

The Subaltern and the Minor

For Qadri Ismail

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ABSTRACT In conversation with the work of Qadri Ismail, this essay explores the figure of the minor. It suggests that Ismail and others have given that figure a distinctive torsion by imbuing it with the moral aspiration for a freedom and equality no longer centered on sovereignty and autonomy. That aspiration is not new; in parallax ways, both Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi strive for such a freedom and equality. The aspiration is also an implicit stake of the *Subaltern Studies* tradition, as is manifest in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's invocation of "love." The other freedom arising from the love of the minor, the essay suggests, cannot be thought save by way of "religion." The essay explores how Ambedkar and Gandhi give a distinctive inflection to the conventional association of religion with the sacred and sacrifice. From their thinking of religion, it suggests, a range of concepts and quasi-concepts cascade out, including a distinction between belief as the sovereign form of religion and faith as its nonsovereign form; a distinction between an idealist impossible and a messianic impossible; authority without sovereignty; and political friendship as the comportment proper to the minor.

KEYWORDS Qadri Ismail, subaltern, minor, Babasaheb Ambedkar, political friendship, Mahatma Gandhi

1.

Qadri Ismail's remarkable 2005 book, *Abiding by Sri Lanka*, is spurred by the questioning of "not just the necessity or practicality but the very ethicality of what is arguably the founding structural principle of representative democracy: majority rule." For him, such a questioning includes the "indispensable enterprise of rethinking, from a minority perspective and from that of the critique of social science and of representation, the problem of democracy; of considering whether representative democracy, understood not as an egalitarian mode of government or as the best possible system one can conceive" but as a form of domination "enables the minoritization, the making insignificant and of no count, of minorities."¹ To the "empiricist" and the "historian," Ismail stresses, minority and majority "are straightforward terms, simple facts

of number or arithmetic, a matter of things that are self-evidently different, that can be and are grouped together, counted.”² By contrast, “the novelist asks the leftist to learn from the singular and the unverifiable, from the minor, from the product of the imagination, that which never happened, and from quality, if you like.”³ Ismail goes on to suggest that minority perspective is best understood as one that “refuses to know its place.”⁴

How does it refuse to know its place? Ismail, whose sudden and unexpected death in May 2021 left an aching gap in the intellectual and personal lives of so many, begins to answer this question in *Abiding by Sri Lanka* and was returning to it in the two projects he was working on at the time of his death—an exploration of the politics of cricket in Sri Lanka, and an interrogation of the United States’ Declaration of Independence.

Just a year after Ismail’s book, Leela Gandhi’s *Affective Communities* was released. Though suffused by a very different sensibility, and shaped by somewhat different theoretical concerns, it shares Ismail’s concern with the minor: the book seeks “to shed greater light on some ‘minor’ forms of anti-imperialism that emerged in Europe, specifically in Britain, at the end of the nineteenth century.” What, Gandhi asks, made some of Europe’s citizenry “betray the claims of possessive nationalism in favor of solidarity with foreigners, outsiders, alleged inferiors?”⁵ The book goes on to trace “small, defiant flights from the fetters of belonging toward the unknown destinations of radical alterity.”⁶ These constitute a “politics of friendship,” understanding the latter term “as the most comprehensive philosophical signifier for all those invisible affective gestures that refuse alignment along the secure axes of filiation to seek expression outside, if not against, possessive communities of belonging.”⁷ Throughout, Gandhi’s effort is to resist the “competing and self-defeating entronement or ‘majorization’ of ‘minor’ thought systems.”⁸

Ismail’s and Gandhi’s essays are early symptoms of the ongoing reframing of the concept of the minor in the scholarship on South Asia. Both give the sociopolitical figure of the minor a distinctive torsion by imbuing it with the moral aspiration for another freedom and equality, so much so that one must use the phrase “equality of the minor” to describe what they are doing.⁹ Their thinking is complementary to but also somewhat at odds with that initiated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: where for the latter thinkers “minor literature” is “that which a minority constructs within a majority language,” Ismail and Gandhi are arguably more invested in the moment where the minor deconstitutes the major, rendering unstable distinctions between within and without.¹⁰

As such, the minor is not quite the same as minority or minors. A by-now voluminous literature has shown us that the emergence of the modern concept of population also involved its division into majorities and minorities, with the latter designating enumerated and identifiable groups usually in a subordinate position

within the population. And with the consolidation of a politics centered around the will of the people, almost always a nationalist politics, the people themselves were divided into majority and minority, and majority rule was instituted as the principle of democracy—often with genocidal consequences for the minority, as Ismail frequently noted.¹¹ As for minors, that term usually includes all those who do not yet have the power to act as citizens or full legal subjects but may one day. Today, that term usually refers to children, but not only to them, if we remember the Kerala High Court judge who insisted a twenty-four-year-old woman who had converted from Hinduism to Islam and married a Muslim was not adult enough to decide whom to marry.¹²

