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ABSTRACT

On February 4th, 1922 the peasant population within the small town of Chauri Chaura, India engaged in a protest that would eventually culminate in the burning of a police station and the brutal murder of the 22 police officers inside the building. Up until this event, Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress had spearheaded a campaign for non-violent non-cooperation that had gained enough momentum to exist as a legitimate threat against British colonial rule. Immediately following the riot, Gandhi denounced the actions as a crime, and by February 12th, the Indian National Congress had halted non-cooperation on the national level. I seek to reanalyze the "riot" that occurred at Chauri Chaura by using a Lacanian framework. I argue that interpreting the events of Chauri Chaura in reference to the Symbolic and Imaginary orders provides a better understanding of the peasant behavior in the historical moment. Gandhi is recast from a Hegelian World-Historical figure into a nationalist leader who gained power through the nationalist peasantry. The riot becomes not a paroxysm of violence, as nationalist elites would want one to believe, but a natural and planned result of politics reformulated within the peasant imaginary. I propose a subaltern reinterpretation wherein nationalism is no longer predicated upon the World-Historical, but rather as a function of a tension between the leader and those "from below."

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Gandhi and Chauri Chaura

A Lacanian Reinterpretation of Gandhi through the Chauri Chaura Riot

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In 1922 Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress (INC) had spearheaded a campaign for non-violent non-cooperation, which by then had gained enough momentum to exist as a legitimate threat against British rule. The success of the movement came in part from an attempt to garner support outside of elite nationalistic circles, wherein Gandhi utilized the pledge form to create the satyagraha-volunteer,[1] a nationalism that operated on the ground.

A turning point of the non-cooperation movement occurred on February 4th, 1922, when the peasant population within the small town of Chauri Chaura[2] engaged in a protest that would eventually culminate in the burning of a police station and the brutal murder of all twenty-two officers inside the building. During the riot, peasants were heard chanting the phrase, "victory to Mahatma Gandhi!"[3] Immediately following the event, Gandhi denounced the actions at Chauri Chaura as a crime, and by February 12th, the INC had halted non-cooperation on the national level.[4]

I seek to reinterpret Gandhi's centrality in Indian nationalism through the lens of the events that took place on February 4th. A Hegelian account of Gandhi's importance would view his ability to halt an entire national movement as proof of his status as a World-Historical individual. However, I use an analytic framework based upon the Lacanian notion of the imaginary and symbolic orders in order to reinterpret Gandhi's position within the nationalistic framework as a construct of the peasant imaginary. This is not to say that Gandhi was not a central figure in the Indian nationalist movement. Rather, his centrality was not a function of his own status as an elite nationalist — it was a direct result of a mass imaginary of

[1] *Satyagraha* roughly translates to "truth force," and refers the core of Gandhi's non-violent theory of resistance. However, it is distinct from "passive resistance," in that it refers to the political ideal of living one's politics through control of the body. For example, *brahmacharya* (abstinence outside of intentional procreation) becomes subsumed into *satyagraha*.

[2] Chauri Chaura is located near Gorakhpur in the North Indian province of Uttar Pradesh (then known as the United Provinces of British India).

[3] Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi: the man, his people, and the empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 248.

[4] Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel, a life* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Pub. House, 1990), 105. See also R. Gandhi, *Gandhi: the man, his people, and the empire*, 250.

Gandhi that rested within peasant populations. Chauri Chaura will be used as an example to clearly enunciate this point.[5]

Chauri Chaura and Non-Cooperation

To understand how Chauri Chaura serves as a site to analyze how Gandhi functioned within Indian nationalism, it is important to understand the events of February 4th and contextualize them within the framework of the non-cooperation movement.

