly

over half of the fatal immolations in South Korea from 1970 to 1997 (Kim 2002). More surprisingly, perhaps, the sources omit over two-thirds of the immolations in Europe that were committed by Kurdish refugees (Olivier Grojean, personal communication). For India, it is possible to tabulate reports in two major national newspapers (the *Times of India* and *The Statesman*) for 2000. They reported eighteen instances of self-immolation—but only two filtered through to the Western news-wires. In sum, we may hazard a guess that the real total could be anywhere from two times to nine times larger than the sample (excluding the wave in India in 1990, which is not likely to be underestimated). The lower bound could hardly be less than 800; it is difficult to imagine that the upper bound could exceed 3,000.

History

Origins

We can certainly find examples of self-immolation before 1963, but these were isolated incidents or episodes; they did not inspire people elsewhere. At the height of the campaign for women's suffrage in Britain, Emily Wilding Davison ran on to the horse-race track during the Derby of 1913. With suffrage flags in hand, she fell under the King's racehorse and received fatal injuries. Actually, she did not intend her death, for she had a return ticket in her pocket and she left no written testament. She was nonetheless willing to die: she had attempted to kill herself in prison as a protest against force-feeding during a hunger strike. Indeed, she intimated that 'a life would have to be given before the vote was won' (quoted in Colmore 1913: 49). Although

the suffrage movement embraced her as a martyr, her death did not inspire others to sacrifice themselves.

Two episodes from the end of the Second World War are worth recounting. After Japan surrendered, many military leaders died by *seppuku* (ritual disembowelling) to atone for their failure. Closer to self-immolation as defined here, two groups of civilian nationalists—numbering twenty-six in total—and several members of the Imperial Guards Division committed *seppuku* before the Imperial Palace, in separate incidents (Morris 1960: 25–9). In Europe, when American and British troops repatriated former Soviet citizens who had been living under Nazi rule, hundreds killed themselves and some killed their children (Bethell 1987). Knowing that their fate would be execution or life in the Gulag, suicide represented a preferable option. To some extent, however, death was a protest against the actions of their captors. Although many soldiers were disturbed by the suicides, they continued to obey orders. Indeed, the military eventually designed procedures and modified trains to prevent people from taking their own lives. As the operation was carried out in secrecy, these deaths had no wider impact.

Quang Duc's death by fire in 1963 was different because it inspired many others. As a result of his act, within a few years self-immolation entered the global 'repertoire' of protest (Tilly 1986). His act was an unexpected combination of modern technology and religious tradition. The availability of flammable liquids like petrol and kerosene made it feasible to burn oneself in a public place; without instant ignition, police could thwart any attempt. The advent of photography—and technologies for the rapid transmission and cheap reproduction of images—made it possible for a single sacrifice to have a dramatic impact on a huge audience. These

potentialities, however, were discovered only in 1963. Therefore, we must closely examine the context of Quang Duc's innovation.

It arose out of conflict between Buddhists and the Diem regime in South Vietnam.[14] Since coming to power, the Catholic ruling family had advanced the interests of the country's Catholic minority and discriminated against Buddhists. Open conflict erupted suddenly on 8 May 1963, Buddha's Birthday (Oka 1966, TO-25: 5–6; Wulff 1963). The regime banned the display of religious flags in Hué, the centre of Vietnamese Buddhism. The Archbishop of Hué, Diem's older brother, was especially militant in his propagation of Catholicism; he had just flown Vatican flags to celebrate the anniversary of his reign, making the refusal to allow Buddhist flags especially galling. There was a mass demonstration; the police killed eight or nine protesters, including children. The government then ludicrously blamed the deaths on the Viet Cong and refused all compromise. Buddhist monks mobilized quickly and effectively, much to the surprise of the regime and its American patrons. There were mass demonstrations and hunger strikes in many cities, including Saigon.

According to Thich Giac Duc, an activist in Saigon, the initiative came from Quang Duc himself. He asked to burn himself 'as a donation to the struggle' (quoted in Thich Giac Duc 1986: 141). Like any cultural innovation, this was a creative mutation of pre-existing elements.[15] Burning the body was an established part of Mahayana Buddhism, predominant in Vietnam (Benn 1998). The ordination ceremony for monks and nuns involved burning part of the forehead. As the ultimate ascetic technique, burning oneself to death was first recorded in Buddhist texts from the fifth century. (It can be traced back as far as China in the first century, when an official supposedly use this technique to induce rain during a drought.) The practice was always doctrinally suspect because it clashed with a central precept of

Buddhism—the injunction against killing. The last case of a Vietnamese monk cremating himself to honour the Buddha-dharma occurred in the late eighteenth century (Thich Thien-An 1975*a*: 172–3). Remarkably, in China a handful of monks had chosen such a death in Quang Duc's lifetime, albeit no longer in public (Welch 1967: 327). In 1948 a monk was supposed to have died by fire in protest at the suppression of Buddhism under Mao's regime, according to a report published in Hong Kong.[16] Perhaps Quang Duc had heard of this precursor. What is certain is that burning evoked reverence within the Buddhist tradition.

When Quang Duc offered his life for the cause, the movement's leaders initially spurned the idea. Giac Duc viewed it as 'exotic and horrible' (Thich Giac Duc 1986: 141). But one monk was in favour: Thich Duc Nghiep, fluent in English, who was in charge of relations with foreign journalists. Did he grasp the potential impact on the American audience? After several days of prayer and fast, Quang Duc eventually won approval. The activist monks thoroughly planned the self-immolation. They conducted experiments with different fuels (Browne 1993: 9). They dropped hints, which could have reached President Diem.[17] On the day, the spectacle was orchestrated with precision. A detachment of monks and nuns prevented fire engines from reaching the scene by lying under their wheels. The performance was designed for maximum publicity, with journalists being alerted beforehand. Thus Malcolm Browne, working for the Associated Press, captured the scene on film. A monk with loudspeaker intoned, 'A Buddhist priest burns himself for five requests', while others distributed the text of Quang Duc's final declaration, all in English, for the benefit of American journalists.

The impact of Quang Duc's fiery death was immense and immediate. Within South Vietnam, it galvanized popular discontent in the cities. In July there was

another self-immolation, though in a rather different context. Nguyen Tuong Tam was a celebrated poet, who had led the struggle against French colonialism. Facing trial for involvement in an earlier coup plot, he took poison. His testament referred to Quang Duc and explained his act 'as a warning to those people who are trampling on all freedoms' (*NYT*, 9 July 1963). As the upward spiral of repression and protest continued, Quang Duc's example was followed by other Buddhists. Four monks and a nun burned themselves to death before Diem was toppled by a coup at the beginning of November. It did not end there. Death by fire was now part of the repertoire of protest in South Vietnam. There was another wave of self-immolations in 1966 in protest against the American-backed military regime and its civil war; thirteen set themselves on fire within one week.

Diffusion

If Buddhists were 'using their bodies like a lamp for help' (Thich Thien-An 1975*b*: 138), the illumination carried far beyond Vietnam. Browne's photographs of Quang Duc's flaming body were immediately reproduced in countless newspapers and magazines (though the *New York Times* refused to print them). He won the World Press Photograph Award for 1963 (Browne 1993). China used the image as anti-American propaganda throughout south-east Asia. Buddhists in countries like Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), Cambodia, and Thailand were deeply concerned for their co-religionists, and they spurred the United Nations to dispatch a fact-finding mission to Vietnam. In fact, the very first imitation of Quang Duc occurred not in Vietnam but in Sri Lanka. Nurse aides were on hunger strike, refusing to clean the hospital wards. Vidanage Vinitha jumped to her death from the building which housed the Ministry of

Health. Although she did not adopt the signature method of burning, her inspiration was clear. 'Thousands weep over the fate of a Buddhist monk in South Vietnam', she wrote, 'but nobody cares about 400 Singhalese girls in our own land' (*The Times*, 16 July 1963).

In subsequent years, the model was taken up in elsewhere. In 1964 in India, a Tamil labourer called Chinnaswami set himself alight to protest against the encroachment of the Hindi language. A year later, when Hindi was supposed to replace English as the official language of India, five Tamils died by fire and three swallowed poison (Ramaswamy 1997: 231–3). Tamils had a tradition of self-sacrifice (Krishnan 1983: 94; Subrahmanian 1983: 43). Less than a decade earlier, someone fasted to death in an attempt to have Madras state renamed 'Tamil Nadu'. The method of burning, however, had no indigenous precedent, and was surely inspired by Quang Duc's act. In 1965, a politician in South Korea burned to death in protest against the country's first post-war treaty with Japan. This was not unprecedented. In 1905, a high official took his life with a dagger to protest against a treaty subordinating the country to Japan (Schmid 2002: 343). Once again, the method of burning was novel.

More remarkable was the diffusion of the practice to the United States, where there was no precedent either for politically motivated sacrifice or for death by fire. 'The self-burning of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in 1963 is somehow difficult for the Western Christian conscience to understand', acknowledged Thich Nhat Hanh (1967: 119), a monk who studied in America. He wrote an open letter to Martin Luther King, Jr., justifying their actions by drawing a distinction between self-destruction and self-sacrifice for the sake of others. Nevertheless, Christians began burning themselves in 1965, just as confrontation was flaring again in Vietnam. Alice Herz, an elderly Quaker, set fire to herself as a protest against American foreign policy. 'I wanted to

burn myself like the monks in Vietnam did', she told police (*NYT*, 18 March 1965). Several months later, another Quaker, Norman Morrison, set fire to himself outside the Pentagon. He was deeply disturbed by the war, and had frequently discussed the Buddhist self-immolations (Hendrickson 1996: 223–4; Morrison Welsh 2000: 4). Only days later, Roger LaPorte, a Catholic who had once trained for monastic life, assumed the lotus position and set himself alight outside the United Nations.[18] These acts were celebrated in North Vietnam; a stamp was issued in Morrison's honour.

By the end of 1965, then, self-immolation had entered the global repertoire of protest. Over the next few years, there were examples in the Soviet Union, Malaysia, and Japan, as well as further cases in the United States and Vietnam. Nhat Chi Mai, who sacrificed herself in Saigon in 1967, even referred to Morrison along with Quang Duc—thus completing the circle of inspiration (Hassler 1970: 201). Most of these people, with the major exception of Tamils in India, were protesting against the foreign policy of the United States, and especially its war in Vietnam.[19] In 1969 came another wave of self-immolations by fire for a completely unrelated cause. On 16 January, Jan Palach set himself alight to protest against the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. 'My act has fulfilled its purpose', he announced from hospital, 'but let nobody else do it.' Nevertheless, over the next four months, at least six others followed in sympathy, in Hungary, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union as well as in Czechoslovakia. By the end of 1969, Quang Duc's act had been repeated over eighty times, and in many places far removed from Saigon. The model of sacrificial protest—especially by burning—was now truly available for any cause.

Just as it was possible to choose another method of death—like jumping or poison—for self-immolation, so burning could be used for purely personal suicide. This had been very rare in the West.[20] The *New York Times* and *The Times* reported

only twenty cases in the half century before 1963 (Crosby, Rhee, and Holland 1977); French newspapers reported a case about once every two years (Bourgeois 1969). This changed following Quang Duc's fiery death. The rate in France leapt to six a year. Examples became familiar in Britain and in the United States. Subsequently, famous acts of self-immolation by fire continued to inspire personal suicides. Within two weeks of Jan Palach's death, there were seven in Czechoslovakia—none apparently with any political motivation.[21] In 1970, after two French boys immolated themselves, the country experienced eight suicides by fire in the following two weeks (*NYT*, 31 January 1970). Besides spectacular short-term waves, there is evidence of a longer-term effect. In 1978, Lynette Phillips burned herself to death in Geneva as a protest against corruption in the United Nations; her death was widely publicized in England, where she had been arrested after threatening to do it in Parliament Square. In the following twelve months, eighty-two people committed suicide by burning—compared with a median of twenty-three (and maximum of thirty-three) a year during the preceding decade (Ashton and Donnan 1981).[22]

The frequency of self-immolation has fluctuated in the four decades since 1963. Figure 6.1 depicts the distribution of the sample by year. Recall that the figure is based on different sources before and after 1977; the latter should be more comprehensive.[23] Note also that the world's urban population increased by about two and a half times over these four decades. There was a relatively high frequency of self-immolation in the ten years following 1963. In 1975, moreover, at least fourteen Buddhists sacrificed themselves, this time in protest against the Communist government of newly unified Vietnam. There was a noticeable lull in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1990 came the unprecedented outbreak of self-immolation in India. This occurred after V. P. Singh's government proposed to set aside 27 per cent

of places in universities and government employment for 'Other Backward Castes' in addition to the existing 22.5 per cent for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Within six weeks, about 200 people—predominantly students from privileged castes—sacrificed (or attempted to sacrifice) themselves in protest. In 1991, there followed another wave in South Korea, as leftist students and trade unionists campaigned against President Roh Tae-woo's government. The immediate provocation was the killing of a student by the police. In recent years, the tactic has been embraced for varied causes: Kurds protesting against Turkey's capture of Abdullah Ocalan in 1999; unemployed coal miners demanding government assistance in Romania in 1999; Falun Gong followers protesting against persecution in China in 2001. Clearly, this model of protest remains viable at the turn of the twenty-first century. As this chapter was being written, in May 2003, eleven Iranians set themselves on fire in western Europe after the French authorities arrested the leader of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, which aims to overthrow the current Iranian regime.

