"Problems of an Other's Making": B. R. Ambedkar, Caste, and Majoritarian Domination

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*T*his article presents a new theory of majoritarian domination drawn from Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's critique of majoritarian tyranny during the decades preceding British India's decolonization. Ambedkar's critique of British colonial pluralism and Congress-led Indian anti-colonialism emphasizes attention to social structures and the mechanisms that produce and sustain communal majorities. He argues that caste prevents equality and fraternity, thus foreclosing the possibility of a democratic society. In such a context, Ambedkar argues that the majority is likely to be communal and fixed, rather than political, inclusive, and open to change over time. Ambedkarian majoritarian domination supplements nineteenth-century accounts of the institutional and epistemic dimensions of majoritarian tyranny. I defend comparison as a tool for theoretical analysis to show that Ambedkarian majoritarian domination can explain the interaction of hierarchical social structures with democratic politics in contexts beyond colonial India.

"A political majority is not a fixed or a permanent majority. It is a majority which is always made, unmade and remade. A communal majority is a permanent majority fixed in its attitude. One can destroy it, but one cannot transform it. If there is so much objection to a political majority, how very fatal must be the objection to a communal majority?" (B. R. Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, 1:377, henceforth BAWS; Ambedkar 2016b).

"Everyone who feels moved by the deplorable condition of the Untouchables begins by saying: 'We must do something for the Untouchables'. One seldom hears any of the persons interested in the problem saying: 'Let us do something to change the Hindu'. It is invariably assumed that the object to the reclaimed is the Untouchables as though untouchability was due to his depravity and that he alone is responsible for his condition. If there is to be a Mission, it must be to the Untouchables. Nothing requires to be done to the Hindu. He is sound in mind, manners and morals. He is whole, there is nothing wrong with him…. Untouchability is an infliction and not a choice." (BAWS 5, 3–5).

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956) was postcolonial India's first Law Minister, Chief Draughtsman of the Indian Constitution, and a paramount Dalit leader, previously "untouchables" in the Hindu caste system. This study reconstructs Ambedkar's critique of communal majorities in South Asia to present a novel theory of majoritarian domination, which I define as the majority's avoidable exercise of insufficiently controlled governmental power that compromises a minority's basic interests. I argue that Ambedkar's account of "communal majorities" as different from "political majorities"

and the "communal cement" that produces it extends and enriches contemporary democratic theory's reckoning with majorities' problematic exercise of power —a concern that underlies recent discussions of populism, backsliding, and electoral authoritarianism in democracies around the world.

Ambedkar's theoretical writings span four decades, from 1916 through 1956, and his most widely read writings, including *The Annihilation of Caste* (Ambedkar 2016a, henceforth AoC), were written before India became a democratic republic in 1950. By the 1930s, the Indian National Congress committed unequivocally to democratic rule (although constitution-makers would negotiate its institutional infrastructure in 1946–1949, where Ambedkar would play an integral role).[1] The seemingly providential inevitability of democracy in India made its prospective institutional design an urgent concern for Ambedkar. Recent scholarship has highlighted the rich and varied theoretical reflections on the state and democracy in the decades preceding 1947 (Mantena 2023; Parasher 2023; Sultan 2024). Ambedkar worried decolonization as democracy as rule by the majority would exacerbate the domination of India's Dalits as long as the social structure of caste remained intact. Ambedkar insisted that Dalits opposed British rule. However, Dalits were wary of accepting democratic rule as the Congress

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[1] Ambedkar was the Chairperson of the Drafting Committee, which prepared the constitutional text between Constituent Assembly sessions. Ambedkar participated actively on the house floor, leaving a lasting discursive legacy. Ambedkar is memorialized with a copy of the constitution and as the "Father of the Indian Constitution." For Ambedkar's self-critique of his role in the process, see BAWS 16, 805. On varied accounts of Ambedkar's role in Constitution-making, see Bajpai (2011), Bhaskar (2024), De (2018), Naresh (2018), Nussbaum (2016), Rathore (2020), and Vundru (2018). On Ambedkar's memorialization and the contemporary politics of Dalit representation and self-presentation, see Jain (2014) and Teltumbde (2018).

understood it: majority rule without protections for the Dalit minority (BAWS 9: 169–72).

Decolonization has three distinct meanings in this context: the formal transfer of power to Indians in 1947–1950; the protracted process of transforming categories, like caste, that were in part constructed and politicized by the colonial state (Dirks 2002; Mitta 2023; Rao 2010); and, methodologically, the decolonization of political theory that recent scholarship, especially Getachew and Mantena (2021), advocates.[2] Postcolonial political theory has long reckoned with an amalgam of the first and second meanings. What would the formal transfer of power mean for developing symmetrically modern institutions and social categories as in Western Europe and the United States? Ambedkar argues that postcolonial popular sovereignty could herald the entrenchment of colonial social categories and intensify domination. Compared to the last colonial constitution (1935), India's republican constitution (1950) constrained group rights (Bajpai 2021).

Ambedkar's anxiety about decolonization is best understood through the distinction between political and communal majorities. A "political majority" is the idealized precondition for and the result of the successful operation of a normative decision procedure, and a "communal majority" is characterized by persistence, indestructibility, and birth.[3] This article reconstructs Ambedkar's account of the "communal cement"—the stuff that holds the communal majority together. I present a new Ambedkarian theory of majoritarian domination that augments classical nineteenth-century conceptions, as in the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill. I use Ambedkarian rather than Ambedkarite to make a distinction analogous to Marxian and Marxist. Ambedkarian refers to the critical examination and extension of Ambedkar's analytic and concepts in the footsteps of his reconstructive method.[4]

Classical accounts of the tyranny of the majority emphasize an empowered majority's institutional overreach and its psychological power over all citizens. Ambedkar's critique and analysis make explicit what Tocqueville and Mill alluded to but did not specify: the importance of social structures in conditioning the terms of democratic politics. Ambedkarian majoritarian domination accepts and embellishes the institutional and psychological mechanisms of majoritarian tyranny. The novelty and contribution of my conception lies in the discussion of the social structure that produces communal majorities and minorities. I focus on Ambedkar's analysis of social division, the moral psychology of domination, and the logic of punishment

and violence in the reproduction of majoritarian domination.

Contemporary democratic theory lacks a distinction between political and communal majoritarianism, even though few theorists would defend the latter. Democratic theory presumes political majorities in two ways. First, some theorists presume a dichotomy between a propertied minority and a disorganized majority (Klein 2022; McCormick 2011). Second, until recently, majority rule was considered *the* benchmark for democratic equality, thus synonymous with democracy (Schwartzberg 2014). This presumption contributes to majoritarian domination, because it obfuscates diagnoses of communal majoritarianism and lumps together all critiques of majority rule as anti-egalitarian. Abizadeh (2021a) demonstrates that social structures in federal polities can produce "persistent minorities" who may never be in the majority, thus undermining their equal agential power. I show that social structures can produce majorities that seek *permanent* rule over minorities (often through tools that render minorities persistent).