In response to the anti-seditionary Rowlatt Act[6] and the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre in Amritsar[7] in 1919, Gandhi met with a group of Hindu and Muslim leaders in a meeting in Delhi to discuss how nationalists should move forward. In his autobiography, he noted that, "I felt that something new, over and above boycott of foreign cloth, would be necessary … I described it by the word 'non-co-operation', an expression that I used for the first time at this meeting."[8] However, the term "non-cooperation" would fall to the wayside until the INC convened at Calcutta in 1920. At the Calcutta meeting of the INC, Gandhi stated that, "I have therefore placed before you my scheme of non-cooperation to achieve … you can gain swaraj in a year."[9] His plan for non-cooperation would include a boycott of foreign goods (especially foreign machine-made cloth) and institutions of British rule (schools, courts of law, etc.) in order to establish *swaraj*, or "self-rule."[10] Foreign industrial rule would be replaced by *swadeshi*[11] — for example, Indians would wear *khadi* (homespun cotton) as a means of detaching India from institutional modernity and economic dependency as established by the British.

Gandhi's concept of swaraj was markedly different from his vision for self-rule that he developed eleven years earlier in his book *Hind Swaraj*, wherein he poignantly described the ills of modern Western civilization and expounded upon the reasons as to why India should engage in a nationalism that disconnected itself

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5 I use 'Chauri Chaura' and the events that occurred within the town on February 4th interchangeably.

6 The Rowlatt Act (March 1919) extended the earlier anti-seditionary Defense of India Regulations Act (1915), and authorized the imprisonment, without due process, of anyone suspected of revolutionary activities.

7 On April 13, 1919, General Reginald Dyer moved a column of troops into Amritsar, Punjab and fired upon a peaceful group of men, women, and children who had gathered in a open space. The Raj, in an officially tally, noted 379 casualties and 1,100 injured.

8 M.K. Gandhi, *An autobiography; the story of my experiments with truth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 481.

9 M.K. Gandhi, and B. K. Ahluwalia, *M.K. Gandhi: select speeches* (New Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1969), 131.

10 Ibid., 132-133.

11 *Swadeshi* refers to economic self-sufficiency. The term is derived from the Sanskrit root *swa-*, meaning self, and *deshi,* the adjectival form of *desh* – country. A literal translation would mean "from one's country."

from the conceptualization of modernity as introduced through colonialism.[12] What his text lacked, however, was a map as to *how* citizens were to access and enact swaraj. The text rested upon a somewhat elitist approach to an Indian nationalism: the text can be seen as an ambiguous political road map to swaraj. Thus, those with the access and influence on the national stage could perhaps follow through on Gandhi's advice. For the citizen on the ground, however, the text read as an abstract polemic.

Gandhi's 1920 incarnation of swaraj was based upon ground-level nationalism that was increasingly dependent upon the satyagrahi-volunteer. Due to the violence and chaos of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Gandhi began to see the masses as a disparate mob in need of discipline and leadership. He accomplished creating an "on-the-ground" satyagrahi through the use of the pledge, a strategy he had previously used to rally individuals during his satyagraha movement in Kheda.[13] The pledge form was not only to be documentary proof of civil disobedience in the wake of anti-sedition laws and hostile colonial rule, but also a method for contractually binding a satyagrahi to the ideals of non-cooperation.[14] Thus, this new iteration of Gandhi's move towards swaraj contained both a new ideal of how to attain self-rule, and also an apparatus in which non-cooperation could manifest itself within the mass peasantry. The process of recruiting was an immediate success. During the months of December 1921 and January 1922, more than thirty-thousand non-cooperators were imprisoned in colonial jails due to their participation.[15]

In January 1921, during this campaign for mass enlistment, a local unit of the movement was established in Chotki Dumri, which was one mile west of Chauri Chaura. An official was dispatched to Chauri Chaura, who elected a few satyagrahi-officers and distributed pledge forms. Interestingly, local volunteers, in addition to pledging to uphold the values within the pledge, also agreed to the extension of abstaining from meat and liquor. A few days before February 4th, volunteers demonstrated for a fair price of meat, and were beaten back by the local police force. In retaliation, volunteers were encouraged to gather and hold a non-violent protest on February 4th against the police force at the local bazaar. On the day of the protest colonial police were dispatched from the local *thana* to

[12] M.K. Gandhi, and Anthony Parel, *Hind swaraj and other writings*, Cambridge texts in modern politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[13] Gandhi, *An autobiography*, 434.