[Figure 6.1 to be set approximately here]

Prevalence

Characteristics of Collective Causes

As we have seen, individuals have committed self-immolation for a bewildering variety of collective causes. Although these defy systematic classification, two generalizations are possible. First, movements or causes that attract self-immolation

do not incline towards suicidal terrorism, or indeed any actions intended to kill their opponents. There are two marginal exceptions, both from Turkey. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was a typical violent organization, involved in a protracted and bloody insurgency in Turkey. It also carried out attacks on Turkish targets in Germany. In 1996, after it was banned there, Ocalan threatened retaliation: 'Each and every Kurd can become a suicide bomber' (quoted in Lyon and Uçarer 2001: 941). His statement was soon followed by the first suicide attack by a Kurdish separatist. This attack—by a woman—was an inspiration for Nejla Coskun, a 14-year-old girl who set fire to herself in London in 1999, to protest against the capture of Ocalan. By that date, however, the PKK had ended violence in Europe, and it was even making overtures to the Turkish government—offering a ceasefire and retreating from its demand for a separate state. Within Turkey, inmates who burned themselves to death during prison protests in the late 1990s included members of the People's Revolutionary Liberation Party Front as well as the PKK. This non-Kurdish organization launched a suicide bombing in Istanbul to avenge the brutal suppression of the protest. These exceptions aside, self-immolation is clearly distinct from terrorism. It belongs with demonstrations, strikes, and sit-ins rather than with bombing or assassination.

The second generalization is negative. Hypothetically, one would expect an individual to be willing to die—whether by an act of self-immolation or a suicidal attack—only where the collective cause is especially 'grave' or 'momentous'. One objective indication is whether the opponent has previously killed proponents or beneficiaries of the cause. The cases of suicidal attacks in the other chapters meet this criterion, with the apparent exception of September 11, 2001. So do many cases of self-immolation, like Buddhists in Vietnam and leftists in South Korea; state

repression had killed some of their number. Similarly, Americans protesting against the Vietnam war had in view the killing of civilians by their armed forces. Yet there are also many cases of self-immolation where the cause seems to fall short of a matter of life or death.[24] Vidanage Vinitha in Sri Lanka is an example. Most significant is the wave of immolations in India in 1990. The government had not killed any of the students who had protested against the new policy of reservations for lower castes, though demonstrations had been quelled with force. Moreover, Singh had declared only his intention to adopt the policy; it was not actually being implemented. That could have been thwarted by the fall of his government (in fact, his government collapsed before the year's end) or by local non-compliance. All this is not to trivialize an issue which students perceived as an attack on their economic prospects as well as an affront to meritocratic justice. Yet one is still surprised by the number of people who were willing to die for this cause. It seems impossible for an outside observer to guess whether a collective cause will be considered by one or more individuals to warrant the ultimate sacrifice.

Variation Across Countries

Compared with suicidal terrorism, self-immolation has diffused widely around the world. The sample includes instances from three dozen countries. Table 6.1 shows the distribution by country. What is striking is the clustering of self-immolation in space. There are no reported cases from Africa or from the Middle East. Conversely, three-quarters of the total are concentrated in just three countries: India, Vietnam (South Vietnam until 1975), and South Korea. The figures for countries in western Europe and North America are increased by refugees and immigrants. Kurdish refugees living

in Europe are counted separately, as their acts were part of a struggle against the Turkish state. The figure for Turkey also excludes (for reasons explained above) at least two dozen prison inmates—most of whom were Kurdish—who have set themselves on fire since 1996.[25] To really compare countries, of course, it is necessary to adjust for population size. The denominator should be urban rather than total population because virtually all the cases occurred in cities. Indeed, there are only five farmers (only 1 per cent of recorded occupations) in the sample. Estimates of urban population refer to 1985, approximately the mean year in the sample (United Nations Population Division 2001: Table A.3).[26] The resulting rates tell a slightly different story. The Kurdish diaspora has by far the highest rate. Vietnam, South Korea, and India remain prominent, ranked second, fourth, and fifth respectively. Lithuanians are treated separately, even though their nation was subsumed by the USSR, because that reveals an unexpectedly high ranking of third. Four Lithuanians killed themselves in 1972 for the cause of national independence; in 1990, as the Soviet Union strove to maintain its rule, a fifth travelled to Moscow to die in protest. Another small country in eastern Europe, Romania, ranks sixth.

[Table 6.1 to be set approximately here]

This variation invites a Durkheimian investigation of rates of self-immolation. Self-immolation fits into Emile Durkheim's category of 'altruistic suicide' (Durkheim 1952)—the 'optional' sub-type. For Durkheim, altruistic suicide is characteristic of highly integrated primitive societies, though it survives in modern societies within the armed forces. He argued that modern types of suicide were symptomatic of a lack of social integration and regulation. Therefore, we would not expect self-immolation to

be correlated with the general rate of suicide. In 1990, suicide rates were highest in China and in the ex-socialist countries of eastern Europe; they were lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Latin America (Reza, Mercy, and Krug 2001). At first sight the inordinately high suicide rate in Lithuania might seem suggestive. The suicide rate in over thirty countries is not correlated, however, with the rate of self-immolation (Schmidtke et al. 1999; Cheng and Lee 2000).[27] Attitudes towards suicide can be measured with greater confidence than suicide rates. The World Values Survey for 1995–97 asked respondents whether suicide was justifiable (Inglehart et al. 2000). Once again, this is not correlated with self-immolation.

The World Values Survey allows us to investigate social correlates in thirty-seven countries, though this kind of analysis is inevitably crude. Durkheim's conception of social integration is notoriously difficult to operationalize. More tangible measures, such as the importance of inculcating obedience in children and the degree of tolerance for divorce, are not correlated with self-immolation. In so far as self-immolation is a form of protest, we would expect a positive correlation with the proportion of people who have participated in protest. This expectation is confounded. The only significant factor to emerge is religion. Durkheim emphasized the intensity of religious belief rather than the content of religious doctrine. For self-immolation, however, the extent of religiosity—measured for instance by belief in life after death—does not matter. What matters is the proportion of Hindus and of Buddhists. Both of these are positively correlated with the rate of self-immolation, whereas the proportion of Christians and of Muslims is not.[28]

Needless to say, this is an 'ecological ' correlation, pertaining to society as a whole rather than the particular individuals who sacrifice themselves. The leftists in South Korea were guided by Marxism rather than Buddhism. Therefore, religious

traditions are significant in shaping tacit preconceptions—the cultural background of action—rather than avowed doctrine. We could seek guidance from Max Weber (1958), who emphasized the distinction between the transcendent God of Semitic religions (Jewish, Christian, and Islamic) and the immanent divinity of Indic religions (Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist). The latter, he asserted, tend towards world-rejecting mysticism. As we will see below, however, nothing of this sort is apparent in the intentions of monks and nuns who sacrificed their lives. If anything, self-immolation seems more like a manifestation of this-worldly asceticism, which Weber identified with Protestantism.

Real differences emerge when we look for the religious valuation of *self*-inflicted death in sacred literatures (Harran 1987). There are no prominent exemplars in Semitic religions; Jesus and Husayn were martyred by their enemies. Hindu Puranas extol the karmic benefits that may be derived by killing oneself in a place of pilgrimage—above all in Allahabad (Dubey 1987; Lochtefeld, 1987; Thakur 1963: 76 ff.). Mythical tales of the Buddha's past lives include instances of self-sacrifice; a Mahayana sutra describes him killing himself to feed a hungry tigress. Within both traditions, the legitimacy of religious suicide was hotly disputed; nevertheless, such acts were recorded in historical times.[29] A more mundane factor is the method of disposing corpses. Cremation is deeply rooted in Indic religions. By extension, death by fire seems sacred—in a way that is still utterly repugnant in the West, despite the recent importation of cremation. (This serves to illustrate the enduring significance of religious tradition, for this repugnance is shared by non-believers.) 'It might be hard for Westerners to understand', explained a young monk who considered self-immolation, 'but going by fire is more clean—more pure' (quoted in Hope 1967: 159). Whatever the precise effect of religious traditions, the difference between the

Semitic West and the Indic East remains inescapable. Contrast how Browne and Chân Không recalled the sight of Quang Duc's death.

Finally, we should not overlook the character of the political system. This requires analysis by year as well as by country. The Polity data series provides a score which summarizes the extent of democracy versus autocracy for each country in every year (Marshall and Jaggers 2003). Using negative binomial regression, and controlling for religious composition, we find self-immolation to be positively associated with the degree of democracy. (This result holds even excluding India in 1990.) In part, this finding must reflect the way totalitarian states suppress information about such acts, as noted above. But it seems more than a measure of our ignorance. Because self-immolation is less likely to have an impact, individuals in totalitarian states are less likely to commit such an act. There are some exceptions, of course, including Lithuanians in 1972 and Vietnamese Buddhists under Communist rule from 1975 onwards. On balance, however, self-immolation has occurred under less repressive political systems. The largest wave of immolation of all occurred in democratic India.

Clustering in Time

Just as self-immolation is concentrated in a small number of countries, it is also clustered in time: it occurs in waves. To a limited extent, this reflects deliberate coordination. For one fifth of the individuals in the sample, the act of self-immolation occurred with one or more other acts of immolation. Most of these coordinated group actions involved two people. The largest occurred in a Vietnamese monastery in 1975: twelve monks and nuns, led by Thich Hue Hien, sacrificed themselves together

in protest against persecution by the Communist government. Even aside from such intentional coordination, separate acts of self-immolation are clustered together. We can examine how much time elapses between one act and the next within the same country (classifying Kurds outside Turkey and Lithuanians separately, as above). In the sample, 47 per cent occurred on the same day; 16 per cent occurred from one to ten days later, and a further 4 per cent up to a month later. We can use the time between acts to demarcate waves of self-immolation. A parsimonious definition of 'wave' would aggregate all acts within the same country separated by intervals of ten days or less.[30] Thus defined, 28 waves consist of two acts, and 21 consist of three or more. The latter are listed in Table 6.2, which shows the country and the collective cause associated with each.

[Table 6.2 to be set approximately here]

To some extent, waves can be explained by particular exogenous events, which suddenly create or exacerbate a collective grievance. An endogenous process of inspiration is also clearly important. In other words, an individual is more likely to choose this sacrifice when someone else has done so; self-immolation is subject to positive feedback (Biggs 2003*a*). An Indian student, Monica Chadha, provides an illustration. After reading about self-immolation in the morning newspaper, she casually announced to her family that she would kill herself. 'If all these other boys and girls can sacrifice themselves like this to shout down the policies of this prime minister, then I will sacrifice my life as well' (*Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1990). She then left the room and set herself alight. There are several instances of tangible connections between one action and another. A Vietnamese monk burned himself to

death in 1963 to protest against the confiscation of a previous victim's body by the police. An Indian student set fire to herself outside the hospital where Rajeev Goswami—who initiated the huge wave of 1990—was recovering. Likewise, a Korean student jumped off the morgue containing the body of Park Sung Hee, who initiated the wave in 1991. Inspiration was not always confined to supporters of the collective cause. The largest wave in 1990 included a clothes washer and an auto rickshaw driver who killed themselves in protest against the protests against reservations.

The positive feedback created by inspiration is, in one respect, not surprising. After all, this is also found in other forms of protest, like strikes (Biggs 2003*a*; Conell and Cohn 1995). The same is true for suicide: news reports and dramatic enactments alike increase the suicide rate (Bollen and Phillips 1982; Phillips and Carstensen 1986; Schmidtke and Schaller 2000). Yet the repetition of self-immolation for one specific collective cause raises a puzzle, for it surely is subject to diminishing marginal returns. At some point, even this most awe-inspiring of actions begins to lose its impact. This was recognized by Nhat Chi Mai in Vietnam. After the wave of immolations in 1966, she suggested that ten students should disembowel themselves for peace. 'Fasting and even self-immolation [by fire] no longer wake people up. We have to be imaginative!' (quoted in Chân Không 1993: 97).[31] The campaign against reservations in 1990 poses the puzzle of diminishing marginal returns with particular force. When Goswami set himself alight, his act revived the flagging protest movement. But after it was repeated the first dozen—or one hundred—times, was there any additional benefit to be gained? As we will see below, some of those who join a wave in its later phase may be moved by despair and therefore not concerned

with the instrumental effect of their death. Nevertheless, this huge wave of immolation provides a chilling illustration of the power of imitation.