Ambedkar's interventions anticipate the "constructive turn" of democratic theory by emphasizing the importance of indeterminacy in democratic politics (Disch 2021). By insisting on institutional change and social activism aimed at producing fraternity, Ambedkar's constructivist project views democratic equality—minimally understood as the destruction of sanctioned inequality—as its end, not just its means (Ramesh 2022). Ambedkar's critique of colonial competitive politics at the precipice of decolonization takes the nature of political identities as produced and mutable. Power inequities between groups constrain the mutability of identities. Democratic competition in the absence of creative modifications to simplistic majoritarian procedures would reproduce majoritarian domination. For Ambedkar, institutions are a crucial site for the realization of democracy.

Ambedkar's account of communal majoritarianism focuses on Hindu caste domination.[5] I reconstruct Ambedkarian majoritarian domination as a general theory that applies across contexts with caste-like hierarchies. Recent scholarship on caste—and untouchability—emphasizes analogs in Japan, Korea, Nigeria, and Senegal (Yengde 2022; Cháirez-Garza et al. 2022; Kim Forthcoming). Isabel Wilkerson (2020) reignited a debate about the similarities and differences between caste in India and race in the United States. These accounts highlight that caste as a hierarchy based on occupation/descent is a feature of many contemporary democratic polities. Charisse Burden-Stelly's (2020) critique of Wilkerson underscores the insufficiency of a class-blind account of caste, augmenting Oliver Wendell Cox's (1948) comprehensive riposte to the caste school of race relations. However, Ambedkar's account

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[2] I thank an anonymous reviewer for this distinction.

[3] Both are different from a "statutory majority"—a legal stipulation that the majority of a legislature would be composed of members elected by a particular community. See Ramesh's (2022) account of Ambedkar's conception of the communal majority in different speeches and writings from 1941 to 1953.

[4] Ambedkarite refers to a contemporary political and social movement. On Ambedkar's reconstructive method, and his reinvention of Bertrand Russell and John Dewey's writings, see Stroud (2023, 120).

[5] This centrality should not be confused with exclusivity. In *Thoughts on Pakistan or the Partition of India* Ambedkar discusses communal majoritarianism *against* Hindu minorities in Muslim-majority provinces per the Communal Award. See BAWS 2: 319; 8: 108, 393.

of caste is class and exploitation conscious (Geetha 2021; Rao 2010; Skaria 2018).[6]

Ambedkar uses provocative comparisons with American chattel slavery and antisemitism in Nazi Germany, to demonstrate the deceptive predicament of untouchability that he labels indirect slavery: formal freedom predicated on totalizing structural domination (Rodrigues 2021). Comparisons with "the Negro problem" and "the Jewish problem" form the basis of Ambedkar's subversion of the social problem of untouchability—from a problem for the oppressed to one of the oppressor(s). In doing so, Ambedkar situates himself in a long line of social theorists who use comparison, externally, between different social systems and, internally, within the same social system over time, to advance arguments about democracy's generalizable characteristics without relinquishing the specific histories of each system (Oskian N.d.).

In the first section, I situate Ambedkar's writings in the context of colonial pluralist debates in twentieth-century South Asia. Second, I present an Ambedkarian account of majoritarian domination. Third, I describe Ambedkar's account of society and the prospective permanence of Hindu dominance in India—the communal cement. Fourth, I highlight the comparative and congruent workings of permanence and majoritarian domination's other mechanisms. A brief conclusion follows.

Colonial India, Communalism, and Caste

Ambedkar interpreted caste as an oppressive hierarchy that foreclosed the possibility of social communication, emptying the promise of democracy precisely because the *putative* majority in colonial/postcolonial India was already settled and unchangeable. It was to be "Hindu." The colonial regime's recognition of Muslim distinctiveness, institutionalized in the form of a separate electorate for Muslims in 1909, followed decades of Muslim activism and emerging colonial enumeration practices.[7] The colonial regime conceived religious communities as self-governing, hostile to other groups, and collectively incapable of self-rule (Mantena 2010; Wang 2024). As an "ethnographic" enterprise, the colonial state surveyed, translated, and codified native populations and practices based on scholars, administrators, and missionaries' prerogatives of rule, religious conversion, and academic advancement (Dirks 2002).

Colonial enumeration practices and patterns of rule produced competition among subjects as groups to forestall the eventual triumph of popular sovereignty (Mamdani 2020).

By granting propertied Muslims the right to elect their representatives through a separate electorate in 1909, the British produced the distinctiveness of two *major* communities and mobilized a boundary defining the groups' exclusive political interests in varied configurations of majority and minority across provincial legislative assemblies (Rawat 2003). On the subcontinental level, Hindus became a *putative* majority—a majority-in-waiting—and Muslims the predominant minority who would negotiate the future of British and postcolonial India and Pakistan. In private correspondence, colonial officials admitted this form of pluralism would undermine collective self-determination and anticolonial unity (Jensenius 2017). Many anticolonial elites, especially in the Congress, decried the separate electorate as a device of "divide and rule" that culminated in the violent emergence of Pakistan following British India's partition (Bajpai 2021; Naresh 2018). India's 1950 Constitution removed separate electorates and instituted reservations for Dalits (scheduled castes) and *Adivasis* and indigenous tribes (scheduled tribes) in state and federal elections (Bajpai 2021).

Ambedkar redefined *minority* as a label for deprivation, oppression, and marginality rather than cultural distinctiveness and cemented this principle of democratic justice in India's postcolonial Constitution (Chatterjee 2018; Rao 2010). Ambedkar's legal and political career made untouchability visible and knowable as *the* axis of caste oppression in Hindu society, established that social action must come together with political justice in remedying this oppression, and specified the institutional measures and principles that would make Dalits a *political* minority. By 1931, Ambedkar had acquired a reputation as a leader of the Dalits and independent labor in the Bombay legislature and as Gandhi and the Congress's foremost non-Muslim critic.[8] Following discussions at the British-convened Round Table Conferences in London, Ambedkar secured a "double vote" for Dalits in existing British representative institutions through the Communal Award of 1932. The double vote would allow Dalits to vote as members of the general electorate and as members of a separate electorate for representatives to colonial provincial legislatures based on a limited franchise. Gandhi rejected the Communal Award and began a hunger strike against what he declared was the forcible division of Hindu society. Ambedkar negotiated, in the face of mounting death threats, with members of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha to secure the promise of urgent anti-caste reform led by the

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[6] Burden-Stelly's (2020) critique essentializes caste and overstates the Black Marxist consensus against using caste. For example, see Du Bois ([1935] 2021, 805–53) where he argues that race relations were transformed from slavery to caste during Reconstruction.

[7] The census aggregated various religious traditions under labels like Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Christian, Zoroastrian, and so forth. These enumerative processes produced political communities through the iterative practice of counting and classification. As communities of religious and social practice, however, communities had long-standing histories that preexisted colonial rule in India. On the politics of the census and caste, see Lieberman and Singh (2017), Vithayathil (2018), and Lee (2021). On the logic of aggregation and political representation, see Kaviraj (1992).

[8] Space constraints preclude a detailed reconstruction of Ambedkar's intellectual and political career. See Gopal (2023) and Rathore's (2023) recent books that furnish essential biographical details. On Ambedkar's career as a lawyer, see De (2018). Also see Rodrigues (2024) and Teltumbde's (2024) recent theoretical commentaries.