[14] Shahid Amin, *Event, metaphor, memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 13. See also Shahid Amin, "Remembering Chauri Chaura: Notes from Historical Fieldwork," in *A subaltern studies reader, 1986-1995*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[15] Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: nonviolent power in action* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), 48.

hold back the crowd. As the volunteers marched towards the site of their protest, the police officers attempted to dissuade the volunteers from protesting by assembling in "an intimidating fashion." The crowd ignored this and continued forward through the police line. As the group marched towards the bazaar, the police fired warning shots, which acted as a siren-song for the group to retaliate. The volunteers charged the police, who shot directly into the crowd. As the fighting intensified, the volunteers eventually locked the police in the local station, and set fire to the building. By the end of the night, the building had been razed to the ground, and twenty-three police officers were burnt to death.[16]

Gandhi and the INC's response to Chauri Chaura was swift – after Gandhi had recommended a halt to mass civil disobedience, Congress brought all non-cooperation activities to a suspension by February 12th, a mere eight days after Chauri Chaura.[17] Soon after the event, Gandhi penned his most serious condemnation of the riots in his essay, "The Crime of Chauri Chaura." In this essay, he stated that, "God spoke clearly through Chauri Chaura … the *mob*, my informant tells me, therefore set fire to the Thana [police station]" [emphasis added].[18] It should be noted that here, Gandhi refers to the mass of satyagrahi-volunteers as a mob – in doing so, he disconnects them from the larger structure of the non-cooperation movement and places them into a autonomous crowd of individuals who are removed from the greater ideals of Gandhi's vision for satyagraha. Gandhi went even further to dismiss these individuals from the movement for non-cooperation when he stated that, "non-violent non-cooperators can only succeed when they have succeeded in attaining control over the *hooligans* of India, in other words, when the latter also have learnt to … refrain from their violent activities."[19] The act of suspension of the movement now comes as a moment of discipline: since the mob, or rather the group of hooligans, could not control their murderous desires, Gandhi felt the need to halt the entire national movement. He stated that, "the tragedy of Chauri Chaura is really the index finger … suspension of mass civil disobedience and subsidence of excitement are necessary for our further progress."[20] Thus, in Gandhi's view, Chauri Chaura was a symptom of a greater problem lurking under the auspices of the national movement. Gandhi had initially utilized the pledge form to bind individuals to non-violence. However, only when the populace was able fully restrain themselves from turning towards violence could India strive to attain

[16] Amin, *Event, metaphor, memory,* 15-16.
[17] Dalton, 48.
[18] M.K. Gandhi, "The Crime of Chauri Chaura," in *Mahatma Gandhi: selected political writings*, ed. Dennis Dalton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1996), 32.
[19] Ibid. Emphasis mine.
[20] Ibid., 33.

swaraj. The restraint against violence became a clearly enunciated point in his writings on civil disobedience in the months following Chauri Chaura. In an article in *Young India*, Gandhi stated that "every possible provision should be made against an outbreak of violence or general lawlessness."[21]

In a speech before the Sessions Court at Ahmedabad in 1922 during the trial of those who partook of the violence at Chauri Chaura, Gandhi said that, "I wish to endorse all the blame that the learned Advocate-General has thrown on my shoulders in connection with the Bombay, the Madras and the Chauri Chaura occurrences … it is impossible to dissociate myself from the diabolical crimes of Chauri Chaura."[22] Clearly, Gandhi saw himself as intricately connected to the events at Chauri Chaura; likewise, those who partook of the violence saw themselves as connected to him when, as the police station burned, they yelled, "victory to Mahatma Gandhi!" However, was this truly the case? How can one analyze the connection between the peasant imaginary and Gandhi during this critical juncture of the nationalist drive towards independence?