Orchestration

Threats

Now we can focus more closely on the act of self-immolation, examining how it is orchestrated. Rarely is self-immolation preceded by any public threat, to allow the opponent an opportunity to make concessions and thus avert the sacrifice. This absence is intriguing. To be sure, in some cases the decision to act is taken on the spur of the moment; moreover, in authoritarian political systems such a threat would simply invite detention. Most importantly, however, any threat of immolation would lack credibility. According to signalling theory, 'for a threat to be reliable, the signal must increase the danger to the threatener—and an escalation of the threat must increase that danger even further' (Zahavi and Zahavi 1997: 16). A hunger strike meets this condition because it gradually escalates physical suffering. If someone threatens to fast until death, then that threat becomes increasingly credible as the fast continues.

This does not imply that threats of immolation are rare. Indeed, threats are surely more numerous than actions.[32] Nevertheless, one is left with an overwhelming impression that individuals who make threats are not actually prepared to carry them out. Consider, as a prime example, South Vietnam in the mid-1960s, when so many Buddhists killed themselves. In July 1963, monks at one pagoda staged a press conference to announce that a nun—from a prestigious family—had requested to be

allowed to burn herself. Foreign journalists found this spectacle repugnant (Schecter 1967: 191–2). And the nun never did kill herself. In May 1966, monks in Danang declared that three of their number would kill themselves if government troops attacked the city (*NYT*, 17 May 1966). Dozens were killed in the attack, but the pagoda surrendered a week later without a single self-immolation (Schecter 1967: 230–1). Similar examples abound in the wave of immolations by Kurds in 1999: those who made threats were not the same individuals as those who set themselves on fire.

There is one important example of a credible threat. Like Tamils in the south of India, Punjabi-speaking Sikhs in the north fought bitterly against the imposition of Hindi language (Grewal 1990: chs. 9–10). After a previous fast, Sant Fateh Singh threatened in 1965 to fast and then burn himself unless a new Punjabi state was created.[33] The outbreak of war with Pakistan led him to postpone the event. Within a year, a new state of Punjab was created. In 1967 Singh repeated the threat, demanding the accession of the city of Chandigarh, which was shared with the neighbouring state of Haryana Punjab. After he had fasted for nine days, and with a huge audience gathered at the Amritsar Temple to watch his impending death, Indira Gandhi suddenly offered to arbitrate (*NYT*, 27 December 1967). In 1970, after he repeated the threat yet again, she promised to transfer the city in five years' time—despite a countervailing threat from a politician in Haryana (*NYT*, 30 January 1970). Gandhi apparently believed that Singh was in earnest, and that his death would incite serious rioting by Sikhs. As a leader, if he had not made good his threat he would have been discredited among his followers.[34] His victory, however, was to prove hollow; Chandigarh was not subsequently transferred to Punjab. The campaign in Punjab had an unexpected echo in England. In 1969, a Sikh leader threatened to burn himself to death in protest against Wolverhampton's ban on bus drivers and conductors wearing

beards or turbans; his demand was conceded (*The Times*, 7 January and 10 April 1969). These cases of successful threats are exceptional.[35]

Organization

Self-immolation does not require organization to be effective, unlike suicidal attacks. In some cases, the action is inherently individualistic, even idiosyncratic. Kathy Change set fire to herself on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania 'to spark a discussion of how we can peacefully transform our world' (AP, 23 October 1996). Although she was a familiar presence around campus and at protest demonstrations, no one else knew her well, or fully comprehended her public declaration. Over a third of the individuals in the sample performed the act in front of a crowd gathered to further the cause—an audience of potential sympathizers. But this audience was not necessarily complicit in the act. To take an extreme example, someone in Taiwan set himself alight in the midst of a packed memorial for a dissident, causing severe injuries to those standing beside him (AP, 19 May 1989). In most situations, protesters intervened to help the individual, such as dousing the flames. It is less common to find evidence that protesters deliberately assisted the sacrifice by preventing police from intervening, as they did during Quang Duc's highly organized immolation. Such cases are confined to South Vietnam and India.

Even if organization is not necessary in order to orchestrate immolation, it would still be possible for an organization to endorse or 'sign' an individual sacrifice performed on its behalf. This, however, is also rare. The clearest examples come from Vietnam. In 1963 Buddhist leaders explicitly sanctioned two deaths: those of Quang Duc and Thich Tieu Dieu. Both were elderly (as was the nun at the press conference),

while there is evidence that younger novices were refused permission. This is understandable: the elderly had less life to sacrifice and had presumably attained sufficient wisdom to make a responsible choice. In 1966, the militant wing of the Unified Buddhist Church apparently staged at least one self-immolation—that of Thich Nu Thanh Quang (55 years old)—though officially it was announced that she had not received permission. 'Burning oneself to death is the noblest form of struggle', declared the militant leader, Thich Tri Quang, 'which symbolizes the spirit of nonviolence of Buddhism' (quoted in Schecter 1967: 233). After five deaths over the next few days, Tri Quang called on followers to halt (*NYT*, 31 May 1966). After the Communist invasion, when Buddhism was facing renewed persecution, the Unified Buddhist Church's Central Executive Council in 1977 asked monks and nuns in Ho Chi Minh City 'to be ready to act, to sacrifice ourselves if necessary' (quoted in Forest 1978: 41). By the late 1990s, however, the Church was apparently dissuading members from killing themselves.

Even in Vietnam, then, organizational endorsement was ambivalent. There are two clear examples of disavowal. One is the leadership of Falun Gong, discussed below. Another is the PKK. On the arrest of Ocalan, it orchestrated simultaneous protests across western Europe, during which seven Kurds set themselves alight on a single day. Yet this did not accord with the wishes of Ocalan himself. Only months before, after PKK prisoners in Turkey had set themselves alight, he broadcast the following message: 'I categorically reject self-immolation. I strongly suggest that they should refrain from setting themselves on fire' (quoted in Ergil 2001: 115). Following Ocalan's capture, his brother Osman repeated the same message: he called on Kurds to end self-immolation and 'burn the enemy' instead (AP, 19 February

1999). By contrast, organizations that sponsor suicidal attacks invariably boast of their readiness to dispatch members to their death.

Degrees of Suffering

By far the most common method of self-immolation was Quang Duc's: four out of five individuals in the sample chose fire. Poison was the next most common method. As we have seen, burning has quite different cultural connotations in West and East. The common denominator is conspicuous suffering. 'To burn oneself by fire is to prove that what one is saying is of the utmost importance', as Thich Nhat Hanh (1967: 118) observed. 'There is nothing more painful than burning oneself.' In this respect, it is akin to *seppuku*. Yukio Mishima, a celebrated Japanese writer who eventually chose this method, explained: 'everybody knew that this was the most painful way to die . . . it proved the courage of the Samurai' (quoted in Scott-Stokes 1975: 16–17). In actuality, the agony was quickly terminated by beheading. Similarly, individuals could combine burning with a less painful means of death. Many in South Korea set themselves alight and then jumped from the top of a building.

Methods such as burning and poisoning do not always lead to death. Therefore I have deliberately included attempts that did not prove fatal. Thwarted attempts, when someone douses himself or herself with flammable liquid but is prevented from setting it aflame by the physical intervention of protesters or police, account for one in eight of the sample. Even when these thwarted attempts are included, the chance of surviving was only about 30 per cent. This, it should be emphasized, is comparatively low. Compare suicide attempts, in which the survival rate can be as high as 90 per cent (Stengel 1969). There is also a marked contrast with hunger strikes. Although

systematic figures are not available, one has the impression that hunger strikers rarely starve to death. In 1923, for example, about 8,000 Republican prisoners in Ireland went on hunger strike to demand release; two died (Sweeney 1993).

Although self-immolation most often results in death, we cannot assume that death is always intended. In many cases, the action could more appropriately be conceived as a gamble with death (cf. Firth 1961; Stengel 1969). This is not to trivialize it: survivors of burning will probably suffer permanent disfigurement. The gamble was explicit for Neusha Farrahi, an Iranian exile in Los Angeles. 'If I die in this little bout with fire . . . ', he wrote (quoted in Kelley 1987: 24). Before setting himself alight at a demonstration against the visiting President of Iran, he placed a fire extinguisher on the ground; another protester found it in time to douse the fire. Yet his injuries proved fatal. More generally, it is telling that survivors do not consider themselves to have failed, nor do they try again. Disaggregated figures reveal significant variations in the severity of the gamble. In Vietnam, virtually everyone died. In India, about one-third survived. Among Kurdish refugees, over half survived. In Romania there seem to have been no deaths at all. These differences cannot be explained away by variations in the quality of medical care, because the United States also has a high death rate.

In some cases, then, self-immolation shades into self-mutilation. Explicit acts of self-mutilation—where there is obviously no risk of death—are exceedingly rare. This is surprising given that deliberate self-harm among the general population is far more prevalent than suicide (Hawton et al. 2002). Three notable examples come from South Vietnam in the 1960s. A student tried to chop off her left hand with an axe; in a letter to the President, she offered the hand as a gift, requesting him to understand his people's wishes to end the persecution (Chân Không 1993: 41–2). Immediately after

a nun burned herself to death, a monk cut off part of his finger before a cheering crowd (*NYT*, 30 May 1966). A monk slowly roasted his finger in a candle flame before an audience of thousands (Hassler 1970: 142). Hypothetically, self-mutilation could be used to lend credibility to a threat of self-immolation, but I know of no case in which immolation has been preceded by mutilation.[36]

If self-immolation is often a gamble with death, can it be rigged to ensure survival? This would require assistance from others, of course. A handful of cases arouse suspicion. Seven women in the Congress Party of India tried to burn themselves outside the home of Sonia Gandhi in order to persuade her to retract her resignation as party president. The other protesters reacted swiftly, and the only casualty was one sari (AP, 19 May 1999). This seems more like a dramatic gesture. It cannot be dismissed as a fake, however, because the women did not—so far as we know—explicitly claim that they were attempting to kill themselves. Admissions or accusations of outright deception are scarce. The wave of immolations in India in 1990 was initiated by Goswami. According to his own account, students decided on 'staging a drama' to revive their protest against reservations (*India Today*, 15 October 1990). It was carefully planned, with photographers to witness the event and crowds of students to prevent the police from intervening. He soaked only his legs in kerosene, and his friends were detailed to quickly extinguish the fire. As the police charged, however, Goswami suddenly doused his body with kerosene and—with his confederates lost in the crowd—ignited himself.[37] He suffered severe burns and spent months in hospital. In a strange twist, Goswami again attempted self-immolation three years later. (He is the only individual entered in the sample twice.) This time his effort was thwarted by the police, thus incurring the ridicule of fellow students. 'It was all stage-managed', said one (AFP, 21 September 1993). In a horrific inversion of

Goswami's account of what happened in 1990, a Pakistani journalist recalls a self-immolation in protest against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's death sentence (UPI, 25 March 2002). According to the man's relatives, others in Bhutto's party assured him that it would be rigged—they would immediately extinguish the fire. But as he ran around in flames, screaming for help, the assembled crowd watched impassively.[38]

This discussion has complicated the category of self-immolation. It should understood as traversing a continuum. At one extreme is a risky gesture of self-inflicted suffering, orchestrated with others, which is akin to self-mutilation. At the other is a determined attempt to kill oneself. Far more actions occur towards the latter extreme than the former. By comparison, hunger strikes traverse a similar continuum but make possible the precise calibration of suffering. Self-immolation by fire always involves some risk of death—that is the source of its power. Even including thwarted attempts, over half of the actions proved fatal. This figure is surely comparable to the death rate among those volunteering for suicidal attacks.

Motivations

Having considered how the act was orchestrated, we can pose the central question: why did these individuals choose to sacrifice themselves—or at the very least gamble with their lives—in preference to other forms of protest? The evidence encompasses written declarations of intent and comments from survivors, as well as from those who entertained the act but did not carry it out. The task of dissecting, from the comfort of one's office, motivations for the ultimate sacrifice must be approached with trepidation. My ambition is simply to disentangle and explicate the various

rational motivations for self-immolation (as Baechler 1975 and Douglas 1967 have done for suicide). Psychological explanations will be treated as a residual category.