The minor as a sociopolitical figure is the stake of these transformations, for this figure embodies practices, actions, or even ways of being that are inassimilable to the norms of the majority. So the minor are all those who face a domination and violence directed at them whether as individuals or as groups, because of *who* they are—for example, Dalits, women, Muslims, Adivasis, LGBTQ groups, dissenters of all stripes. As such, the minor—minoritized, really—face challenges somewhat different from the exploited, who face violence because of *what* they are—for example, small farmers, migrant workers, laborers, or the precariat broadly (though the minoritized are overwhelmingly also exploited, and vice versa).

The torsion of imbuing this sociopolitical figure of the minor with the moral aspiration for another freedom is not new, at least not in South Asia. Dissenting specters within the minority had quite early on declared their refusal to play by the rules of majoritarianism; they had declared the minor an alternative principle. For example, both Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar—and these two figures are so massive that they are not merely examples—anchor their politics around the equality of the minor. (A sidebar: because Ambedkar’s and Gandhi’s differences center on how to read this equality of the minor, we need to reframe their relation as thinkers for our time. While they were often in a self-evidently antagonistic relation as historical actors in their time, and while Ambedkar’s astute criticisms of Gandhi are quite justified both in their times and ours, their conceptual relation was not a simple antagonism but one organized around parallax readings of the equality of the minor. Aspects of this parallax, and the sometimes complementary and sometimes supplementary relation between them that it implies, will emerge later in this essay, though an extended exploration will have to await another occasion.)

In Gandhi’s 1910 book *Hind Swaraj*, the Editor declares, “It is a superstition and ungodly thing to believe that an act of the many [*ghana*; “majority” in Gandhi’s own English translation] binds the few [*thoda*; “minority”]. Many examples can be given in which acts of majorities will be found to have been wrong and those of minorities to have been right. All reforms owe their origin to the initiation of minorities in opposition to majorities.”¹³

And in the preface to his *States and Minorities*, Ambedkar acidly takes issue with the “spokesmen” of the “High and Mighty Hindu Majority” who proposed that the Scheduled Castes were not a minority:

Anyone with a fresh and free mind, reading it as a general proposition, would be justified in saying that it is capable of double interpretation. I interpret it to mean that the Scheduled Castes are more than a minority and that any protection given to the citizens and to the minorities will not be adequate for the Scheduled Castes. In other words it means that their social, economic and educational condition is so much worse than that of the citizens and other minorities that in addition to protection they would get as citizens and as minorities the Scheduled Castes would require special safeguards against the tyranny and discrimination of the majority.¹⁴

This is why, Ambedkar goes on, the Scheduled Castes need not only the “Fundamental Rights of citizens” but also “all the benefit of the Provisions for the Protection of the minorities and in addition special Safeguards.”

But despite the prominence of both Gandhi and Ambedkar, the minor as a moral aspiration was largely cast aside in the decades that followed. Gandhi was incorporated firmly into the majoritarian, nationalist pantheon (and there is more than enough in what he says to authorize this inclusion), and while many rights of minorities were institutionalized in the constitution whose writing Ambedkar led, the minor remained in practice a recessive element, inadequately activated by his or the constitution’s admirers.

It is only in the last three or so decades that the concept of the minor as an aspiration to another justice and another freedom has come to the fore again in South Asia, though this time around as yet most visibly in scholarship. Often taking a leaf from David Scott’s pioneering 1999 essay, scholars who differ considerably from and with each other have taken the minor as a quilting point, in works that are all loosely committed to an egalitarian and democratic politics. Thus, not only have we belatedly come to recognize Gandhi, Ambedkar, Muhammad Iqbal, and Saadat Hasan Manto as thinkers of the minor; the recent work of Daniel Elam shows how the trope of the minor also organizes the activities of Bhagat Singh and Lala Har Dayal.¹⁵

This increasing visibility of the minor in scholarship on South Asia parallels a double movement. On the one side, a range of developments are enabling the proliferation of spaces for the minor—Dalit mobilizations, movements for gender equality, LGBTQ movements, and so much more. These spaces are not so much institutional as they are interstitial—uncodified in law, and enacted through our comportments in our everyday lives. Assuming these comportments involves claiming equality without abandoning a minor status—without flipping the

valence of those badges that mark them as minor. In other words, the minor is not a majority-in-waiting, nor even is it a minority in the making. True, the minor may—sometimes must—seek to be codified in law as a minority, but what is most crucial about the minor is precisely that it remains in an agonistic relation to the enumerable minorities it animates and constitutes; following Ambedkar, we could say that it is “more than a minority.”