Chauri Chaura: A Traditional Hegelian Account

One may find it problematic to conflate a historical narrative that centers around the study of one historical figure with what I dub to be "an Hegelian account" of these events. However, as Ranajit Guha noted at the dawn of the Subaltern Studies movement, "the historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism – colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism."[23] The ability to see Gandhi as nationalist figure who paternally led and controlled an entire nationalist movement and additionally view him as imminent in each individual during an action that was physically separated from him[24], is a primarily elitist position which needs to be questioned. Additionally, it has been noted that political mobilization within subaltern groups has often been dismissed as a purely spontaneous act; when in actuality, subalterns often had far too much at stake in the institutions of power that situated their daily lives and would not engage in an act of insurgency except in a deliberate and pre-meditated manner.[25] Hence I adopt the subaltern perspective by questioning the

[21] Mahatma Gandhi, and Shriman Narayan, *The selected works of Mahatma Gandhi*, volume 6 (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1968), 212.
[22] M.K. Gandhi, *Select Speeches*, 147.
[23] Ranajit Guha, "Introduction," in *A subaltern studies reader, 1986-1995*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 14.
[24] By this I mean that, while Gandhi was present in that he was vocalized during the protest, he was not *present* in leading the protest.
[25] Ranajit Guha, "The prose of counter-insurgency," in *Selected subaltern studies,* ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 45-46.

elite status of Gandhi in an attempt to transcend the notion of high-level elite politics. I wish to ponder how the *idea* of Gandhi functioned within a peasant imaginary and how said population simply did not act in a paroxysm of violence.

However, one may simply be wondering, why take contention with Hegel? My response to this criticism is that, in many historical narratives that are encountered on a day-to-day basis, Hegel looms invisibly in the background. By "day-to-day," I am referring here to the ubiquity of historical narratives wherein the crux of history occurs on the shoulders of the world-historical. In these accounts, one is sincerely left believing that history can only occur when "great men" take action. By extension, these individuals are the driving force behind history and remain its true agents. However, as subaltern histories have shown, agency and subjectivity are not limited to a small stratum of community. While they may be important, it must be realized that agency is not a nodal apparatus, but extends in all directions.

At this juncture, however, it may be fruitful to expound upon the meaning of Chauri Chaura from an Hegelian standpoint. When analyzing Gandhi as a *historical figure* in this vein, one must see how he fits into the model of the World-Historical Individual. Hegel states in *The philosophy of history* that there exists a "universal concept [that] is a moving force of the productive Idea, an element of truth that is forever striving towards itself."[26] The World-Historical Individual takes this universal conception and embodies it: "the historical men, are those whose aims embody a universal concept of this kind."[27] Furthermore, these individuals eventually harmonize the ideal of World Spirit – which seeks to attain the consciousness of its own freedom – with the particularities of situations on the ground. That is to say, the passion of the World-Historical Individual within its contextualized moment "is thus inseparable from the actualization of the universal principle; for the universal is the outcome of the particular and determinate, and from its negation."[28] Now, individuals "on the ground" find an intense affinity for the individual because of the omnipresence of the universal world spirit as previously mentioned: "this is why the others follow these soul-leaders; for they feel the irresistible force of their own spirit coming out in the heroes."[29]

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[26] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, and Leo Rauch. *Introduction to The philosophy of history: with selections from The philosophy of right*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1988), 32.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 35.
[29] Ibid., 33.

Through this mode of analysis, one could suppose that a Hegelian depiction of Gandhian nationalism is accurate. In terms of the latter point of the synthesis of spirit between the World-Historical and the individual, one can see this manifest clearly in Gandhi's commentary on Chauri Chaura. It is interesting to note that Gandhi sees himself as the extension of the individuals at Chauri Chaura. For him, it was as if he too were present when the police station had burned down: "for me the suspension of mass civil disobedience and other minor activities is not enough penance for my having been the instrument, however involuntary, of the brutal violence by the people at Chauri Chaura."[30] Moreover, one could argue that the very speed at which the non-violent non-cooperation movement gained footing supports this claim; for if nearly thirty-thousand people had been arrested for joining the movement by January of 1922, then Gandhi clearly harmonized the Spirit of the desire to become conscious of freedom within the masses to a point where in a large cadre of the population joined his ranks to challenge British rule and authority.