My emphasis on teasing out the rationality—in the broadest sense of the term—of self-immolation reflects more than just a theoretical predisposition (cf. Weber 1978: ch. 1). For the most part, where sufficient evidence is available, one can discern adequate reason(s) for self-immolation. In many cases, the decision was the product of lengthy consideration, as with Quang Duc, Mishima, and Nhat Chi Mai (Chân Không 1993: ch. 10). A Crimean Tatar, Musa Mamut, declared his resolve a year before he acted. Admittedly, many others took the decision on the spur of the moment. (This follows from the fact that self-immolation requires no organization, as pointed out above.) 'We need more dedicated fighters, not more *yolsa* [martyrs]', said Chun Se Yong, a South Korean student, only two days before his immolation (*Time Magazine*, 3 June 1991). For Morrison too, the impulse to act came after reading a gruesome account of an American air raid in Vietnam. 'For weeks, even months, I have been praying only that I be shown what I must do. This morning with no warning I was shown' (quoted in Morrison Welsh 2000: 4). Goswami (in 1990) and Chadha apparently made a decision only minutes before they acted. Still, what is remarkable is the lack of expressions of regret. 'I am proud of what I have done', announced Chadha as she lay dying in hospital (*Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1990). This sentiment was typical.

The typology begins, logically enough, with 'selfless' motivations that stem from commitment to the collective cause. Such a commitment may be manifested in instrumental rationality—treating one's own sacrifice as a means to advance the cause. Two significant motivations can be discerned: *appealing* to others by means of a costly signal, and *inciting* potential sympathizers by provoking an emotional

response. A subsidiary mechanism involves supernatural *exchange*. Commitment to the cause may also be manifested in the non-instrumental motivation of *despair*. By contrast, 'egocentric' motivations lack the selflessness of commitment to a collective cause. One is *cheating* the adversary. Another is *transfiguration* (after Baechler 1975), attaining an exalted existence after death. Other personal motivations are unlikely to be publicly declared or even consciously acknowledged: *vanity*, gaining attention from others, and *redemption* from personal failings.

Selfless Motivations

In so far as individuals treat self-immolation as a means to advance their cause, it can be an appeal to others to change their behaviour. The appeal may be addressed directly to the adversary. Thus Quang Duc politely requested Diem to show religious tolerance. This was echoed over a decade later: in 1975 twelve monks and nuns offered their lives in an 'appeal to the Revolutionary Government . . . to respect the right to freedom of worship of all religions' (quoted in Forest 1978: 14). Whether or not they genuinely expected to convert their adversary, this sentiment is not frequent. More commonly, the appeal is addressed to a third party in the conflict, particularly to public opinion. Thich Nu Thanh Quang intended 'to raise the tragic voice of my people'. Her letter appealed to the arbiters of South Vietnam's future. 'Before dying, I hope and believe that the President of the USA, the Congress and the people of the US will prove their clearsightedness and understanding and be our ally forever' (quoted in Schecter 1967: 233). She was under no illusions about the role of American power, which she denounced for 'approving the massacre of our monks, nuns, and Buddhist followers'. Nevertheless, it was a plausible attempt to appeal to

American public opinion. Likewise, Coskun recalled, 'I wanted someone to stop and think about us' (*Guardian*, 8 June 1999). Implicitly, of course, the appeal derives its potency from sacrifice; self-immolation amplifies the individual's 'voice'. This is explicated by Chân Không: 'If you want to buy something, you should pay something. And now you want to buy something very, very precious—the understanding of people. You have nothing more precious than your life' (quoted in Forest 1978: 8; see also Chân Không 1993: 39, 105). Self-immolation, in other words, is a costly signal which conveys information: the depth of the individual's sense of injustice on behalf of the collective cause (see Biggs 2003*b*).

A slightly different—though compatible—motivation is to incite others who already share the collective cause. This is not a matter of altering their beliefs; it is a matter of galvanizing them to engage in protest. This motivated a student monk in Hué, who wanted to kill himself 'to rouse the people to defend themselves' (quoted in Hope 1967: 157). Though refused permission by his monk, he resolved to burn himself if all else failed. Then Thich Tieu Dieu's immolation led to mass defiance and increased repression. The student monk clearly treated his own death instrumentally: as it was now unnecessary, he went into hiding and published resistance pamphlets instead. This motivation is frequently expressed. A Korean student expressed the hope that his death would produce 'many warriors' against the government. On the day that he died, he wondered aloud to a friend: 'Don't you think we would have more fighting activists if someone else killed himself by immolation?' (*Time Magazine*, 3 June 1991: 34) 'Because our nations are on the brink of despair', wrote Jan Palach, 'we have decided to express our protest and wake up the people of this land' (quoted in Treptow 1992: 126). He concocted an elaborate threat, based on the fiction that he was the first in a group of volunteers. 'If our demands are not fulfilled within five

days by January 21, 1969, and if the people do not support us sufficiently through a strike of indefinite duration, more torches will burn.' Implicitly, this was calculated to induce guilt among potential supporters: if they remained passive, then they would be responsible for further deaths.

Another instrumental motivation is very different, for it depends on belief in a supernatural agency. Self-immolation is an exchange: in return for the sacrifice, a supernatural agency will intervene on behalf of the cause. This motivation is exceedingly rare in the last four decades. Tran Bach Nga killed herself just *after* the overthrow of Diem (*NYT*, 31 November 1963). Having made a vow to Buddha to burn herself if the imprisoned monks and nuns were released, she kept her side of the bargain. A similar case occurred two months later.[39] For the sake of completeness, it is worth noting that supernatural beliefs may provide an alternative motivation: one kills oneself in order to become a ghost, with more formidable powers. This motivated the Korean official who killed himself in 1905.[40]

All the above motivations are instrumental: death serves to advance the cause. Commitment to the cause can also produce a completely different motivation, namely, despair. Chân Không did not sacrifice herself (though she contemplated a fast until death), but she explains the impulse: 'Learning of the arrest of so many monks, nuns, and Buddhist friends, I wanted to scream and go to jail, or burn myself in despair' (1993: 41). This fits the psychological model of suicide proposed by Mark Williams: 'the "cry of pain" from a person who feels completely defeated, with no escape routes, and no possibility of rescue at all' (Williams and Pollock 2000: 89; also M. Williams 1997). Here, however, this defeat is collective and not personal: it occurs only because the individual is devoted to the cause. Despair was also the motivation for Jan Zajic, who killed himself after it was clear that Palach's sacrifice had not

sparked mass defiance of the Soviet occupation. 'I hear your cowardice', was one line in his final poem (quoted in Treptow 1992: 130). 'Bells toll from the spires of churches for the nation, for the country.' This motivation is not merely to die, to escape the distress that stems from identification with the cause, but to make a final—albeit instrumentally useless—statement to the world.

Egocentric Motivations and Psychological Explanations

Closely related to despair is the motivation of cheating the enemy out of the satisfaction of one's capture, in an ultimate act of defiance. In so far as killing oneself is less bad than the alternative—imprisonment, torture, or execution—then the act is more compatible with self-interest; it may be unnecessary to invoke commitment to the collective cause. Cheating the enemy apparently motivated Nguyen Tuong Tam. Although he was about to be tried, a death sentence was not inevitable. Salvador Allende, by contrast, would have had no illusions about his fate if captured. He made a final defiant broadcast from the besieged presidential palace: 'I am ready to resist with whatever means, even at the cost of my life in that this serves as a lesson in the ignominious history of those who have strength but not reason' (*NYT*, 12 September 1973).[41] Both men were famous and both died in private. A contrast is an anonymous South Vietnamese official who killed himself on the fall of Saigon. He may have had sufficient reason to avoid capture. What is significant is that he chose a public death: on the steps of a monument to the war dead, watched by journalists. 'It is finished', he exclaimed, and shot himself (*NYT*, 21 May 1975).

The motivation of transfiguration—attaining a more exalted existence—depends on supernatural beliefs. It may seem paradoxical to call this the most nakedly 'self-

interested' motivation, but surely one's death is a small price to pay for eternal heavenly life or karmic advancement. One would expect this motivation to be prevalent, given that so many individuals in the sample had religious vocations. After students, they formed the most common occupational group, comprising one-sixth of the total where occupation was recorded. Many more were deeply religious. Yet evidence of such a motivation is almost entirely absent. It may have helped to motivate the followers of Falun Gong . 'Let me go to heaven', cried Liu Hongjun—according to the state news agency—as police prevented her from igniting herself (AP, 30 January 2001). Another of the group, Hao Huijun, gave a perfectly mundane explanation of their act: after the failure of more conventional methods of protest, 'we decided to make a big event to tell the world' (AP, 4 April 2002). In Vietnam, where one would expect transfiguration to loom large, many of the politically engaged monks embraced Buddhism as a means of attaining national liberation and social justice—an alternative to Marxism—rather than as a quest for spiritual perfection. Remarkably, the student monk in Hué did not even believe in reincarnation. Furthermore, certain beliefs raised rather than lowered the 'cost' of self-immolation. Contemplating a fast until death, Chân Không understood that she would have 'to pay for the sin of impiety [towards her mother] in another life' (1993: 97). Similarly, Coskun believed that she would go to hell for defiling the body that God gave her (interview, 8 August 2003). In sum, although religious belief and discipline undoubtedly prepare an individual for self-sacrifice, the promise of supernatural rewards was not a significant motivation. This also holds for suicide attacks by the Japanese *kamikaze* and the Tamil Tigers, of course.

All the motivations discussed thus far operate at the level of conscious intentions, and they would be openly declared. Now we survey a more ambiguous territory, which shades gradually into psychological explanation.

Although it would be absurdly cynical to reduce self-sacrifice to attention-seeking, we cannot overlook vanity as a potential motivation. This cannot be publicly declared. It would be an instance of the mental alchemy investigated by Jon Elster (1999). If the individual was consciously aware that the act was motivated by vanity, then he or she would misrepresent the motivation. More insidiously, it could be unconsciously 'transmuted' into another motivation, beneath the individual's awareness. By its very nature, then, vanity will be exceedingly difficult to trace. One candidate is the host of a television talk show in Florida who shot herself on air, ostensibly protesting against violence on television. In reality, it seems to have been a purely personal suicide, staged as self-immolation in order to maximize publicity. The most plausible case of vanity is the death of Yukio Mishima (Nathan 1974; Scott-Stokes 1975). With four confederates, he kidnapped a general and demanded to address the troops. He exhorted them to overthrow the constitution and restore Japanese honour. He then committed *seppuku* and was beheaded by a confederate; another died in the same fashion, while the remaining two surrendered. There is considerable evidence that Mishima misrepresented his real motivation. In making plans he had acknowledged that the troops would not revolt (Nathan 1974: 266). In the event they greeted his speech with derision. His death was the culmination of a lifelong erotic fascination with Japanese martial traditions. In the previous months, he had posed for a series of photographs entitled 'Death of a Man'. 'If I decided to commit *seppuku*, could you televise it live?', he had asked a friend in broadcasting

(quoted by Nathan 1974: 265). He would surely have been pleased that gory pictures of his severed head appeared in the Japanese press and in *Life* magazine.

Vanity may be distinguished from a more worthy motivation, namely, redemption from personal failings. By choosing to die for a cause, an individual may compensate for an unsatisfactory life. 'Maybe because things hadn't all worked out for him professionally', wondered Morrison's wife, 'it was easier somehow (a little bit) to give away his life' (quoted in Hendrickson 1996: 235). But she certainly did not consider it suicide. A more ambiguous case is Tran Bach Nga, who apparently promised her life in return for Diem's overthrow. Yet she also wrote a final letter to a male acquaintance, apologizing for being unworthy of him. For the Buddhist authorities, at least, this hint of romantic disappointment posed the question of whether her act was suicide masquerading as self-sacrifice, which would not deserve a memorial ceremony. Occasionally, redemption is publicly acknowledged—though only as a subsidiary motivation, of course. 'I have never been a good son to you, mother and father', admitted Kim Ki Sol, a Korean student. 'But I am no longer your son but the son of the whole nation. I now want to be a good son' (*Independent*, 21 May 1991). A Lithuanian man likewise acknowledged marital problems in his final declaration (AP, 27 April 1990).