Congress and a system of "primaries" that would include reserved seats for scheduled castes in an undivided electorate—the "Poona Pact" of September 1932 (Rao 2010; Vundru 2022). Ambedkar would later denounce Gandhi's fast as coercive, and the Congress' failure to deliver on its promises as *malafide* (BAWS 5: 329–95; BAWS 8).

The Muslim League's 1940 Lahore Declaration, which crystallized the demand for Pakistan as a territorial nation-state separate from India, led Ambedkar to reformulate the terms of Dalit engagement with a decolonized India (Devji 2013; BAWS 8). Ambedkar views the demand for Muslim self-determination and consequently putative communal Muslim majorities in the Western and Eastern provinces portending the partition of the subcontinent and fissuring the struggle for minority rights (Devji 2021; Kapila 2021). Dalits could not make claims symmetrical to South Asian Muslims because the latter could claim religious, cultural, and territorial separateness. Ambedkar observed that the removal of Muslims from independent India would only exacerbate the possibility of caste Hindu domination over Dalits in independent India (BAWS 8: 106).

The widespread expectation that mass suffrage and electoral democracy would follow decolonization in British India produced challenges and possibilities aplenty. On the one hand, institutional creativity and negotiations abounded, challenging postcolonial elites around the world to imagine the instruments of rule anew (Getachew 2019). On the other hand, the anticolonial elite perceived the challenge of popular sovereignty as overcoming a largely illiterate population's "developmental lack" that bred misgivings about democratic citizenship in South Asia (Bhatia 2024; Dasgupta 2024; Sultan 2024). For Ambedkar, decolonization and the rapid fluctuations in political decision-making between 1946 and 1950 heralded urgency to resolve the *social question* before institutionalizing popular sovereignty. Would the transition to universal adult suffrage in a government ruled by Indians lead to justice and uplift for Dalits? Many in the Congress found this question infuriating and caricatured it as a defense of colonial rule. Ambedkar rejected this trap. He argued that it was implausible that Dalits would find justice and uplift because the majority that would assume power in postcolonial India be communal, not a political majority.

In the colonial regime's vocabulary, Hindus and Muslims were culturally distinct; each claimed the right to protection from the other's political intrusion into its social self-regulation. Without political power, Hindus could not systematically dominate Muslims regardless of the relative strengths of their enumerated communities. Ambedkar's intervention in these debates about colonial difference and pluralism introduces a different problem: some Hindus dominating others *systematically*—domination that would be augmented, not ameliorated, by democracy as majority rule. The colonial regime claimed non-interference in Indian politics and, for itself, the responsibility to protect minorities—especially Muslims. Ambedkar decried British doublespeak on minority rights as a

tool to deepen its hold on power and throttle legitimate claims of popular sovereignty (Cháirez-Garza 2024; BAWS 8: 106). At the same time, Ambedkar insisted that Congress's deferral of social justice was harmful to the possibility of democracy itself because "a democratic form of Government presupposes a democratic form of society" (BAWS 1: 222). Ambedkarian majoritarian domination lies in the disjuncture between government and society.

Ambedkarian Majoritarian Domination

Ambedkar recognizes the normative value of majoritarianism as a decision procedure. He writes, "majority rule is not accepted as a principle but is tolerated as a rule…It is tolerated for two reasons, (1) because the majority is always a political majority and (2) because the decision of a political majority accepts and absorbs so much of the point of view of the minority that the minority does not care to rebel against the decision" (BAWS 1: 377). Ambedkar's first condition for the acceptability of majority rule emphasizes "changeability of composition" of the individuals who constitute the majority, variability in the political positions the majority adopts over time, and open access to the majority for individuals regardless of their identity (BAWS 1: 169).

The second condition presents a more expansive understanding of the value of majority rule, rooted in democratic ideals. A political majority, according to Ambedkar, should have a disposition toward accepting minority demands. This majority must embody a spirit of open-mindedness to accommodate such contention and look past it. Ambedkar (BAWS 8: 108) writes, "Majority Rule is tolerated only because it is *for a limited period* and *subject to the right to have it changed*, and secondly because it is a rule of a political majority, i.e., *majority which has submitted itself to the suffrage of a minority and not a communal majority*" (emphases mine). Political majority rule is subject to a temporal limit and minority suffrage. Ambedkar is not calling for the political majority to subject itself to a communal minority. Vulnerable political minorities must possess the institutional power to engage the majority rather than being arbitrarily subject to majoritarian power (Abizadeh 2021b).

Critiques of majority rule are as old as democracy. Following the emergence of representative government, these critiques resurfaced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the wider adoption of representative government (Manin 2010). The Federalists, Tocqueville and Mill, among many others, furnished robust critiques of the tyranny of the majority, focusing on the institutional weaknesses of democracy and epistemic demerits of the masses. Tocqueville and Mill identify identitarian minorities, like Black and Native Americans and the Irish, as the victims of majoritarian tyranny.[9] However, they presume that democracy has civilizational prerequisites and, further, that these

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[9] Tocqueville cites the case of Black American voters intimidated by whites in Pennsylvania ([1835–1840] 2012, 414 fn4). Mill

groups are subject to democratic rule *by* white Europeans but lack the capacity and legitimate authority for democratic self-rule.

Early and mid-twentieth-century theorists of majoritarian tyranny confront the question of identity centrally. Ambedkar, for example, demonstrates the tyranny produced by an oppressive society that conditions the moral psychology of the majority and considers how to create the conditions for political majoritarianism. A normative concern with majoritarianism—particularly communal majoritarianism—became paramount in debates on democracy and nation in South Asia in the decades preceding decolonization. Subsequent scholarship on postcolonial democracy and nationalism has forwarded a consistent critique of communal majorities. However, this scholarship largely neglects the possibility of political majoritarianism. Meanwhile, normative democratic theory has, until recently, assumed abstract political majoritarianism and conflated democracy with the majoritarian principle.

Arash Abizadeh (2021a, 742) critiques the conceptual conflation of majoritarianism and democracy without considering "the external, liberal worry about majority tyranny or likely rights violations." Abizadeh argues that persistent minorities, identified by their position in the social structure, are unequal and less powerful in democratic terms. Ingham and Kolodny (2023) helpfully point out where Abizadeh's critique of majoritarianism is insufficiently explanatory—in that the power of numbers cannot fully explain the inequity of majoritarianism. They argue that "the distribution of power across social groups takes on normative significance above and beyond the distribution of power across individuals in societies with histories of group-based injustice" (2023, 467), a claim further pursued in Kolodny's (2023) monograph on hierarchies that equates caste with bondage as an extreme, unjustifiable instantiation of the "pecking order." Ingham's (2024) account of domination in majoritarian democracy argues that ethnic majorities are insufficiently constrained compared to possible non-ethnic majorities because shared histories and culture produce asymmetrical deliberative norms among groups. What about social structures produces a correlation of preferences, especially in modern diverse societies that presume individual independence? These analytical critiques of majoritarianism confront the consequences but not the sources of communal cement.