But, would a Hegelian analysis apply to Chauri Chaura? The answer to this question is a resounding 'no'. The difficulty with a Hegelian analysis is that it fails to capture how Gandhi functioned within the imaginary of the peasantry, wherein a large part of his following was found.[31] This analytical framework would posit that there existed a consistent Gandhian image which resonated within the minds of all individuals. The actualization of universal principle is predicated upon a notion of attaining freedom wherein agency is a nexus between the World-Historical Individual and the World Spirit; the peasantry would merely be a localization of the ideals that occur within these two groups. If this were true, then one would posit that each manifestation of non-cooperation within a rural setting would never exist as a Chauri Chaura; each individual would harmonize personal passion with the universal principle in such a way that would always find itself in line with the doctrine on the Pledge Form. Though this has been explored in depth, it must be repeated: peasant nationalism was not simply a derivative discourse of elitist nationalism; though the two were intimately connected with each other, peasant nationalism utilized its own lexical functionaries.[32]

When the peasants at Chauri Chaura yelled out, "victory to Mahatma Gandhi," they partook of two processes. First, by declaring Gandhi as 'Mahatma', they

[30] Gandhi, "The Crime of Chauri Chaura," 33.
[31] Dalton, 48.
[32] The use of the term "derivative discourse," is borrowed from: Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist thought and the colonial world: a derivative discourse* (Minnesota, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

linguistically recreated him as a *Mahatm*a (Sanskrit for 'Great Soul'). This *Mahatmaization* of Gandhi occurred as independent of his views on colonial emancipation or non-cooperation; it was a contextualized decision to cry out his name. This follows the argument that Gandhi was created and contested *through* the peasantry. Peasants propagated rumors regarding Gandhi which often included ideas about testing the power of the Mahatma, opposing the Mahatma, opposing Gandhian creed, and receiving boons.[33] Moreover, by yelling out Gandhi's name, the peasantry recontextualized Gandhi into a new discursive apparatus. Within Chaura Chaura, for example, he became disconnected from his views on *ahmisa* (non-violence) and now became a tool for *himsa* (violence). Thus, based upon this preliminary reinterpretation of Chauri Chaura, it becomes evident that a Hegelian analytic may not be the most prudent approach to understanding how Gandhi functioned within the peasant imaginary.

A Lacanian Analytic Framework

Two structures within Lacanian psychoanalysis are central to this analysis: the imaginary and symbolic order. Within the imaginary order, one must consider the relevancy of the development of the subjectivity of language and ideal-ego formation during the mirror stage. When describing the subjectivity of language, Lacan utilizes the notion of the imperative (the call). When describing how this grammatical mood functions in terms of the imaginary, Lacan notes that "at the level of the statement, from its style to its very intonation, everything we learn bears on the nature of the subject."[34] Lacan further explicates that the imperative is a "question of the tone in which the imperative is uttered. The same text can have completely different imports depending on the tone," however, one must also consider "what is at issue, and its reference to the totality of the situation."[35] Thus, one can reduce the call to two planar categories: the tonality and the subjectivity of the statement. However, what one can garner from this information is that language processing is an entirely subjective experience. To borrow from Ferdinand de Saussure, the imaginary is the realm of the signified.[36] What this implies is that language gains meaning and signification through an interpretive process that is within the contexts of the imaginary order. Planes such as tonality and subjectivity are imminent within the subject; that is to say,

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[33] Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-1922," *Subaltern studies: writings on South Asian history and society*, No. 3, ed. Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1984): 314.

[34] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book 1, Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (London: W.W. Norton & Co, 1991), 84.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ferdinand de Saussure, and Roy Harris, *Course in general linguistics* (LaSalle (Illinois: Open Court Publishing Co., 1972), 75.

these categories only gain meaning when attached to an individual who has the ability to interpret them within the imaginary order.