As motivations, even redemption and vanity 'make sense', though they are far removed from selfless motivations based on commitment to the cause. Psychopathology provides a quite different kind of explanation, which makes no reference to an individual's reasons. It is all too easy to attribute self-immolation to psychological disturbances. This stratagem is adopted by totalitarian states. When a German pastor lay dying after setting fire to himself to protest against communist atheism, the government barred his wife from hospital; they would let her visit only

when she ‘admitted’ he was mentally deranged (*Times*, 23 August 1976). In the Soviet Union, any survivor of an immolation attempt was consigned to a psychiatric institution. Less obvious, and therefore more insidious, is the temptation to search for such explanations when the act fails to resonate with the public. When a woman set fire to herself in a Minneapolis sex shop, the media portrayed her as a rape victim with a history of mental instability (AP, 12 July 1984). But the context of the act was eminently reasonable: the city council was about to vote on a pioneering anti-pornography ordinance, which many American feminists viewed as a legal breakthrough.

Nevertheless, in some cases the expressed motivation does seem inadequate to account for the action. At the limit, the individual may not have a reason. Someone who set himself alight outside the United Nations apologized for the inconvenience to his rescuers, but was literally unable to explain his act (*NYT*, 6 December 1967). This is excluded from the sample, as are cases in which the ‘cause’ makes no sense whatsoever. There are still cases in which the avowed intention does not seem to match the situation. Charles Hook III shot himself in the gardens of the United Nations in 1975. He had been involved in the Student Peace Union several years before. ‘I have always attempted to act in the interest of peace and the general defense of the planet’, he declared (*NYT*, 8 May 1975). But there was no reference to contemporaneous political events which justified such a sacrifice. Moreover, the note implies paranoia: ‘I have never knowingly and deliberately been a part of any secret political conspiracy . . .’. The only systematic psychological evidence comes from an investigation of twenty-two survivors (some of whom later died) of self-immolation in India in 1990 (Singh et al. 1998). Despite the propensity of psychiatrists to find disorders in everyone, only one of the subjects fitted the criteria for ‘manifest

psychopathology'. The battery of tests indicated that the subjects had a greater than average internal locus of control, and scored high on 'intropunitiveness'—self-criticism and guilt as contrasted with hostility to others.

In sum, psychopathology is not necessary to explain most cases of self-immolation. With sufficient evidence, it is not difficult to understand the act in terms of a combination of the motivations explicated above. Which of these are most common? Answering this question is especially difficult for egocentric motivations such as vanity or redemption, which one would expect to be misrepresented as or transmuted into more 'noble' motivations. There must be cases of personal suicide masquerading as self-immolation. A very large number of people commit suicide: in the order of three-quarters of a million each year (Reza, Mercy, and Krug 2001). Organizations involved in suicidal terrorism claim to screen out individuals who just want to die, and they plausibly have an incentive to do so. By contrast, self-immolation (as we have seen) requires no organization; anyone who wants to put an end to his or her life anyway can easily choose self-immolation. What is remarkable, then, is that self-immolation is so rare. If we estimate at the most an average of seventy-five cases per year, then that equates to about one per 10,000 suicides! At the very least, we must conclude that suicidal tendencies almost never lead to self-immolation. I would go further and suggest that self-immolation is rarely explained by suicidal tendencies. For the most part, then, we should take avowed motivations seriously. Transmutation and cheating are uncommon. Among the selfless motivations, supernatural exchange is rare; despair seems somewhat more common. The most frequently declared motivations are appealing to others and inciting potential sympathizers.

Effects

Responses

This leads us to the response that self-immolation invokes in other people. Following the distinction between the motivations of appeal and incitement, we can differentiate between the response of opponents or bystanders and of sympathizers. Because it is such a drastic act, self-immolation can convert people to a cause, altering their beliefs. 'I have always believed in President Diem', remarked an old servant of an American family in Saigon, after Quang Duc's death. 'But now this has happened. This proves that the President is bad' (quoted in Mecklin 1965: 167). That event led many people elsewhere—especially in Buddhist countries and in America—to embrace the cause of Vietnamese Buddhists, simply by bringing it to their attention. Morrison died within sight of the office of Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense. 'I was horrified', McNamara recalls (quoted in Steinbach 1995). 'And I was also quite aware that my family was deeply disturbed by the event, and many other members of the public were.' Within months, he became convinced that the war in Vietnam was futile; a journalist speculates that Morrison's death was the 'emotional catalyst' for his conversion (Hendrickson 1996: 198). Self-immolation can also have the opposite effect: discrediting the cause in the eyes of others. This was the case for Falun Gong, discussed below.

Self-immolation can enhance the commitment of others who believe in the cause. As Chân Không watched Quang Duc's fiery death, 'a deep vow sprang forth from me: I too would do something for the respect of human rights in as beautiful and gentle way' (1993: 38). A student monk in Hué helped Thich Tieu Dieu kill himself.

The ceremony made him feel 'the emptiness of human life in comparison with the struggle for a higher idea' (quoted in Hope 1967: 155). Out of 400 people who wrote testimonials for Park Sung Hee after her death, over two-thirds explicitly resolved to intensify their efforts: 'I will fight a thousand, ten thousand times more steadfastly, fiercely, than I have until now' (quoted in Kim 2002: 163).

More systematically, we can count how many acts in the sample generated some kind of collective response: people taking to the streets on hearing of the death, attending a mass funeral, and so on. Such a response is reported in about one-sixth of cases. This proportion is inevitably biased downwards because news reports often do not cover subsequent events. If we confine our attention to cases in which there is more substantial information, the proportion is about a third. Note that the significance of this measure varies with the degree of repression exercised by the political system; in totalitarian states, where the cost of protest is exceedingly high, an act of self-immolation may have a significant impact on people's opinions without any public manifestation. At one extreme, a handful of individuals have a tremendous impact. They include Quang Duc, Nu Thanh Quang, Nhat Chi Mai, Jan Palach, Romas Kalanta in Soviet Lithuania, Rajeev Goswami (in 1990), and Park Sung Hee. These deaths brought thousands or tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands[42] of people together—to express their rage, grief, and commitment. As we have seen, all these individuals became exemplars for others to sacrifice their own lives in turn. Still, we should not lose sight of the fact that most acts of self-immolation fail to generate any collective response.

This should not obscure a theoretical puzzle: why should a self-inflicted death ever have any influence? Self-immolation provides two stirring images: the victim who is innocent and the hero who braves death. A protester killed by police is a

victim, but has not willed the ultimate sacrifice.[43] A suicide bomber may be seen as a hero, but hardly as a victim. Self-immolation carries such emotional power because it inspires sacrifice and also provokes outrage. The latter may seem paradoxical, because the victim actually killed himself or herself—why blame anyone else for the death? This becomes somewhat less surprising when we turn to examples in tribal societies. In some communities, anyone who committed suicide after publicly blaming someone else was treated as the victim of murder, requiring relatives to receive the same compensation or exact the same revenge (Jeffreys 1971). A familiar example is Kima'i in the Trobriand Islands. After being publicly insulted for an incestuous relationship with his maternal cousin, he climbed a tree, denounced his tormentor, and jumped to his death. His clansmen took revenge, severely injuring the culprit (Malinowski 1926).

Hyojoung Kim (2002) provides unique insight into the emotional response to self-immolation, examining the testimonials left at Park Sung Hee's grave. Renewed commitment was strongly and significantly associated with expressions of shame. (It was also strongly associated with expressions of anger and of patriotic love, though these are not statistically significant.) Besides the self-sacrifice of a martyr, these individuals felt guilty about their own relative lack of commitment. 'While looking at your face, fourteen years younger than mine, I feel ashamed through and through' (quoted by Kim 2002: 167). This motivated a pledge of enhanced commitment. 'I resolve that I will become a fighter who will not be ashamed to stand before you' (quoted by Kim 2002: 163). At the funeral of another Korean student, a dissident leader tried to instil this same emotion: 'We will never disappoint the martyr who devoted his dear life to the nation' (AP, 12 May 1991).

The most significant acts of self-immolation continue to evoke a response, long after the event. The site of the event or burial can become a place of pilgrimage. On the intersection where Quang Duc died, there is a large memorial; it is still festooned with flowers to this day (Topmiller 1998: 272). Palach was first buried in Olsany Cemetery in Prague. To hinder people from laying flowers, the police removed the bronze tablet from his grave; eventually, in 1973 they translated the remains to his native village, which would be less accessible. Similarly, the date of the event can become a time of renewed attention. On the twentieth anniversary of Palach's death, in 1989, police resorted to tear gas and water cannons to break up a demonstration in Wenceslas Square. The Dravidian Progress Association celebrates the anniversary of Chinnaswamy's death as 'Language Martyrs' Day' (Ramaswamy 1997: 229).

Consequences

Self-immolation can spur sympathizers to greater effort on behalf of the cause, and it can even convert people to the cause. And it often inspires others to repeat the sacrifice. The effect of self-immolation is potentially far greater than any other individual contribution to a social movement. After all, the marginal effect of an individual participating in a demonstration or some other conventional protest is vanishingly small (Olson 1971). The ultimate consequences of self-immolation depend on the particular context because this sacrifice is usually only one element in a sustained interaction between protesters and their opponents. It is therefore worthwhile to explore two episodes in greater detail: Buddhists in South Vietnam in 1963 and 1966, and followers of Falun Gong in China in 2001. These serve to delineate the range of possible consequences, from beneficial to detrimental.

The overthrow of President Diem in 1963 provides a clear illustration of success. The coup occurred five months after Quang Duc's immolation, during which five monks and nuns had followed his example. One can surmise that their deaths were a necessary—albeit not sufficient—cause of Diem's downfall, though the causal pathway is complex. The immolation of Quang Duc dramatically altered the climate of popular opinion in the cities. For the first time, ordinary citizens took to the streets of Saigon, alongside monks and nuns. Even the regime sensed the change. Diem hurriedly negotiated a compromise with the Buddhist movement in order to avoid a public funeral. In the event, thousands of women rioted as police tried to prevent them from attending. Quang Duc's ashes were distributed to pagodas across the country, along with photographs 'touched up to show the skeleton through the fire' (Hope 1967: 151). Widespread popular opposition—regularly inflamed by further immolations—stimulated more severe repression. All this was reported by American journalists, who were skilfully cultivated by the Buddhists.

The regime's repression alienated the United States. President John F. Kennedy supposedly exclaimed 'Jesus Christ' when he saw the image of the burning monk. It was not a good advertisement for the anti-communist struggle, especially as the Buddhist crisis immediately became an international issue. As the crisis worsened, the ruling family became more irrational, joking about 'barbecues'. Even their stalwart supporters in the American Mission realized that the regime was focused more on suppressing the Buddhists than on fighting the Viet Cong. Kennedy appointed a new ambassador to force compromise. At his initial briefing, there was the photograph of Quang Duc's death on the President's desk (Browne 1965: 182).[44] Then, in August, the government's special forces launched a concerted assault on pagodas across the country, injuring hundreds of monks and killing an unknown number. Thousands

were arrested. The police even cut the telephones of American officials, to prevent them from intervening. This was Diem's fatal mistake, to openly defy the United States (cf. Kahin 1987: 431). Only when American officials intimated their need for a more pliable regime did army leaders launch a coup.

The success of self-immolation in 1963 should be contrasted with the failure in 1966. (Topmiller 1998 is the definitive monograph; Schecter 1967 provides a first-hand account.) By the spring of that year, South Vietnam was in turmoil. The military junta, headed by Premier Nguyen Cao Ky, had lost control of swathes of the country. Danang and Hué were held by dissident army units and popular forces, led by Buddhists. Ky announced his intention to limit the scope of forthcoming elections, and launched a military assault on the 'rebel' cities. In the course of a month, fourteen Buddhists burned themselves to death. By the end of June, however, the regime had successfully repressed all opposition, raiding the Buddhist headquarters in Saigon and placing Tri Quang under house arrest. The outcome may be partly explained by domestic factors. Ky was a wily operator compared with Diem; he made the most of factional conflict between Tri Quang and the conservative leader, Thich Tam Chau. The militant Buddhists were not merely fighting for religious freedom, they were attempting to dictate the country's political future; as a result, perhaps, they might not have enjoyed the breadth of popular support they had in 1963 (Schecter 1967: 235, 243; Oka 1966, TO-27: 11). But once again the decisive factor was the attitude of the United States (Kahin 1987: 431–2). By 1966, it was clear that the Buddhists were committed to ending the war through negotiations. Indeed, two monks had burned themselves to death during the previous year to plead for a ceasefire on Buddha's birthday. As the Americans came to realize that only a dictatorial regime would prosecute the war against the Viet Cong, so the Buddhists came to identify the United

States as their foe. Though Nu Thanh Quang appealed to American for help, Buddhist students torched the United States Information Service and consulate in Hué. It is not surprising, then, that President Lyndon Johnson never wavered in his support for Ky.