I define majoritarian domination as the majority's avoidable exercise of insufficiently controlled governmental power that compromises a minority's basic interests. Majoritarian connotes the privileges a member of the enumerated majority enjoys over the government *because* of her membership in that community (Eisenberg 2020). Avoidability denotes the contingent

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([1859] 1977, Vol XVIII) lists numerous majority–minority entanglements, including white, Catholic, and English majorities pitched against Black, Protestant, and Irish minorities before asking, "Is it likely the majority will allow equal justice to the minority?" Instead of answering, he discusses manual laborers as prospective tyrannical majorities.

and specific nature of struggles against instances of majoritarian domination and signals the concept's negative character. Majoritarian domination has three mechanisms that I discuss below: *permanence, exaggeration*, and *confusion.* In the section that follows, I focus on caste as a social structure to elucidate the sources of communal cement.

Permanence

Permanence connotes the transformation of the majority from an abstract, fluctuating, and episodic collective of individuals into a socially enumerated majority, especially a group bound by an ascriptive identity—in Ambedkar's terms, its communalization. When the majority is identified with a specific group, or the non-inclusion of groups, the majority attains the capacity to interfere in the basic interests and activities of minorities. A permanent majority threatens a central tenet of modern democracy, that anyone might hope to be in the majority and have their political will enacted by a government of their choosing, thereby undermining political equality. In contrast to recent scholarship emphasizing the persistence of minorities, Ambedkar highlights the permanence of the majority *and* minorities. This permanence is *putative*—it is desired and pursued, but as with any claim of groupness, it is neither perfect nor final. Arguably, recent developments in Indian politics evidence the consolidation of a cross-caste Hindu majority that seeks to subsume Dalits and other lower caste groups in the domination of Muslims.

In the context of caste, the object of permanence is identity, or the political activation and development of an *identity script*, which prescribes the conditions of belonging; mobility; and punishment for disloyalty, disobedience, and transgression. Scripts include "beliefs and expectations related to the actors' roles" and connote a "stylized, stereotyped sequence of actions that are appropriate in [a] context" (Cristina Bicchieri 2006, 93–4). As Clarissa Hayward (2013) shows, narratives and storytelling produce these attributes and practices. They are reproduced through political and social institutions that adopt these scripts in their allocation of resources, and through collective violence.

Reproduction draws attention to the meaning of structure in my account. As Gourevitch (2024) suggests, "when the structures that *constitute* the dominator's power also *determine* the typical exercise of that dominating power," structural domination exists. Structures that create incentives and constraints reproduce domination over time. Sally Haslanger (2023) distinguishes between structure and system to explain the difference between oppressions that might bear either label. Structures, on Haslanger's account, "are networks of social relations that are constituted through practices, and practices are learned patterns of behavior that draw on social meanings to enable us to coordinate around the production, management, disposal of things of (positive or negative) value" (14). On the other hand, systems consist of "historically particular, concrete, dynamic processes" that reproduce

structures through loops rather than deliberate centralized design (3).

For Haslanger (2023, 21), "White Supremacy is a system whose structure is composed of social practices that we become fluent in and are taught are natural and right." The distinction between social structure and system helps us think comparatively: white supremacy is a global system composed of several, less complex systems. The structure of local systems nested within the global need not be symmetrical nor identical—for example, in the American South and British dominion in South and Southeast Asia (Ince 2024). These dissimilarities occasion scholarly interest in the varied structures of hierarchy and the processes through which such hierarchies are reproduced—as structures and systems. My point is not to explain a single global system. Caste is a social structure and a system. For Ambedkar, democracy, properly understood, could transform caste. Its uncritical adoption, however, could also lead to its reproduction through democratic politics. Before discussing permanence in Ambedkar's writings, I briefly outline the other mechanisms of majoritarian domination—*exaggeration* and *confusion*.

Institutional Domination or Exaggeration

Exaggeration describes the institutional facets of majoritarian tyranny: the majority's desire that all state institutions must reflect the will of the communal majority. Majoritarian domination undermines institutional pluralism by weakening institutions designed to temper majoritarian impulses and attacking accountability mechanisms that supplement democratic elections. The agents of majoritarian domination—individuals and political parties—attack constitutional organs of the state, such as the judiciary; statutory institutions, like election bodies; and nongovernmental organizations, including human rights watchdogs. This feature of majoritarianism resembles authoritarianism, except that agents of majoritarian domination use their electoral victory to justify attacks on other institutions. Recent discussions of majoritarian brutality, democratic backsliding, populism, and autocratic legalism primarily focus on these institutional aspects (Bermeo 2016; Elster 2014; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019; Scheppele 2018).

In the nineteenth century, Tocqueville ([1835–1840] 2012, 402–27) argued that democracy empowered elected legislatures over other institutions. In other words, a manifest majority would exert its influence across the domains of political power and become insuperable in the face of institutions designed to temper its excesses and secure liberty. By contrast, Ambedkar traces the challenges presented by a *majority-in-waiting*. The Congress party was paramount in the struggle for Indian independence, and in the late 1940s, their leaders acted as a government-in-waiting, impatient to rule and implement a transformative agenda on an optimistic time horizon (Dasgupta 2024; Mehta 2016). Ambedkar identified this proclivity and impatience for power as a danger to democracy. In *Ranade, Gandhi, and Jinnah* ([1941] 2016d), he argues that one-party rule under the Congress made the tyranny of the majority a "menacing

fact." Moreover, Ambedkar suggests that "despotism does not cease to be despotism because it is elective. Nor does despotism become agreeable because the Despots belong to our own kindred" (BAWS 1: 237).

During constitution-making, the Congress repeatedly displayed the pridefulness Ambedkar critiques. He argues:

> The real guarantee against despotism is to confront it with the possibility of its dethronement, of its being laid low, of its being superseded by a rival party. Every Government is liable to error of judgment, great many liable to bad administration and not a few to corruption, injustice and acts of oppression and bad faith. No Government ought to be free from criticism (BAWS 1: 237).

Ambedkar identifies the need for multiple parties, the possibility of uncertainty in government as a natural check on majority despotism, and the importance of institutionalized criticism. Ambedkar's account is realist: the possibility of dethronement, resonant with accounts of popular control, and constraints is an essential safeguard against despotism/tyranny (Bagg 2024; Ingham 2022). Under social conditions conducive to communal majorities, Ambedkarian democracy entails subjecting majorities to minority suffrage. Ambedkarian *exaggeration* shares much with extant accounts of institutional attacks on democracy from within democratic institutions.

Epistemic Domination, or Conformism and Pluralistic Ignorance

Conformism and pluralistic ignorance in majoritarian domination reinforce each other and undermine the epistemic pluralism necessary for democracy. Uncertainty about other individuals' beliefs is a ubiquitous fact of social life. The right to free expression, a general expectation in democratic regimes, notionally removes all formal constraints upon speech. Democratic societies have greater diversity in expressed opinion and protections for this diversity. Nevertheless, pluralistic ignorance, wherein individuals believe "that one's private thoughts, attitudes, and feelings are different from those of others, even though one's public behavior is identical," is an essential facet of democratic life (Bicchieri 2006, 186). In democratic politics, majorities may privately reject a norm even as individual members publicly endorse it because they think everyone else privately supports it (Elster 2014). Conformism refers to a moral pressure to speak, behave, or think in a manner specified by another. This pressure might be external or internal. Together, these two phenomena comprise majoritarian *confusion*, or the pressure to conform to majority opinion under pluralistic ignorance.