A second structure within the imaginary that one must be aware of is the development of the ideal-ego during the mirror stage. The Lacanian mirror stage is referential to the formative moment within the development of the ego when a child begins to recognize him or herself in the mirror.[37] The representation of the self in the mirror becomes the ideal-ego, a term that represents the idealized notion of a self that one can construe from the reflection in the mirror; this self is idealized not only because it exists in the imaginary (rather than the symbolic), but because is bounded nature within the mirror allows for complete vision of the self; this is opposed to the chaotic reality seen around the viewer on the level of the symbolic; Lacan states that the "ideal-ego is now the target of the self-love which was enjoyed in childhood by the true ego."[38] The ego-ideal, in turn, is the realization that occurs when one has the opportunity to view himself from the point of view of the ideal-ego – at this juncture the viewer is disgusted by the fact that his actual self is far from the perfection he imagined via the ideal-ego.[39]

Finally, while the symbolic order is a nuanced and far-reaching construct within Lacanian psychoanalysis, this paper will only consider the nature of signified notions of language. In short, within the symbolic order, language is only the signifier – interpretive actions are made on the basis of individuals via the imaginary apparatus. Thus, the symbolic is what binds "subjects together in one action. The human action *par excellence* is originally founded on the existence of the world of the symbol, namely on laws and contracts."[40] One needs to note the lack of subjectivity in this order: the symbolic simply acts as a presentation of the binding force of language between individuals – the actuality behind this force always rests in the imaginary.

But how do these structures translate into political analysis? One must consider national politics as operating within the symbolic. The nationalist figure is a synchronic symbol of the the national movement within any political situation. In the relationship between nationalist and individual, the individual's imaginary holds the nationalist figure as the ideal-ego – a manifestation of the self's political desires on the political/national stage. This is extrapolated from the idea that, the

[37] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book 1,* 132.
[38] Ibid., 133.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 230.

nationalist represents a stable, coherent, unified, and whole vision of the political self that the individual cannot attain in his everyday existence. In short, due to limitations of subjectivity the peasant cannot simultaneously be a peasant *and* Gandhi. Instead, the self is displaced into Gandhi. Therefore, political action is an interplay between the realization of the self as the ego-ideal – the fact that one's political self is not a coherent plan as created within a nationalist framework (the fact that one is a peasant and not an elite political figure) – and the ideal-ego of the nationalist. This tension between the ideal-ego and the ego-ideal is drawn from the idea that the imaginary is where signified notions of language are present. However, the "language," here is not limited to a linguistic system of signs or speech, but rather encapsulates the notion of a language within politics itself. Now, the tension between egos is resolved when the individual utilizes one's own subjective interpretation to re-seek national politics in the self, and the subjectivity of political discourse is taken up in the imaginary to become an individuated and subjective notion of interpretation.

It must be noted that these notions of tension between the symbolic-nationalist and the individual are completely contextualized. One cannot enter into the subject's internal discursive apparatus to determine how linguistic or symbolic gestures, such as clothing, tonality, or language functioned within a personalized imaginary. However, it is from this vantage point, agency begins its shift down from the top and back into the masses.

Reapproaching Chauri Chaura

Now, how can one reapproach Chauri Chaura through the use of a Lacanian psychoanalytic structure? When using this analytic approach, it becomes clear why the peasants yelled "victory to Mahatma Gandhi" as they burnt down the police station, even after they had signed the Pledge Form. As previously stated, the symbolic order within political discourse is the nationalist figure; thus in this situation, the symbolic is Gandhi. If Gandhi acted within the purview of the symbolic order, then the signifier within nationalist politics was Gandhi *as* a nationalist figure in that he represented a readily available differentiation of ideals. This may have come from the fact that he not only was a figure who was not British, but also from the fact that he literally did not fashion himself as an elite – he was known to don the *dhoti*.[41] As previously stated, the signifier is based upon a use of language that is binds individuals within a given structural unit. Perhaps it was also Gandhi's literal use of language – his stress upon Gujarati, Hindi, and

[41] A *dhoti* is a piece of traditional menswear. It consists of seven yards of undyed and unstitched rectangular clothing tied around the waist. It is similar to the *lungi* or *sarong*.