The self-immolation of Chinese followers of Falun Gong provides an exceptional example of unintended—and detrimental—consequences (for a detailed chronology see Human Rights Watch 2002). The Chinese government banned Falun Gong, a spiritual movement based on the *qigong* healing tradition, in the middle of 1999. Because the movement had a huge following, including by many in the Communist Party, and because local officials did not view it as a threat, the campaign of repression had little success. The movement was still able to orchestrate protests in Tiananmen Square, which was acutely embarrassing for the government. In January 2001, on the eve of Chinese New Year, five followers set themselves alight in the Square and two more were thwarted. The government initially tried to suppress news of the event, even though Western journalists had witnessed the scene. Then it was realized how this could be turned against the movement. A week later, state television broadcast a gruesome film of the incident, including images of a 12-year-old girl (daughter of one of the practitioners) writhing in agony (*NYT*, 31 Jan. 2001). The official leadership of Falun Gong, exiled in America, immediately denied any connection with the movement; it released its own video, which accused the government of concocting the incident (Falun Dafa 2001). While there is no reason to believe that the leadership sanctioned the suicides, it seems unnecessary to resort to any conspiracy theory. Some of the adults had taken part in previous protests (*Washington Post*, 4 February 2001). In addition, two more individuals set fire to themselves in the following months; another was arrested for planning to emulate their actions.

Self-immolation became the centrepiece of the government's continuing propaganda campaign. This framed the deaths as cultic suicide rather than political protest. 'Nirvana means slaughter' was one headline in the *People's Daily* (AF, 17 February 2001). By all accounts this had a major impact on people's opinions. 'Previously, most Chinese thought the crackdown was stupid, like a dog catching a mouse', admitted an anonymous official (*Washington Post*, 5 August 2001). 'After those people burned themselves and the party broadcast that little girl's face on TV for almost a month straight, people's views here changed.'[45] Within weeks, the government ordered a massive increase in repression, including systematic torture. Not only was there a favourable climate of opinion; deaths in custody could now be used as evidence of the cult's deleterious effects. The official news agency boasts that a total of 1,700 have committed suicide.[46] The combination of torture, 're-education', and propaganda apparently yielded results. Within six months, Falun Gong was effectively eliminated as a movement within China. The maimed survivors were still being paraded before a press conference in the following year. 'Falun Gong is indeed an evil cult and it led me to this', said Chen Guo (Xinhua News Agency, 7 April 2002).[47] Presumably the state could not have scored such a propaganda triumph without the involvement of children in the attempted immolation. The attempt by Falun Gong to disassociate itself from the act was probably also counterproductive.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can revisit the comparison with suicide attacks. Quang Duc's self-immolation in Saigon in 1963 resembles the suicide bombing of the Iraqi embassy in Beirut in 1981: each initiated a continuing lineage of actions, directly or indirectly

descending from the original event. There were earlier instances of self-immolation and of suicide attacks, of course, but they did not have the same inspirational effect on others. The lineage beginning with Quang Duc proliferated more widely in its first two decades: self-immolation has been adopted in more countries than has suicide bombing and for a greater range of collective causes. Overall, it is more prevalent within cultures shaped by Hindu and Buddhist traditions, whereas suicide bombing has an affinity with Islam.

In a fundamental sense, the two phenomena are disconnected: actors do not treat them as alternatives. It is not as if an individual resolves to die for the cause, and then chooses whether or not to kill. It is the reverse: the basic parameter is whether or not the enemy is to be killed—whether the situation is war (in the broadest sense) or protest. Within the confines of each situation, the decision is then whether to make the supreme sacrifice instead of engaging in a less costly form of action. Self-immolation is an alternative to participating in a demonstration or going on hunger strike, for example, just as a suicide attack is an alternative to an attack from which escape is possible. This disjunction helps explain the difference in orchestration: self-immolation is inherently individualistic, while a suicide attack is invariably organized. In part, this reflects practical constraints. Gasoline and a match suffice for self-immolation, whereas a suicide attack requires considerable planning and expertise. Yet the difference runs deeper, because organizations are unwilling to claim credit for self-immolation by their supporters. Outside of war, directing someone to make the ultimate sacrifice is unacceptable; that sacrifice is legitimate only as an individual choice.

Given the disjunction between self-immolation and suicide attacks, we would expect to find different sets of motivations. On the one hand, some motivations

pertain especially or exclusively to suicide attacks. Such attacks provide greater scope for what I identify as vanity, due to the lengthy interval between volunteering and dying, during which the volunteer enjoys the approbation of others. Self-immolation, by contrast, is rarely announced beforehand, and so approbation is only posthumous. (Like threats, promises of self-immolation are apparently not credible.) A potential motivation for suicide attacks is the calculation that death in combat is highly probable anyway, and so little is lost by volunteering for a suicide attack. This resembles what I identify as cheating the enemy, but that applies to only a small fraction of cases of self-immolation. Another prominent motivation is the emotional 'reward' of anticipated harm to the enemy. While self-immolation may be spurred by anger, it cannot be motivated directly by revenge or retaliation. On the other hand, some motivations pertain especially or exclusively to self-immolation. Conceivably, suicide attacks could be intended to incite sympathizers, as I identify it, but this must be a minor theme.[48] Suicide attacks cannot be intended to appeal to bystanders or opponents. As an example, Vietnamese Buddhists killed themselves (in part) to appeal to American public opinion, and thus change the foreign policy of the United States; that motivation can hardly be shared by Palestinian suicide bombers.

This leads to the central puzzle posed by self-immolation: how is it effective? A suicide attack maximizes the costs imposed on the enemy, while self-immolation inflicts cost only on the perpetrator. Dying without killing is potentially effective in two ways. First, it can incite sympathizers to contribute more to the cause by evoking emotions like guilt or shame. Second, it can convert bystanders to the cause by signalling the depth of the collectivity's grievances. Only once has self-immolation proved detrimental, in allowing the Chinese state to frame Falun Gong as a suicidal cult. Although self-immolation is exceedingly rare, it provides a significant theoretical

lesson: suffering can serve to advance a collective cause. We can discern the same logic—protest by 'communicative suffering' (Biggs 2003*b*)—in less costly forms, as when leaders seek arrest or when protesters provoke police violence. Alternatively, protesters can use the threat of their own suffering in order to constrain the actions of opponents, for example by ascending trees to prevent them from being felled. Self-immolation is unique in that it does not depend on the reaction of authorities or opponents; the individual chooses unconditionally to inflict extreme suffering on himself or herself. The efficacy of suffering is an unexplored dimension of protest, and deserves further research.

REFERENCES

Adityanjee, Dr. (1986). 'Suicide Attempts and Suicides in India: Cross-Cultural Aspects'. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 32/2: 64–73.

Ashton, John R. and Donnan, Stuart (1981). 'Suicide by Burning as an Epidemic Phenomenon: An Analysis of 82 Deaths and Inquests in England and Wales in 1978-9'. *Psychological Medicine*, 11: 735–9.

Baechler, Jean (1975), *Suicides* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell),

Benn, James A. (1998), 'Where Text Meets Flesh: Burning the Body as an Apocryphal Practice in Chinese Buddhism'. *History of Religions*, 37: 295–322.

Bethell, Nicholas (1987). *The Last Secret: Forcible Repatriation to Russia (1944–7)* (London: Hodder and Stoughton).

Biggs, Michael (2003*a*). 'Positive Feedback in Collective Mobilization: The American Strike Wave of 1886'. *Theory and Society*, 32: 217–54.

— (2003*b*). 'When Costs are Beneficial: Protest as Communicative Suffering'. Department of Sociology, University of Oxford, Working Paper, 2003-04.

Bollen, Kenneth A. and Phillips, David P. (1982). 'Imitative Suicides: A National Study of the Effects of Television News Stories'. *American Sociological Review*, 47: 802–9.

Bostic, Richard A. (1973) 'Self-Immolation: A Survey of the Last Decade'. *Life-Threatening Behavior*, 3, no. 1:66-74

Bourgeois, Marc (1969, 'Suicides par le feu à la manière des bonzes'. *Société Medico-Psychologique*, May 19:116-27

Browne, Malcolm W. (1965). *The New Face of War: A Report on a Communist Guerrilla Campaign* (London: Cassell).

— (1993). *Muddy Boots and Red Socks: A Reporter's Life* (New York: Random House).

Chabot, Sean (2000). 'Transnational Diffusion and the African American Reinvention of Gandhian Repertoire'. *Mobilization*, 5: 201–16.

Chân Không (Cao Ngoc Phuong) (1993). *Learning True Love: How I Learned and Practiced Social Change in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press).

Cheng, Andrew T. A. and Lee, Chau-Shoun (2000). 'Suicide in Asia and the Far East', in Keith Hawton and Kees van Heeringen (eds.), *The International Handbook of Suicide and Attempted Suicide* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons).

Colmore, G. (1913). *The Life of Emily Davison: An Outline* (London: The Woman's Press).

Conell, Carol and Cohn, Samuel (1995). 'Learning from Other People's Actions: Environmental Variation and Diffusion in French Coal Mining Strikes, 1890–1935'. *American Journal of Sociology*, 101: 366–403.

Crosby, Kevin, Rhee, Joong-oh, and Holland, Jimmie (1977). 'Suicide by Fire: A Contemporary Method of Political Protest'. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 23: 60–9.

Douglas, Jack D. (1967). *The Social Meanings of Suicide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

Dubey, D. P. (1987). 'The Religious Practice of Suicides at Prayāga (Allahabad)'. *Archív Orientální*, 55: 355–69.

Durkheim, Emile (1952). *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, 1st edn. 1897 (New York: Free Press). (1952

Elster, Jon (1999). *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Ergil, Dogu (2001). 'Suicide Terrorism in Turkey: The Workers' Party of Kurdistan', in *Countering Suicide Terrorism: An International Conference* (Herzliya, Israel: The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism).

Falun Dafa (2001). 'Uncovering the Truth of the Self-Immolation' (video), http://minghui.cc/media/video/immolation_doubts_broadband.ram

Firth, Raymond (1961). 'Suicide and Risk-Taking in Tikopia Society'. *Psychiatry*, 24: 1–17.

Forest, James H. (1978). *The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam: Fifteen Years for Reconciliation* (Alkmaar: International Fellowship for Reconciliation).

Gambetta, Diego (1993). *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Private Protection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

Grewal, J. S. (1990). *The New Cambridge History of India*, II.3: *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, rev. edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Halberstam, David (1965). *The Making of a Quagmire* (London: Bodley Head).

Harran, Marilyn J. (1987). 'Suicide', in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan).

Hassler, Alfred (1970). *Saigon, U.S.A.* (New York: Richard W. Baron).

Hawley, John Stratton (ed.) (1994). *Sati: The Burning of Wives in India* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Hawton, Keith, Rodham, Karen, Evans, Emma, and Weatherall , Rosamund (2002). 'Deliberate Self Harm in Adolescents: Self Report Survey in Schools in England'. *British Medical Journal*, 325: 1207–11.

Hendrickson, Paul (1996). *The Living and the Dead: Robert McNamara and Five Lives of a Lost War* (New York: Knopf).

Hope, Marjorie (1967). 'The Reluctant Way: Self-Immolation in Vietnam'. *The Antioch Review*, 27/2: 149–63.

Human Rights Watch (1995). *Vietnam: The Suppression of the Unified Buddhist Church* (New York: Human Rights Watch).

— (2002). *Dangerous Meditation: China's Campaign Against Falungong* (New York: Human Rights Watch).

Inglehart, Ronald et al. (2000). World Values Surveys (1995–97) (computer file), ICPSR 2790 (Ann Arbor: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research).

Jeffreys, M. D. (1971). 'Samsonic Suicides: Or Suicides of Revenge among Africans', in Anthony Giddens (ed.), *The Sociology of Suicide: A Selection of Readings* (London: Frank Cass).

Joiner, Charles A. (1964). 'South Vietnam's Buddhist Crisis: Organization for Charity, Dissidence, and Unity'. *Asian Survey*, 4: 915–28.

Kahin, George McT. (1987). *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Knopf).

Kelley, Ron (1987). 'The Death of Neusha Farrahi: An Immolation in Westwood'. *L.A. Weekly*, 23–7 October: 20–2, 24, 26–7.

Kim, Hyojoung (2002). 'Shame, Anger, and Love in Collective Action: Emotional Consequences of Suicide Protest in South Korea 1991'. *Mobilization*, 7/2: 159–76.

King, Sallie B. (2000). 'They Who Burned Themselves for Peace: Quaker and Buddhist Self-Immolators during the Vietnam War'. *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 20: 127–50.