For Tocqueville and Mill, majority tyranny's epistemic effects are pivotal. Tocqueville argues that the majority "draws a formidable circle around thought."[10]

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[10] See Tocqueville ([1835–1840] 2012, 418). For a discussion of the formidable circle as a metaphor, see Henderson (2022).

Should an individual attempt to step outside, she would be denied her reputation and ostracized by the majority. The majority's punishment—or even the threat of punishment—through devices violent and exclusionary obscures the writer's true preferences, strengthening the majority's authority if another courageous individual in the minority would err in a like manner (Kuran 1997). Democratic tyranny is irresistible because it spreads and spills over seductively and insidiously, but also because it cannot be physically resisted. Ambedkar identifies majoritarianism's dual tendencies toward fatalism and its latent disposition toward prejudice and punishment. Through commentary on James Bryce's ([1891] 2008) *American Commonwealth*, Ambedkar describes how a mechanism that exercises the power of docility over the majority also makes it the vicious purveyor of violent punishment against minorities (BAWS 1: 237).

For Ambedkar, caste Hindus' power to excommunicate upper caste transgressors and violently subjugate Dalits produced conformity to caste norms. Violent control cements the instability of caste hierarchy. Democratic politics would be insufficient in unmaking majoritarian domination because it would demotivate reformers, leaving extant social domination untouched.[11] The combination of a discursively produced, identitarian *permanent* majority set on claiming institutional holism (*exaggeration*) augmented by the epistemic power of *confusion* instantiates the full potential of majoritarian domination.

Permanence, Society, and the Social Structure of Caste

This section explores Ambedkar's conception of society to specify the "communal cement" that characterizes communal majorities and forecloses political majoritarianism. I present Ambedkar's conception of caste as a social structure that undermines the possibility of a democratic society. Consequently, a democratic government that presumes a democratic society would sustain rather than transform the oppressive social structure of caste and approximate *permanence.* The moral psychology of caste reproduces the social structure and shapes political preferences.

Society and Division

Ambedkar identifies society in Deweyan terms—the collective experience of shared emotions, being in communication with others, and multiple and overlapping associations among individuals.[12] Ambedkar sees a

"democratic society" as a prerequisite of democratic government and the social enjoyment of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Hindu society is a corrupt imitation of society because caste demobilizes the possibility of collective action and shared emotional experiences. However, for Ambedkar, Hindu society is not powerless—caste exercises enormous political and moral psychological power over Hindus and Dalits alike, reproducing division through a moral psychology of domination, violence, and ostracism.

Ambedkar sees society as a central feature of democracy itself. He argues:

> In an ideal society, there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words, there must be social endosmosis. This is *fraternity*, which is only another name for democracy. Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellow men (AoC§14.2, italics mine).

In *Annihilation*, Ambedkar describes fraternity as the bedrock of democracy, prior to equality and liberty.[13] *The Philosophy of Hinduism*, Ambedkar identifies fraternity as one of "two forces prevalent in society…opposite in character" to individualism (BAWS 3: 44). Ambedkar cites John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism* to make the case that fraternity consists in fellow feeling such that "the good of others becomes to him a thing naturally and necessarily to be attended to like any of the physical conditions of our existence" (Mill [1833] *Utilitarianism*, Vol. X cf. BAWS 3: 44). Ambedkar continues, although "fraternity as Mill said is natural, it is a plant which grows only where the soil is propitious" (BAWS 3: 64).

The soil of caste is anything but propitious. In Ambedkar's words, "Hindu society is a myth" because:

> A caste has no feeling that it is affiliated to other castes, except when there is a Hindu-Moslem riot. On other occasions each caste endeavours to segregate itself and to distinguish itself from other castes… [Caste] prevents common activity; and by preventing common activity, it has prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being (AoC § 6.2).

If each caste is interested in self-segregation and disinterested in collective action, how can it be said that some castes collude to dominate others? In Du Boisian terms, untouchability is the *line* of caste,

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[11] Ambedkar is not immune to his contemporaries' suspicions of popular capacities for democratic self-rule (Bhatia 2024; Dasgupta 2024; Naresh 2018; Sultan 2024).

[12] For a comprehensive account of Ambedkar's inheritances from Dewey, see Stroud (2023). As Dewey writes in Democracy and Education ([1916] 2024, 6 emphasis in original): "Society not only continues to exist *by* transmission, *by* communication, but it may fairly be said to exist *in* transmission, *in* communication."

[13] Despite a male-centric emphasis implied in "fraternity," Shailaja Paik argues "Ambedkar and Dalit radicals played a creative role in radically democratizing gender norms and indeed, deploying gender as a generative activity to imagine new forms of public emancipation during colonial times" (Paik 2022, 61). For a thorough examination of gender in Ambedkar's speeches, writings, and practice, see Paik (2023).

fissuring the touchable and Dalit worlds (Du Bois [1903] 1999). Ambedkar argues that the exceptionalism of caste oppression makes upper-caste collusion beneficial at the expense of Dalits and other non-Savarna castes (including Shudras, OBCs, and the Bahujan). Ambedkar describes how upper caste collusion prevents Dalits from acquiring the means to defend themselves and identify, articulate, and pursue their interests. The line that divides touchable and untouchable castes is constitutive of the historical sociology of caste. Caste, Ambedkar suggests, makes the conditions of the untouchables of India singularly oppressive. Unlike in ancient Rome, where enslaved people served an array of productive tasks, including those recognized as entailing intellectual labor, or even in slave-owning America, where their status as *property* conferred *some* value upon Black life,[14] caste Hindus had no motive to educate or feed the untouchables. Dalit labor is available to caste Hindus as a matter of divine right and social practice, and the latter could legitimately punish its refusal with violence. In *The Untouchables, or the Children of India's Ghetto* ([1949] 2016e), Ambedkar argues that untouchability is worse than Roman and American slavery because it is totalizing, perpetual, and deceptive. Ambedkar labels untouchability *indirect slavery*.

Ambedkar's conception of equality and liberty inform the importance of society, and his critique of caste as a social structure. Ambedkar avers on the centrality of equality. In *Annihilation*, he insists that despite man's "undoubted inequality" in "(1) physical heredity; (2) social inheritance or endowment… (3) on his own efforts," we must treat them as equal (AoC § 14.5). The full realization of human potential dictates that we minimize the disparities produced by physical and social inheritances lest the result be a "selection of the privileged." By contrast, in *Philosophy of Hinduism*, he suggests "fraternity and liberty are derivative notions…equality is the original notion and respect for human personality is a reflection of it. So where equality is denied, everything else may be taken to be denied" (BAWS 3: 66). Ambedkar's point, as I alluded in the preceding discussion of equality in contemporary democratic theory, is that inequality is normatively unacceptable. Caste society is characterized by an egregious form of systematized inequality: graded inequality. In Ambedkar's words:

> an ascending scale of hatred and a descending scale of contempt…In the minds of the lower orders…it creates a preference for the higher orders while it creates contempt

for the lower orders in the minds of the higher orders. Thus, the ascending scale of preference and the descending scale of hatred and contempt beggars the untouchables both ways. (BAWS 1: 167, 257).