Urdu – that acted as a signifier to present him as readily available to the peasantry.[42] Nationalist politics tended to be elitist in terms of language choice: it was conducted in English, or in distinct versions of Hindi or Urdu; that is to say that the Hindi or Urdu used by nationalist figures tended to be overly Sanksritized or Persianized in order to accomplish a certain resonance within a specific population within India (an example of this would be Dayanand Saraswati's *Satyarth prakash*).

Thus, Gandhi's choice of language (the language of speech or presentation) – as language is all that binds the signifier within the symbolic – presents him as a readily available nationalist figure to enter the peasant imaginary. However, Gandhi within the symbolic goes beyond a notion of language. If one is to consider Gandhi a manifestation of national politics which was readily available to the peasantry, then he already begins to lose status as a World-Historical Figure wherein all agency within a nationalist movement is predicated upon him. It is likely that a peasant population would look to Gandhi as a signifier of nationalism that could be manipulated to accomplish their own goals. Only four years prior to the non-cooperation movement were the Kheda and Champaran satyagraha campaigns. Within these campaigns, certain figures within the peasant and working-class communities approached Gandhi to act as a figurehead in order to accomplish their goals to battle what they deemed as the oppressive structures of land tenure or working conditions.[43] At the time (and also today), a popular communicative device was rumor: it was often used to spread information about Gandhi through India. As previously mentioned, the idea of Gandhi as a Mahatma was spread through the use of rumor – it can only be inferred from this that the idea of Gandhi as nationalist figurehead for the peasantry was also spread through the use of rumor. Combining both Gandhi's use of language as well as the rumor lends credence to the idea that Gandhi was not necessarily a figure that could be considered to be bounded within him. The pledge form, ahimsa, and satyagraha are merely extensions of the symbolic form of Gandhi; while these symbols come *from* Gandhi, they dually represent and signify a manipulated nationalism within the peasantry.

Although Gandhi is the signifier, he is also the ideal-ego. Individuals displace political idealism into nationalist figures because the nationalist is a bounded, coherent individual; that is to say, the nationalist is what one would imagine the self to be if one were to only focus upon his or her political desires. However, due to the demands of everyday life, the political self is often unstable or incomplete.

[42] M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, 480.
[43] Ibid., 450.

One cannot address the full demands of the political self as it is constantly bound by the self of the everyday. Thus, to the peasant imaginary, Gandhi was the ideal-ego – he represented the coherent, stable image of what the politics for the peasantry would manifest as on the national stage.

The analysis of the symbolic thus far has considered the signifier/ideal-ego nexus from the point of view of the imaginary. It must be noted that the preceding analysis relies on the interpretive element of how the symbolic functions within an imaginary; that is to say, how the peasantry would react to a specific nationalist framework. To summarize, Gandhi may be simultaneously considered the ideal political self as well as the hollow shell of politics to place one's desires into.

Chauri Chaura represents these ideas as manifesting into a moment within the purview of the non-violent non-cooperation movement. One may recall that a month before the event, the satyagrahi-volunteers who participated in the riot signed the pledge form. The pledge form represents the previously discussed conceptualization of the political signifier – though it bound the satyagrahis to the Gandhian cause through a contractual agreement, the imaginary does not necessary have to perceive the contract as extending beyond the symbolic and into the self. The demonstration that occurred a few days prior to February 4th was not predicated upon the wholesale ban of the trade of meat; rather, the protest was contesting the current market prices of meat – once again the use of the symbol was manipulated within the imaginary as a something related, but also wholly different. The march of February 4th represented this idea taken to its extreme. If one were to espouse Gandhian values as delineated by Gandhi, then the satyagraha-volunteer would clearly not burn a police station and kill the police officers inside. However, this was not the case. The anger against colonial policing had peaked within each individual and could be expressed via the newly codified political ideal-ego that they had acquired within their own political imaginaries: the result was deadly. It is here when the notion of this moment of counter-insurgency as spastic violence begins to come undone. It is nearly impossible at this moment to return to the moment of Chauri Chaura to come to understand the motives of each and every protester. But what one can learn is that the event did not come from a vacuum, but rather held antecedents in the violence of the state against the peasantry. A desperate attempt to regain agency in the face of colonial violence does not necessarily equate to hooliganism.