Kohli, Atul (ed.) (2001). *The Success of India's Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Krishnan, K. G. (1983). 'On Self-Immolation from Inscriptions', in N. Subrahmanian (ed.), *Self-Immolation in Tamil Society* (Madurai: International Institute of Tamil Historical Studies).

Lee, Kyung-soon and Bishop, Ellen (1998). *The May 18 Kwangju Democratic Uprising.* (Kwangju: The May 18 History Compilation Committee of Kwangju City.)

Lochtefeld, James G. (1987). 'Suicide in the Hindu Tradition: Varieties, Propriety and Practice'. M.A. dissertation, University of Washington.

Luce, Don and Sommer, John (1969). *Viet Nam: The Unheard Voices* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press).

Lyon, Alynna and Uçarer, Emek (2001). 'Mobilizing Ethnic Conflict: Kurdish Separatism in Germany and the PKK'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 24: 925–48.

McCarthy, John D., McPhail, Clark, and Smith, Jackie (1996). 'Images of Protest: Dimensions of Selection Bias in Media Coverage of Washington Demonstrations 1982 and 1991'. *American Sociological Review*, 61: 478–99.

Mahla, V. P., Bharghava, S. C., Dogra, R., and Shome, S. (1992). 'The Psychology of Self-Immolation in India'. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 34/2: 108–13.

Malinowski, Bronislaw (1926). *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (New York: Humanities Press).

Marshall, Monty G. and Jaggers, Keith (2003). Polity IV: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2002 (electronic dataset) (Baltimore: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland).

Mastny, Vojtech (ed.) (1972). *Czechoslovakia: Crisis in World Communism* (New York: Facts on File).

Mecklin, John (1965). *Mission in Torment: An Intimate Account of the U.S. Role in Vietnam* (New York: Doubleday).

Morris, I. I. (1960). *Nationalism and the Right Wing in Japan* (London: Oxford University Press).

Morrison Welsh, Anne (2000). 'Norman Morrison, Deed of Life, Deed of Death' and 'A Healing Journey'. *Winds of Change*, 2: 4–7.

Nathan, John (1974). *Mishima: A Biography* (London: Hamish Hamilton).

Nepstad, Sharon Erickson (2002). 'Creating Transnational Solidarity: The Use of Narrative in the U.S.-Central America Peace Movement', in Jackie Smith and

Hank Johnston (eds.), *Globalization and Resistance: Transnational Dimensions of Social Movements* (Lanham, MD: Rowland and Littlefield).

Oka, Takashi (1966). 'Buddhism as a Political Force'. Institute of Current World Affairs, *Newsletter*, TO-24–TO-27.

Olson, Mancur (1971). *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press).

Pandian, M. S. S. (1992). *The Image Trap: M. G. Ramachandran in Film and Politics* (New Delhi: Sage).

Park, B. C. Ben (forthcoming). 'Sociopolitical Contexts of Self-Immolations in Vietnam and South Korea'. *Archives of Suicide Research.*

Park, Kwang Su (1995). *A Single Spark* (film) (Daewoo Cinema Network).

Phillips, David P., and Carstensen, Lundie L. (1986). 'Clustering of Teenage Suicides after Television News Stories about Suicide'. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 315/11: 685–89.

Puhovski, Nenad (1997). *Graham and I: A True Story* (film) (Zagreb: Factum Productions).

Radio Praha (n.d.). Jan Palach, 16.1.1969. http://archiv.radio.cz/palach99/eng/

Ramaswamy, Sumathi (1997). *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891–1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

Reza, A., Mercy, J. A., and Krug, E. (2001). 'Epidemiology of Violent Deaths in the World'. *Injury Prevention*, 7: 104–11.

Rothschild, M. A., Raatschen, H.-J., and Schneider, V. (2002). 'Suicide by Self-Immolation in Berlin from 1990 to 2000'. *Forensic Science International*, 124/2: 163–6.

Ryan, Cheyney (1994). 'The One Who Burns Herself for Peace', in Karen J. Warren and Duane L. Cady (eds.), *Bringing Peace Home: Feminism, Violence, and Nature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press).

Schecter, Jerrold (1967). *The New Face of Buddha: Buddhism and Political Power in Southeast Asia* (London: Victor Gollancz).

Schmid, Andre (2002). *Korea between Empires, 1895–1919* (New York: Columbia University Press).

Schmidtke, Armin and Schaller, Sylvia (2000). 'The Role of Mass Media in Suicide Prevention', in Keith Hawton and Kees van Heeringen (eds.), *The International Handbook of Suicide and Attempted Suicide* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons).

— et al. (1999). 'Suicide Rates in the World: Update'. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 5: 81–9.

Scott-Stokes, Henry (1975). *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima* (London: Peter Owen).

Singh, S., Santosh, J., Avasthi, A., and Kulhara, P. (1998). 'A Psychosocial Study of "Self-Immolation" in India'. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 97: 71–5.

Soni Raleigh, V. and Balarajan, R. (1992). 'Suicide and Self-Burning Among Indians and West Indians in England and Wales'. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 161: 365–8.

Steinbach, Alice (1995). 'The Sacrifice of Norman Morrison'. *Baltimore Sun*, 30 July: K1, K4–5

Stengel, Erwin (1969). *Suicide and Attempted Suicide*, rev. edn. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books).

Subrahmanian, N. (1983). 'Self-Immolation in Tamil Society', in N. Subrahmanian (ed.), *Self-Immolation in Tamil Society* (Madurai: International Institute of Tamil Historical Studies).

Sukhai, A., Moorad, R. G. R., and Dada, Mahomed A. (2002). 'Suicide by Self-Immolation in Durban, South Africa: A Five-Year Retrospective Review'. *American Journal of Forensic Medicine and Pathology*, 23: 295–8.

Sweeney, George (1993). 'Irish Hunger Strikes and the Cult of Self-Sacrifice'. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28: 421–37.

Taylor, Steve (1982). *Durkheim and the Study of Suicide* (London: Macmillan).

Thakur, Upendra (1963). *The History of Suicide in India: An Introduction* (Delhi: Munshi Ram Manohar Lal).

Thich Giac Duc (1986). 'Buddhists and Catholics', in David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai (eds.), *Portrait of the Enemy* (New York: Random House).

Thich Nhat Hanh (1967). Letter to Martin Luther King, Jr. (1 June 1965), *Vietnam: The Lotus in the Sea of Fire* (London: SCM Press).

Thich Thien-An (1975*a*). *Buddhism and Zen in Vietnam in Relation to the Development of Buddhism in Asia* (Los Angeles: College of Oriental Studies, Graduate School; Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle).

— (1975*b*). Interview, in Rick Fields (ed.), *Loka: A Journal from Naropa Institute* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books).

Tilly, Charles (1986). 'European Violence and Collective Action since 1700'. *Social Research*, 53: 159–84.

Topmiller, Robert (1994). 'The 1963 Buddhist Crisis in South Vietnam'. M.A. thesis, Central Washington University.

— (1998). 'The Lotus Unleashed: The Buddhist Struggle Movement in South Vietnam (1964–66)'. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky.

Treptow, Kurt W. (1992). 'The Winter of Despair: Jan Palach and the Collapse of the Prague Spring' [1989], in Kurt W. Treptow, *From Zalmoxis to Jan Palach: Studies in East European History* (New York: Columbia University Press).

Tsai, H. H. (1996). 'Globalization and the Urban System in Taiwan', in Fu-chen Lo and Yue-man Yeung (eds.), *Emerging World Cities in Pacific Asia* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press).

Tz'u-hsing Ch'an Ssu (1958). *Tu-lun ch'an shih shih chi* (Hong Kong: n.p.).

Uehling, Greta (2000). 'Squatting, Self-Immolation, and the Repatriation of Crimean Tatars', *Nationalities Papers*. 28: 317–41.

United Nations Population Division (2001). *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2001 Revision* (New York: United Nations).

Weber, Max (1958). 'The Economic Ethic of World Religions: Introduction' and 'Intermediate Considerations' [1916], in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York : Oxford University Press).

— (1978). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, 1st edn 1922 (Berkeley: University of California Press).

Weinberger-Thomas, Catherine (1999). *Ashes of Immortality: Widow-Burning in India* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press).

Welch, Holmes (1967). *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism (1900–1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

Williams, Kieran (1997). *The Prague Spring and Its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics (1968–1970)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Williams, Mark (1997). *Cry of Pain: Understanding Suicide and Self-Harm* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books).

Williams, J., Mark G. and Pollock, Leslie R. (2000). 'The Psychology of Suicidal Behaviour', in Keith Hawton and Kees van Heeringen (eds.), *The International Handbook of Suicide and Attempted Suicide* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons).

Wulff, Erich (1963). 'The Buddhist Revolt: Diem's New Opponents Deserve US Support'. *New Republic*, 31 August: 11–14.

Zahavi, Amotz and Zahavi, Avishag (1997). *The Handicap Principle: A Missing Piece of Darwin's Puzzle* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press).

This research was supported in part by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council, no. 000-22-0033z. I am indebted to my fellow contributors and especially to Diego Gambetta, along with James Benn, Susanne Choi, Andreas Glaeser, Doug Grbic, Olivier Grojean, Heather Hamill, Keith Hawton, Nejla Coskun, Alistair McMillan, Christian List, Clark McPhail, Kate Meagher, Anna Maria Marshall, Sally Nhomi, Avner Offer, Nenad Puhovski, Alice de Sturler, Robert Topmiller, and Kamakshya Trivedi.

[1] As with any social phenomena, there are boundary cases. Musa Mamut, a Crimean Tatar, set himself alight and ran towards a policeman; according to his father, he intended to harm or kill (Uehling 2000). More enigmatic is Norman Morrison's decision to bring his infant daughter: 'I shall not plan to go without my child, as Abraham did' (quoted in Morrison Welsh 2000: 4). He set himself alight, but she escaped unharmed.

[2] This is not yet reflected in dictionary definitions, but it is apparent in news reports (for example, 'immolation' used to describe murder by fire in *NYT*, 22 Jan. 1969). The shift in meaning indicates, yet again, the impact of Quang Duc's sacrifice.

[3] The death of Roop Kanwar in 1987 was, however, used by the Hindu nationalist movement to symbolize its conflict with the secular state.

[4] Hypothetically, an individual could fast to death without making any threat and without heeding any concessions, but this seems unlikely and I have found no examples.

[5] After this chapter was written, Ben Park kindly sent me a paper on self-immolation in Vietnam and South Korea (Park forthcoming).

[6] The index to the *New York Times* is searched under the heading 'suicide'; in addition, the electronic text (recently available through the ProQuest database) is searched by the keywords 'immolate', 'immolated', 'immolating', and 'immolation'. The index to *The Times* is searched electronically, under the heading 'suicide' until 1965 and 'self-immolation' thereafter.

[7] Other news-wires, from different parts of the world, have recently been added to the Nexis database. These are not included because this would destroy comparability of coverage over time. The keywords utilized are 'immolate', 'immolated', 'immolating', and 'immolation'. Some reports, unfortunately, may not include these words, but this is the only feasible method of searching.

[8] A thwarted attempt is included only if it was physically prevented at the last moment; this excludes arrests for apparently planning self-immolation.

[9] I would tend to exclude suicides on the illness or death of a public figure—like that of M. G. Ramachandran in Tamil Nadu (Pandian 1992: 17–18)—though the point is moot because there is not sufficient information on individual cases, even in Indian newspapers.

[10] One example is Musa Mamut (Uehling 2000).

[11] The Cable News Network denied that it was tipped off beforehand; its producer just guessed that some sort of protest was likely (AP, 8 February 2001). The film was confiscated by the police.

[12] This is indicated by *The Times* index, which includes articles dropped from later editions of the day's newspaper. Some tantalizing reports of self-immolation were driven off the page by late-breaking news. Because only the day's final edition is

microfilmed and archived, these reports effectively vanish from the record. (Even *The Times* itself does not hold these early editions.)

[13] Chân Không (1993: 206–8); Forest (1978: 31–41); Human Rights Watch (1995); Lee and Bishop (1998: 171); Puhovski (1997); Radio Praha (n.d.); Ramaswamy (1997: 233, 271–3); Uehling (1990). This includes a group of twelve which was actually reported in *The Times* (8 September 1976), though not indexed under 'immolation'; the newspaper report alone does not provide sufficient information to warrant inclusion in the sample.

[14] Accounts by those in Vietnam at the time include Browne (1965, 1993); Chân Không (1993); Halberstam (1965); Hope (1967); Luce and Sommer (1969); Mecklin (1965); Schecter (1967); and Thich Giac Duc (1986). Joiner (1964) and Topmiller (1994) narrate the events.