The gradation corresponds to the religious and social rights each caste would enjoy. *Graded inequality* (re)produces an oppressive and static social order through a logic of perverse imitation and self-enclosure. For Ambedkar, caste produces a unique proclivity for dual status: covetous imitation of castes above and staunch contempt for those below.

While many Congress leaders protested the lack of political liberty under colonial rule, some, including Gandhi, defended an idealized caste system as a regime of duty that constrained the liberty to choose one's profession. Ambedkar's conception of liberty problematizes its reduction to a problem of political self-rule. Ambedkar argues:

> [S]lavery does not merely mean a legalized form of subjection. It means a state of society in which some men are forced to accept from others the purposes which control their conduct (AoC § 14.4).

The coercive instrument that produces this form of subjection is found in the legal devices that uphold its enforcement and in the social mechanisms that permit the sustenance of caste. Ambedkar's account of indirect slavery highlights how caste deprives Dalits of their liberty deceptively. For Ambedkar, democratic government is a means toward an ideal society as an end. As a critique of the Congress's anticolonial invective, Ambedkar encourages attention to political self-rule to produce a different social reality. Adopting democratic government alone—even with universal suffrage—would not ameliorate this central fact of Indian society.[15]

For Ambedkar, caste is destructive for all Hindus, even those who wield social power and have rights and privileges in a caste society. Ambedkar insists that "All are slaves of the caste system. But all slaves are not equal in status" (AoC § 21.16). Ambedkar's indictment of caste is a focused riposte directed at the beneficiaries of a system of oppression they cannot diagnose (Rao 2010). Caste produces a state of interpersonal relations that is not asocial but anti-social—caste facilitates violence, domination, and suffering in society.[16]

Untouchability is totalizing in that Hindus and Dalits alike are required to uphold it—whereas even chattel slavery in the USA was merely *permitted* by law. For Ambedkar, the ubiquity and general availability of

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[14] See Ida B. Wells-Barnett's (1895) and W. E. B. Du Bois' ([1935] 2021) critique of the presumption that emancipation was commensurate with effective enfranchisement. Du Bois was a notable influence on Ambedkar. It is unclear whether Ambedkar read Du Bois' writings on caste, which include *Black Reconstruction* and other writings spanning his lengthy and prolific career. Ambedkar cites Du Bois' friend and colleague Herbert Aptheker's (1938) *The Negro and the Civil War* in *Gandhi and the Congress* to argue against deferring the social question until the resolution of the political demand for freedom (BAWS 8: 173–6).

[15] As Anand Teltumbde (2021) has shown, Ambedkar also identified parliamentary democracy with persistent economic injustice (BAWS 10: 106–12).

[16] Whereas "in one society groups may be only *non-social* in their attitude towards one another. But in another they may be *anti-social*" (BAWS 9: 192, emphasis in original). Ambedkar's account of violence is evocative of Iris Young's ([1990] 2011, 40) account of group violence as a "face" of the group oppression or the "inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings." I thank Jonathan Masin-Peters for sharing this observation.

caste status for Hindus make it distinct from slavery. The obligation enjoins *all* Hindus to dominate Dalits. Unlike slavery, caste has no conception of emancipation—its only remedial mechanism provides for better status in the next birth, not in this lifetime. One's actions in her previous lifetime justify her place in the caste hierarchy in this life. Indirect slavery is thus perpetual. Finally, since Dalits are not legally enslaved, the deceptive premise of formal freedom prevents the oppressed from becoming conscious of their enslavement. Ambedkar writes:

> A deprivation of a man's freedom by an open and direct way is a preferable form of enslavement. It makes the slave conscious of his enslavement and to become conscious of slavery is the first and most important step in the battle for freedom. But if a man is deprived of his liberty indirectly, he has no consciousness of his enslavement (BAWS 5: 15).

The hierarchy of caste, which reserved the spoils of social activity for the touchable castes, left untouchables in a singularly oppressed position. Relations of interdependence through social and economic activity maintained a tenuous peace among the upper castes. The segmentation of occupations meant isolating or boycotting any touchable castes was never an option.

Across the caste line, the reality was starkly different. Ambedkar argues that "Hindus have nothing to fear from the Untouchables, nor have they anything to gain by the abolition of Untouchability" (BAWS 9: 196). Caste is a stable equilibrium that facilitates the wide-ranging domination of Dalits. Ambedkar writes that

> In it the 240 millions of Hindus have 60 millions of Untouchables *to serve as their retinue to enable the Hindus to maintain pomp and ceremony and to cultivate a feeling of pride and dignity befitting a master class which cannot be fostered and sustained unless there is beneath it a servile class to look down upon (*BAWS 9: 196, emphases mine).

Dalit "destitution" makes them vulnerable to exploitation by meager compensation, "scavenging" and sanitation work considered impure by Hindus, prevents them from competing with upper castes for higher-paying jobs, and makes them "shock-absorbers" who are most dispensable as employees during crises. Political sovereignty under majority rule would mean rule over Dalits, rather than self-rule, and inheres against Ambedkar's criterion for legitimate political majority rule: that majority rule be subject to minority suffrage.

Ambedkar centers society as a precondition for democratic government. Yet, he argues that

> Society can practise tyranny and oppression against an individual in a far greater degree than a Government can. The means and scope that are open to society for oppression are more extensive than those that are open to government, also they are far more effective (BAWS 1: 217).

A democratic government and democratic society can sustain and reinforce each other. Democratic government without a democratic society, through state action, presents an opportunity to unmake relations of anti-sociality and produce genuine democracy. Ambedkar's account of caste society stresses the relationality of caste that makes it oppressive; his account of caste psychology demonstrates its effect on individuals.

The Moral Psychology of Caste

Ambedkar argues that Hindu scripture produces conformity and erodes responsibility (AoC § 23.4). This criticism rests on Ambedkar's Deweyan distinction between rules and principles. Ambedkar argues that the rules of Hindu religion, although prescriptive, connect means to *un*principled ends. The moral psychology of caste is devoid of morality, especially as it applies to those beyond one's caste. Caste rules simultaneously sustain domination and diminish the capacity for judgment among Hindus. Ambedkar's distinction between rules and principles also has a bearing on different types and experiences of action. He argues that principled action is "conscious and responsible." Rule-based action is merely "mechanical" (AoC § 23.2) and conforms to immorality and injustice while principled action is conscious, responsible, and creative. All rules are not necessarily bad, but rules devoid of principles lead to unreflective compliance with an evil regime. Ambedkar argues that Hinduism lacks reason and morality to motivate principled behavior against its own rules.