On the other side, there is also the resurgence, both institutional and social, of a relatively new form of majoritarianism. Ismail was unsparing in his criticisms of its manifestations in Sri Lanka.¹⁶ In India, about which I feel better placed to write, this majoritarianism is best described as a supremacist racism.¹⁷ What distinguishes the new violence is a moral dimension, a moralism really, as it searches incessantly for an internal enemy—the minorities—against whom it can sharpen its own identity. That moralism is necessary at least partially because the minor as a moral aspiration is interstitial, and cannot be contained within legal and institutional mechanisms; only the extralegality of moralism can police it. Ironically, as majoritarianism transforms itself into the supremacist racism that is *Hindutva*, the experience of the minor also grows more intense—both as the violent experience of minoritization, or being cast into precarity through legal and extralegal means, and as the moral aspiration for something that is more than just majoritarianism held at bay.

2.

If we heed this growing prominence of the minor in our present, we find ourselves returned anew to the question Ismail and Gandhi posed: Who is the minor? And, in a first take, perhaps we could pick up the question that Ismail begins answering, and also gives to us to continue answering: How does the minor not know their place? I hesitate to claim that I will answer that question in a way identical to his. But what I will say hopefully rhymes with his arguments, “rhyming” being his preferred word in *Abiding by Sri Lanka* to describe the amicable holding together of similarity and difference. This is as it should be. During our twenty-one years together at the University of Minnesota, a rhyming disagreement has been part of the sap of our friendship.

With that caveat: not knowing one’s place is, of course, a familiar Enlightenment trope. In Kant’s “What Is Enlightenment?,” we get a sense of how autonomous subjects (the subjects of the Enlightenment for Kant, as for any serious attempt to defend “Enlightenment values”) do not know their place in the private use of reason: they question everything restlessly, question other humans in a way that respects their autonomy; this questioning makes them cosmopolitan, or suggests that they belong to all places and no place. But these autonomous and cosmopolitan subjects who do not know their place are emphatically not minor: Kant begins his essay by describing the Enlightenment as “the human being’s emergence from

his self-incurred minority.”¹⁸ So when we ask, “How does the minor not know their place?” we are also asking: How is the minor’s way of not knowing their place different from Enlightenment subjects’ ways of not knowing their places?

To start again, then: Who is the minor? In taking up today this prismatic question that quickly refracts into a scatter, we could begin with a figure who does not have a place, and around whom the critique of domination condensed between the 1980s and the 2010s—the subaltern. Though majoritarianism and minority are not usually explicitly thematized concerns in the *Subaltern Studies* project, they are very much there already in the work of the original collective. And with hindsight, this is unsurprising: quite apart from its attacks on the “Cambridge School,” the project was also taking issue with the two forms of progressive (teleological) nationalism that were intellectually influential then.

One was a left nationalist majoritarianism, which remained a significant strand all the way down to Bipan Chandra, and arguably still finds resonances in the institutionalized forms of Marxism in the subcontinent. This tradition celebrated independence as the putative beginning of an emancipated society, one organized around progressive and “secular” values. Then there is the more critical and still valuable Marxist tradition that remains critical of nationalism and stresses that postindependence India was marked by the dominance of a subcontinental elite, a national class formation. What these two progressivisms share, despite the enormous differences between them, is what could be called a statist or sovereignty-centered hope—a hope for transforming the Indian state, and transforming sovereignty too.

Beginning around the 1980s, as this statist hope wanes even more with the decline of the Naxalite movement, there emerges the early moment of *Subaltern Studies*. Negatively, that moment is critical of statism itself as an orientation, and more broadly of majoritarianism. Indeed, across significant ideological differences, the critique of majoritarianism can be even said to be what is negatively most shared by the project. Positively, it affirms, especially in the first four volumes, a separate domain of subaltern activity, an activity that resists incorporation into the nationalist narrative, escapes it. Hence

what Guha calls “the politics of the people,” both outside (“this was an autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter”) and inside (“it continued to operate vigorously in spite of [colonialism], adjusting itself to the conditions prevailing under the Raj and in many respects developing entirely new strains in both form and content”) the circuit of colonial production.¹⁹