[15] This creative redeployment of religious tradition in political struggle has similarities with the contemporaneous American civil rights movement. Like Vietnamese Buddhists, Southern blacks practised militant non-violence, and were adept at using the media to discredit their opponents. Both took inspiration from Gandhi's similar synthesis of Hinduism and nationalism.

[16] The report, which appeared two years afterwards, included some fanciful elements; it mentions neither eyewitnesses nor any note (Tz'u-hsing ch'an ssu 1958). My thanks are due to Susanne Choi for translating this.

[17] Schecter (1967: 178) claims that Diem was told three days in advance of the self-immolation, but did not take the warning seriously.

[18] Curiously, Herz's sacrifice attracted far less attention in America than the subsequent two. Perhaps the neglect can be explained by gender (Ryan 1994). Note,

however, that it occurred on a Detroit street corner, far from any place of national significance.

[19] The case in the Soviet Union illustrates the difficulties of obtaining evidence in a totalitarian political system. 'Soviet sources' claimed that the man killed himself because officials would not let him fight in Vietnam, and this was reported without comment in the *New York Times* (12 April 1966). One wonders whether this was a conveniently patriotic cover story for an act of *anti*-Soviet protest.

[20] Suicide by fire was not so rare in some non-Western cultures. Two Vietnamese men killed themselves in this manner in 1963, apparently because they were suffering serious illness (*NYT*, 12 December 1963). In India this method was 'very common', particularly among women (Thakur 1963: 112). More recent statistics show that suicide by fire is more frequent among Indians, including Indian immigrants to Britain and South Africa, than in the West (Adityanjee 1986; Soni Raleigh and Balarajan 1992; Sukhai, Moorad, and Dada 2002).

[21] The figure is from *The Times* index (a report which was dropped before the final edition), 29 January 1969. Of course, it is impossible to be sure that these were not politically motivated, because the government would have suppressed information to that effect. I have been guided by two recent accounts (Radio Praha n.d; K. Williams 1997: 190) which name as protest suicides only Jan Zajic, Evzen Plocek, and Michal Leucik. (The latter is excluded from the sample only because I lack sufficient information.) Indeed, Zajic implied this when he signed himself as 'Torch number two'.

[22] We should not necessarily conclude that this actually increased the *total* number of suicides. Because this is such a painful method, it is unlikely to have attracted people who were undecided whether to live or die.

[23] The news-wires appear to be more comprehensive, at least to judge from 1977: the Associated Press reported two cases, but neither appeared in the *New York Times* or *The Times*.

[24] I have concentrated on examples in which self-immolation was fatal. As we will see below, in a handful of cases the act falls short of a determined attempt to die, which implies that the relevant collective cause is not such a momentous one.

[25] The news-wires reported twenty-one in total, but this is obviously an underestimate. For November 1998 alone, six appeared in news reports, but official Turkish figures counted twenty-two (Ergil 2001: 115).

[26] Unfortunately, these estimates are not based on a uniform definition of 'urban'; they reflect the different definitions adopted by each country's statistical office. The United Nations eliminates Taiwan from its statistics; the figure is estimated from Tsai (1996). The Kurdish population in Europe is estimated at a million (following Oliver Grojean). Obviously the rate of population growth varies greatly among countries, but this would not affect the comparison—though differential growth before and after 1985 would.

[27] These suicide rates refer to a single year in the 1990s, whereas one ideally wants the average over the four decades. We know, however, that the ranking of European countries has proved quite stable over many decades.

[28] This result holds even if Kurdish self-immolations are added to the figure for Turkey.

[29] Self-sacrifice is especially prominent in the Jain tradition, but none in the sample of self-immolations is identified as Jain.

[30] This interval is chosen because Bollen and Phillips (1982: 806–9) estimate that a television news story about a suicide has a discernible effect on the suicide rate over the subsequent ten days. Note that the term 'wave' is used with a less restrictive meaning elsewhere in this chapter.

[31] There was no support for this gruesome plan, and she eventually died by fire. She orchestrated her death to appeal to Catholics—she died before a statue of the Virgin Mary as well as a Buddhist icon—which may be interpreted as further evidence of her strategic insight.

[32] Because threats are far less newsworthy, it is not possible to compile comparable systematic evidence.

[33] The shift from fasting in 1961 to (threatened) self-immolation by fire in 1965 is further evidence that the latter was ultimately derived from Quang Duc's act, possibly via the Tamil immolations.

[34] There is a complicated history. In the early 1960s, Sant Fateh Singh and Master Tara Singh had each promised a fast until death; both gave up. The latter was blamed and subsequently discredited (Grewal 1990: 199–200).

[35] I am aware of only one other successful threat, in Burma: in 1964, Buddhists threatened to burn themselves to protest against the regime's regulation of religious organizations (*NYT*, 6 May 1964).

[36] This is suggested by the Charan caste in India, which specialized in the 'business of private protection' (cf. Gambetta 1993), like the mafia—but they enforced contracts and guaranteed security by threatening to harm *themselves*. This was known as *traga*

(Gujarati spelling): graduated self-mutilation which would culminate in killing oneself (Weinberger-Thomas 1999: 58–63).

[37] What really happened is not altogether clear. The police claimed, implausibly, that Goswami's rivals had set him alight. Although Goswami is not the most reliable witness, his story is consistent with contemporary reports. And surely he had no reason to emphasize momentary impulse rather than heroic resolve?

[38] A recollection so many years after the event—in 1978—cannot be treated uncritically, but it obviously seared his memory. The event is in the sample, but the Associated Press did not report sufficient detail to verify his account (AP, 2 October 1978).

[39] The same sort of sacrificial exchange can be found in tribal societies, as when a Tikopian chief tried to hang himself in order to compel the gods to cure his ailing son (Firth 1961).

[40] This also undergirded the use of *traga* by the Charan caste, noted above. Defaulters feared that the ghosts of the dead would return to haunt them (Weinberger-Thomas 1999: 58–63; cf. Jeffreys 1971).

[41] Conceivably Allende was captured and murdered, but his wife certainly believed that he killed himself (see also a bodyguard's testimony in *Guardian*, 2 September 2003).

[42] Jan Palach's funeral is supposed to have been attended by 'hundreds of thousands' (Treptow 1992: 129) or 'half a million' (Mastny 1972: 191). Whether these figures are exaggerated is unclear.

[43] The distinction is illustrated by the wave of self-immolations in South Korea in 1991, after the police killed a student, Kang Kyung Dae. Although the movement

already had an innocent victim, eight individuals killed themselves before Kang was buried, including one during the funeral procession.

[44] The ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, wrote the preface to Browne's book, and must have relayed this to Browne.

[45] It is not far-fetched to make a connection with report in May 2001 by Xinhua News Agency that a Tibetan monk had been sentenced (in January) for plotting to burn himself to death. The authorities apparently hoped to discredit the Dalai Lama as they had discredited Falun Gong.

[46] There are sketchy reports that several adherents in a labour camp in Harbin killed themselves to protest against prison conditions, but the precise nature is impossible to confirm (AFP, 3 July 2001).

[47] Curiously, another survivor, Liu Yunfang, declared his continued belief in the movement. This either testifies to the strength of his commitment or is a cunning ploy to enhance the credibility of state propaganda.

[48] Another difference is relevant here: we do not find individuals who immolate themselves hoping for others to replicate their example, unlike those who volunteer for suicide attacks.

TABLE 6.1: Self-immolation by country, 1963–2002

Country	Number	% of total	Rate per million
India	255	47.8	1.4
South Vietnam/Vietnam	92	17.3	8.0
South Korea	43	8.1	1.6
USA	29	5.4	0.2
Kurds outside Turkey	14	2.6	14.0
Romania	14	2.6	1.2
USSR/ex-USSR (except Lithuania)	12	2.3	0.1
China	9	1.7	0.0
Pakistan	9	1.7	0.3
France	5	0.9	0.5
Japan	5	0.9	0.1
Lithuanians	5	0.9	2.2
Czechoslovakia	4	0.8	0.5
East/West Germany	4	0.8	0.1
Turkey	4	0.8	0.2
Bulgaria	3	0.6	0.5
Chile	3	0.6	0.0
Taiwan	3	0.6	0.2
UK	3	0.6	0.1
Malaysia	2	0.4	0.3
Thailand	2	0.4	0.2
Elsewhere	13	2.4	0.0
TOTAL	533	100.0	0.3

Source: see text.

TABLE 6.2: Waves involving more than three acts of self-immolation, 1963–2002

Country	Date begun	Collective cause	Number
China	23 Jan 2001	Falun Gong v government	7
India	11 Feb 1965	Tamil v Hindi	5
	19 Sep 1990	protest against reservations for lower castes*	208
	19 Nov 1990	protest against reservations for lower castes	15
	19 May 1999	request for Sonia Gandhi to retract resignation	7
Pakistan	30 Sep 1978	Bhutto supporters v government	4
Romania	24 Mar 2000	miners v government	10
South Korea	18 Dec 1987	protest against electoral fraud	3
	29 Apr 1991	protest against government	9
	16 Apr 1996	protest against government	3
South Vietnam/	13 Aug 1963	Buddhists v government	3
Vietnam	21 Apr 1965	Buddhists v government	3
	29 May 1966	Buddhists v government	13
	3 Oct 1967	Buddhists v government	3
	22 Oct 1967	Buddhists v government	4
	4 Jun 1970	Buddhists v government	3
	9 May 1971	Buddhists v government	4
	16 Aug 1971	protest against electoral fraud	4
	2 Nov 1975	Buddhists v government	12
USSR	29 May 1972	Lithuanians v government	3
Western Europe	15 Feb 1999	Kurds v Turkey	7
TOTAL			330

Note: 'wave' = all acts within a country separated by intervals of ten days or less.
Source: see text.
* includes two acts of protest against the protest against reservations, and one for the cause of Hindus v Muslims.
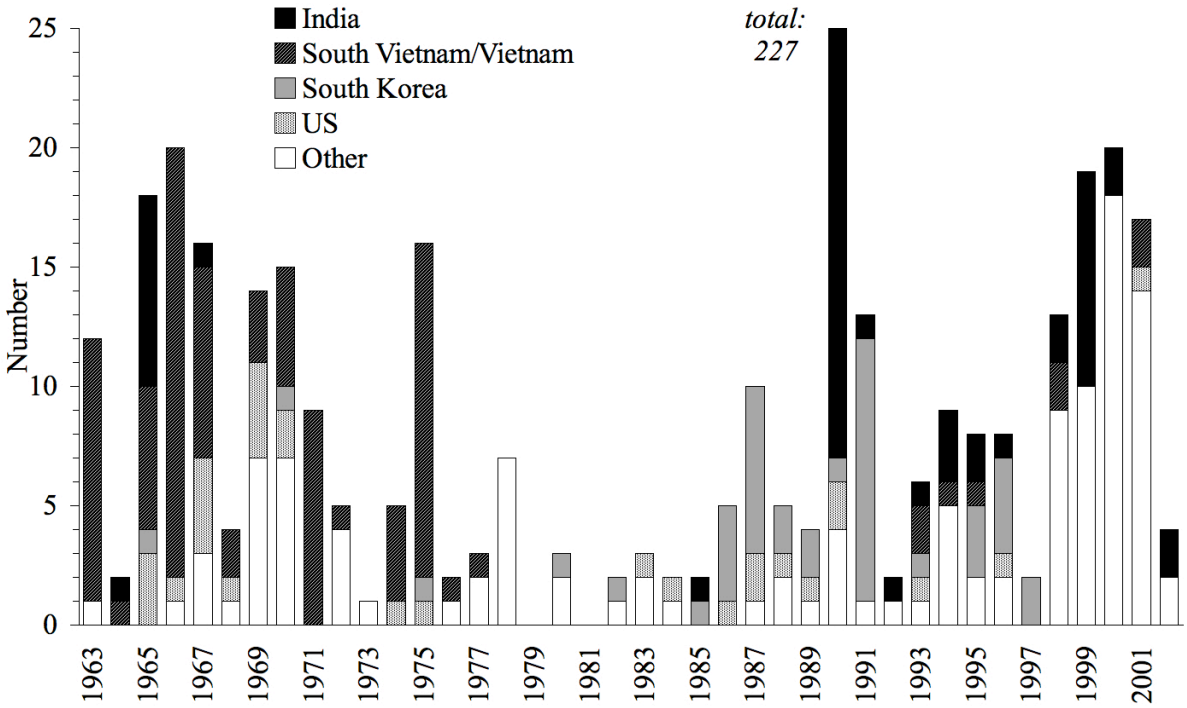
FIGURE 6.1: Self-immolation by year, 1963-2002