Ambedkar's acknowledgment of all Hindus as unequal sufferers under caste urges closer attention to the mechanics of depleted reason and morality. Ambedkar suggests that caste Hindu moral psychology consists of obstinacy, avoidance, and inconsistency with respect to caste oppression.[17] Ambedkar identifies the moral obstinacy of caste Hindus in two senses: first, their proclivity to comply with the rules-based regime they understand as religion and, second, more pressingly, their punishment of supposed transgressions. In *Annihilation*, Ambedkar cites numerous instances of physical assault against Dalits for sending their children to school (AoC § 2.11); of Dalit women assaulted for using metal pots (AoC §2.11); and of caste Hindus attacking Dalits for consuming ghee (AoC § 2.12). In *The Untouchables*, Ambedkar presents a "citation of cases" documenting representative instances of violence against Dalits. Ambedkar classifies these citations, culled from numerous newspapers and journals from 1923 through 1950, as applying to the Dalit's "Unfit[ness] for Human Association" and "Untouchability and Lawlessness" (BAWS 5: 27–61). The lack of moral accountability among caste Hindus constitutes obstinacy. Physical violence is not necessary for domination nor necessarily its most problematic manifestation. However, political

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[17] Cháirez-Garza (2024) and Waghmore (2019) describe Ambedkar's defense of urban spaces and the inconsistencies of caste Hindu prejudice in urban contexts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

theorists often overlook the consequences of collective violence for the social reproduction of identity (Tilly 2003; Young [1990] 2011).

Caste Hindus *avoid* the problem of oppression through several tactics. Ambedkar's critique of Congress politicians prioritizing political reform over social reform is one instance. Another is what Ambedkar labels "armed neutrality." Ambedkar argues that caste Hindu's "attitude to the problem of caste is not merely an attitude of neutrality but is an attitude of armed neutrality" (AoC § 19.1). The editor S. Anand (AoC § 19.1 fn 111) suggests that *armed neutrality* describes the aggressive reactionary disposition that caste Hindus adopt in holding and reinforcing beliefs about caste: caste discrimination against Dalits does not exist, and remedial mechanisms such as quotas or anti-atrocity legislation victimize upper castes (Deshpande 2013; Vithayathil 2018). The result of an inability to recognize caste oppression and caste privilege is a vicious defense of these privileges.

The moral–psychological deficits simultaneously explain the resilience of caste and signal its fragility. Ambedkar argues that caste survives because attempts to overthrow the order imperil each caste's pride in its status:

> If a caste claims the right to inter-dine and intermarry with another caste placed above it, it is frozen the instant it is told … that it will have to concede inter-dining and intermarriage with the castes below it! (AoC § 21.16).

Thus, "Castes form a graded system of sovereignties, high and low, which are *jealous* of their status and know that if a general dissolution came, some of them stand to lose more of their *prestige* and powers than others do" (AoC § 21.17, emphases mine). Jealousy, envy, and prestige motivate violence and gather the pleasure of subjection. Although Ambedkar does not spell out a comprehensive theory of political violence, his documentation of social violence against Dalits is compatible with recent scholarship on the identity-shaping effects of collective violence in various contexts (Fujii 2021; Gorup 2020; Kaviraj 2021; Smångs 2016). Violence as the physical infliction of damage is not essential to majoritarian domination, but it is a mechanism for the social reproduction of permanence. Public violence intensifies identitarian attachment, establishes new norms of belonging, and validates the punishment of transgressions.

The reproduction of the social structure is apparent through the moral psychology of domination as well: a matrix of intersecting interests and passions that benefit caste Hindus who will not relinquish these privileges. The social and psychological elements of caste congeal to produce a moral psychology of domination, part of the communal cement. The social psychology challenge posed by majoritarian domination is more thoroughgoing than the combination of conformism and pluralistic ignorance. It produces an obdurate moral psychology that requires transformation to produce political majorities.

Permanence in Comparison

Without a democratic society, Ambedkar asks rhetorically, "What is the use of the fundamental rights to the Negroes in America, to the Jews in Germany and to the Untouchables in India? As [Edmund] Burke said, there is no method found for punishing the multitude" (BAWS 1: 222). Caste Hindu politics relied on the presumption that a legislature based on adult franchise would be the site of unmaking and making majorities without any other intervention. Ambedkar argues against the uncritical application of the majority principle across varied social contexts. The interest caste Hindus had in sustaining caste domination would bias their legislative dispositions, deflating the possibility that political intervention would bring about social justice. Ambedkar's argument is grounded in comparison, and the implications of his argument are equally relevant for comparison. Ambedkar argues:

> The English Parliament, we may be certain, though it is sovereign to do anything, will not make the preservation of blue-eyed babies illegal. The Sultan will not, though he can, change the religion of Mohammed just as the Pope will not, though he can, overthrow the religion of Christ. In the same way legislature, mainly composed of high caste men, will not pass a law removing untouchability, sanctioning inter-marriages, removing the ban on the use of public streets, public temples, or public schools; in short, cleansing the person of the untouchables. This is not because they cannot, but *chiefly because they will not.* A legislature is the product of a certain social condition and its power is determined by whatever determines society (BAWS 1: 264, emphasis mine).

Ambedkar reinterprets A. V. Dicey's distinction between the external limits upon sovereign power —"the possibility or certainty that his subjects or a large number of them will disobey or resist his laws…" and the internal limit—"even a despot exercises his powers in accordance with *his character*, which is itself molded *by the circumstances under which he lives*, including under that head the *moral feelings of the time and the society to which he belongs*" (AoC § 21.8, emphasis mine).[18] For Ambedkar, the socially constructed matrix of psychology, experience, and norms and identity scripts comprise the internal limit. Abstracting away these limits is akin to intellectual idleness. Ambedkar describes the implications of this distinction as follows: "To expect a Brahmin to be a revolutionary in matters of social reform is as idle as to expect the British Parliament, as was said by Leslie Stephen, to pass an Act requiring all blue-eyed babies to be murdered" (AoC § 21.9). The expectation that a communal majority would voluntarily surrender its interests comprises the core of Ambedkar's realist critique of majoritarianism.

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[18] Gregory Conti (2023) describes Dicey's borrowing of this distinction from Leslie Stephen's *Science of Ethics.* On the limits of political representation for minorities based in the majority's lack of will, see Williams (1998).

He continues that "one can say with equal truth that if a man *who becomes a Pope* has no wish to be a revolutionary, a man *who is born a Brahmin* has much less desire to become a revolutionary" (AoC § 21.8, emphases mine). *Blue-eyed babies* connote contemporary eugenic attachments in Europe (Ambedkar published *Annihilation* in 1936). Whereas a Catholic priest *becomes* a Pope (through election), a Brahmin is *born*. We settle on a point about caste that has been salient throughout Ambedkar's critique. It is *permanent*, and its majority is communal. Recall Ambedkar's definition of the communal majority—it is born, closed, and cannot be transformed politically without destruction. To paraphrase the Combahee River Collective, Ambedkar has a great deal of criticism for Hindus as they have been *communalized* to be.

Ambedkar argues repeatedly that Indian society is not fit for majoritarian rule in the manner of Europe and the United States. However, through comparisons with white and gentile majorities and their domination of Blacks and Jews in America and Europe, Ambedkar emphasizes the importance of reconsidering simplistic majoritarianism as a general principle for all democratic societies. Ambedkar's comparisons to analogous cases of domination fall in two different registers. In the invocation of Roman and American chattel slavery, Ambedkar undertakes a comparative analysis of oppression to argue for the exceptionalism of Indian caste as indirect slavery. On the other hand, when he discusses Dicey's writings or compares the social problems of untouchability with racial domination and antisemitism, Ambedkar deploys comparison to illustrate the ubiquity of the communal cement and the moral psychology of communal majoritarianism. As I indicated above, recent scholarship on race, caste, capitalism, and related portmanteau concepts resists collapsing different forms of difference into a general, underspecified account of a hierarchical social structure. The Ambedkarian communal cement is not the same as, for instance, Du Bois' account of caste as collective slavery in the American South during Reconstruction, but I argue it is *similar*.