However, how can one reapproach the stoppage of the movement after non-cooperation? The power to halt an entire form of protest would to some seem to be the best case for a Hegelian interpretation of Chauri Chaura. However, one

needs to remember how the interaction between the symbolic and the imaginary functions. In order to create a nationalist imaginary, the peasantry relied upon the symbolic ideal-ego. When Gandhi halted the non-cooperation movement, he dismantled an apparatus to displace the ego-ideal into the ideal-ego. One could naturalize the ideal political self into the body through the conceptualization of the satyagrahi-volunteer; by being a part of the movement, one was a part of the ideal-ego. Thus, the eventual end of the non-cooperation movement due to Chauri Chaura was not necessarily a function of Gandhi; most likely it was predicated upon the peasantry not having the ability to displace their political imaginary. One cannot see either the peasantry or Gandhi as the World-Historical; rather, both Gandhi and the peasantry are inextricably linked through the symbiosis of the symbolic and the imaginary. Here one is left at a strange intermediate point – neither Gandhi nor the masses can claim theoretical control over the end of non-cooperation. But, within the same gesture, it cannot be said that agency within this historical moment lies wholly within any single group or individual. Instead, one is confronted with a historical tension between the groups. The fact remains, how can the masses look up to the shining figure of the World-Historical if each agent/subject in the historical field is level?

Sustained Reinterpretations

> At the very time when men appear engaged in revolutionizing things and themselves, in bringing about what never was before, at such very epochs of revolutionary crisis do they anxiously conjure up into their service the spirits of the past, assume their names, their battles cries, their costumes, to enact a new historic scene in such time-honored disguise and did with such borrowed language.[44]

Within a Lacanian framework that utilizes both the symbolic and imaginary order, one can now reapproach Chauri Chaura. The mass peasant imaginary utilized the Gandhian image vis-à-vis the conceptualization of the imaginary. Gandhi existed as a political ideal-ego to displace the self into; one's ego-ideal was inadequate to manifest itself as a political form. Thus, within Chauri Chaura, the peasantry employed Gandhi through the *form* of him as a nationalist that was readily available to them through the use of language and rumor. As the symbolic was interpreted through the imaginary, peasant discontent manifested itself through this apparatus, and the result was the violent uprising at Chauri Chaura. As the non-cooperation movement came to a close,

[44] Karl Marx, and Daniel De Leon, *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Chicago: C.H. Kerr, 1913), 9-10.

the symbolic-imaginary apparatus began to crumble, and it was through this dismantlement wherein non-cooperation failed: one cannot place importance on either Gandhi or the peasantry, as it was both working simultaneously within the purview of the political imaginary-symbolic nexus that brought the event to a close.

However, what makes my analysis any less elitist than a Hegelian interpretation? A possible critique of this paper would perhaps address the idea that this seemingly structuralist application of Lacanian psychoanalysis cannot apply to an undeniably dynamic subaltern community. To answer this criticism, I return back to Lacan, who wisely stated that "one of the things we must guard most against is to understand too much, to understand more than what is in the discourse of the subject."[45] I cannot stress the importance of the contextuality of my argument. Perhaps the usage of the symbolic and imaginary may stretch beyond Chauri Chaura, but we must not assume that this is so. I must remain staunch in the idea that this analysis does not extend beyond the limits of these moments in the historical record. This analysis simply returns to the Chauri Chaura and uses the fragments of discourse that remains from those peasants to rightfully recast them from rabble-rousers to political actors and insurgents.

With this in mind, one has a historical moment close to what Marx described within his *eighteenth Brumaire*. However, it was not history that the peasants called upon, but the lived reality of the present – the history that synchronically emerges from the past into the everyday. They took both the names of political structures and the names of nationalists and reformed it into their own manifestation of peasant-centric nationalism. The result was not a movement that necessarily came from above, but one that emerged from below.

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[45] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book 1,* 73.