I have discussed the Ambedkarian communal cement in terms of permanence as a necessary feature of majoritarian domination. On Ingham's (2024) account of domination by majorities, a social structure-based majority (ethnic in his example) makes the domination of minorities more likely. It is possible to imagine majoritarian domination without a communalized majority. Indeed, this is the classical account of majoritarian tyranny in Tocqueville and Mill's descriptions. When Tocqueville and Mill cite extant rather than prospective examples of majoritarian tyranny, they refer to demographic majorities and minorities of race and religion rather than the unlettered manual laborers. Democratic theorists ought to demonstrate rather than presume that a majority is political rather than communal (Klein 2022; McCormick 2011).

Over the past decade, societies like Turkey, the United States, India, Sri Lanka, and Hungary, have all seen some form of democratic autophagy. Political theorists and scientists have explained this process as populism, democratic backsliding, or electoral authoritarianism. Majoritarian domination provides an alternate explanation, one that other scholars have furthered too—I have sought to provide a common conceptual language (Barkey and Naresh 2021; Chatterjee 2023; Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot 2020; Gooding-Williams 2024; Patten 2020b; Peterson and Schafer 2021). The rule of an ethnic majority is not always majoritarian domination—in post-apartheid South Africa, Blacks constitute the demographic majority but affluent white minority remains empowered (Patten 2020a). In conjunction, permanence, exaggeration, and confusion undermine democracy's discursive, institutional, and epistemic pluralism.

As a historical example from a different century, consider the meeting between a delegation of Black abolitionists led by Frederick Douglass and President Andrew Johnson in the White House in February 1866 (Johnson 1866). Douglass and the rest of the delegation sought the President's support for Black enfranchisement in the South. Johnson declared that enfranchising emancipated Blacks would occasion a race war with non-slaveholding whites. Besides, he suggests that a white majority in Ohio had voted to disenfranchise Blacks in the State. In effect, Johnson argued that the permanent communal majority empowered him to veto Congressional legislation and forestall Black enfranchisement—*exaggeration*. Race in nineteenth-century United States operates in a manner similar (not identical) to caste in India: the communal cement produced a permanent majority through the antebellum period and reasserted itself after 1876, following the "splendid failure" of Black Reconstruction (Du Bois [1935] 2021, 805–53). The structures are not identical: caste in India during Ambedkar's writing is part of and adjacent to Hindu religious systems that varied widely across British India, while race relations in America varied by state, territory, and across the Mason–Dixon line. Both hierarchical systems intersected in complicated ways with colonial regimes of capitalist development. Comparison can illuminate various moments of majoritarian domination without collapsing the specificity of different historical systems.

We might take the comparative question differently, to ask how majoritarian domination would explain politics in contemporary India, nearly six decades after Ambedkar's demise. The anti-caste movement in India has since grown to embrace a language of political majoritarianism, invoking the label "Bahujan" to claim that non-Savarnas (Dalits, OBCs, Adivasis, and other indigenous tribal groups) together form a demographic majority, not caste Hindus, and should exercise political power to unmake the caste order. At the national level, Hindu nationalism remains dominant and the immediate victims of majoritarian domination include Muslims and especially Kashmiris. Ambedkar's suggestion that castes have fellow feeling—and thus a sense of Hinduness exists in society—only "when there is a Hindu–Muslim riot" is a dark prognosis. We might read it as the empowering subjection of Dalits and other non-Savarnas in Muslim domination, even as atrocities against Dalits continue in different parts of India

(Abizadeh 2021a). Scholars and journalists (NDTV 2019) have shown how epistemic pluralism in India is under attack. By curtailing the expression of criticism and spreading falsehoods that scaffold majoritarian scripts and diminish the space for critical reflection, the news media produces *confusion*. The violent enforcement of majoritarian scripts pressures audiences within the majority to approve silently or participate actively and initiates a cycle of anxiety, pluralistic ignorance, and preference falsification.[19]

CONCLUSION

This article has made three interventions that open questions and, hopefully, fruitful avenues for further inquiry. I argue democratic theory ought to distinguish between political and communal majorities. As Ambedkar puts it, "a political majority is not a fixed or a permanent majority. It is a majority which is always made, unmade and remade. A communal majority is a permanent majority fixed in its attitude. One can destroy it, but one cannot transform it." (BAWS 1: 377). Democratic theorists who assume political majorities when defending majoritarianism contribute to the obfuscation of the problem. Majority rule by a political majority sufficiently controlled by minorities remains normatively justifiable. To make this distinction, democratic theorists must center social structures.

Recent critiques of majoritarianism defer to abstract, unspecified accounts of social structure. Ambedkar's critique of caste explicates the mechanisms through which the communal cement that binds the communal majority is produced and reproduced: social division, the moral psychology of domination, and collective public violence. By studying social structures and systems on their own terms—across varied contexts—democratic theorists can contribute to knowledge about contexts beyond the Global North and make more precise prescriptions about democratic institutions for specific contexts. Ambedkar is one in a long line of theorists to think comparatively about democracy and society.

Ambedkarian majoritarian domination extends and enriches theories of majoritarian tyranny. *Permanence* is a mechanism that explains the conjunction of identity with majority–minority conflicts. Majoritarian domination can help understand the insufficiently controlled power of communal majorities in various democratic societies. Ambedkarian majoritarian domination turns the problem of "persistent minorities" into an inquiry of the dominators rather than the dominated. Treating ascriptive identity seriously is a dispiriting exercise: social division, the moral psychology of domination, and collective violence congeal to produce an obdurate political order bolstered by the institutional and epistemic effects of majoritarian domination. Hierarchical social structures like caste (and race) are rigid and fragile. Ambedkar's critique of caste highlights the scriptural rigidity, depleted reason, and cohering interests that sustain caste. When the order's fragility is palpable, violence and excommunication bolster it, producing a cycle of identity formation that makes easy prescription and radical action against an unequal order difficult. Ambedkar argues that simple majority rule is insufficiently democratic unless it produces a political majority and, alongside, a democratic society.

Yet Ambedkar is a resolute democrat. Ambedkar had a prolific career as an innovative institutional theorist. Majoritarian domination as a republican problem calls for a republican remedy: the subjection of the communal majority to the amplified franchise of the minority (Mathew N.d.). Ambedkar's relentless pursuit of fraternity and democracy highlights the importance of constructivism. Thinking historically about identity makes it possible to imagine new sites to produce *pluralities*. India stood at the precipice of self-rule, and Ambedkar's timely warnings, if heeded, could produce a decolonized political-majoritarian democracy (Duong 2021). It is never too late to examine Ambedkar's contributions to democratic theory, take social structures seriously, or consider democratic theory in a new key.

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The author affirms this research did not involve human participants.

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[19] For a discussion of majoritarian domination in contemporary India and Turkey, see Barkey and Naresh (2021).

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