From this perspective, what is most visible are the categories of minority and subaltern. In an essay symptomatic of this perspective, Dipesh Chakrabarty

distinguishes between minority histories and subaltern pasts. Democratically minded historians, he notes, have often produced “minority histories”: histories that eschew “any claims to a superior overarching grand narrative,” and incorporate minorities into a baggy narrative, since “democracy requires hitherto neglected groups to tell their histories, and these different histories come together in accepting the shared rational and evidentiary rules.” Here, “minority” becomes a category entirely subsumed within a sovereignty-centered order, an order moreover organized around the regime of capital. To minority histories Chakrabarty contrasts “subaltern pasts,” which “cannot ever enter academic history as belonging to the historian’s own position.” Subaltern pasts “represent moments or points at which the archive that the historian mines develops a degree of intractability with respect to the aims of professional history.”²⁰

But the *Subaltern Studies* tradition never does stay entirely within this perspective, arguably not even quite in the first four volumes, and certainly not after that.²¹ Perhaps it could not have. For every time it takes up the question of what freedom is proper to the subaltern, it is returned, inadvertently or not, to the minor as not just a sociopolitical figure but also a moral aspiration. And that question belongs neither to subaltern pasts nor to minority histories but precedes both, animates both, divides itself up into both, and more. While this spirit of “both and more” is not explicitly thematized in *Provincializing Europe*, the book into which Chakrabarty’s essay is later incorporated, it nevertheless drives that book’s argument, receiving an especially lucid formulation in Chakrabarty’s remark that “provincializing Europe cannot ever be a project of shunning European thought. For at the end of European imperialism, European thought is a gift to us all. We can talk of provincializing it only in an anticolonial spirit of gratitude.”²²

In retrospect, this emphasis on “both and more” is arguably systematized by Ismail’s teacher and mentor, and a thinker whose work Ismail found endlessly generative: by Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak’s transformative intervention in the *Subaltern Studies* project—her critique of subaltern autonomy in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” As we know, Spivak’s claim was not at all that the subaltern cannot speak as such (as many outraged liberals and orthodox leftists assumed she was claiming). Rather, it was that, in speaking, the subaltern was transformed, was no longer subaltern in the old way. And when intellectuals gave voice to the subaltern, they inevitably engaged in a critique of the subject that “actually inaugurates a Subject.” Relatedly, as Spivak puts it in her later formulation, “When a line of communication is established between a member of subaltern groups and the circuits of citizenship or institutionality, the subaltern has been inserted into the long road to hegemony.”²³

And yet, as Spivak remains acutely aware, there is more to the subaltern engagement with circuits of citizenship or institutionality than the “long road

to hegemony,” or what Chakrabarty calls “minority histories.” What this “more” is we can get to by recalling a tension inherent to the *Subaltern Studies* project. Subalternity is a wrong, and it must be redressed—this is one of the premises of the quasi-concept of the subaltern as reworked by the project. But also, the wrong of subalternity is different from the wrong redressed by nationalism and revolutionary socialism. Both of these phenomena seek to redress the wrong of being excluded from power. Here, redress takes the form of participating in sovereignty—claiming sovereignty for and by those who were formerly dominated; in other words, becoming part of minority histories, being “inserted into the long road to hegemony.” The *Subaltern Studies* project does not at all reject this emphasis on empowerment through sovereignty (especially in its Kantian form as autonomy, which modulates the capitalist and protocapitalist sovereignty of self-ownership by premising sovereignty instead on the dignity of rational beings).

Still, the wrong that constitutes the subaltern can only begin to be redressed by the horizon of freedom and not knowing one’s place implied in autonomy. Indeed, as we shall see, implicit in the figure of the subaltern is the intimation that any sovereign freedom is itself an unfreedom, that maybe there are other ways of being free, of not knowing one’s place, that one may want to be governed, but not like that—not, that is, through the un/freedom of sovereignty, whether in its individualized forms as self-ownership and autonomy, or in collective forms such as the nation-state. So if the subaltern cannot speak, this is also because speech is the privileged signifier of that un/freedom, and to speak would be to obfuscate from themselves and others the horizon of another freedom—the freedom of the minor. Indeed, as Ismail notes, while the subaltern cannot speak, this does not rule out the possibility of speaking to, itself one way of abiding by.²⁴

3.

Who is the minor, then? A second take could begin: the minor is the figure who is skeptical of the freedom of sovereignty, who aspires to another freedom. This yearning for another freedom at odds with sovereignty is what must be conserved in the figure of the subaltern, even as subalternity itself is a wrong that must be redressed, a condition that must be annihilated.

This yearning for another freedom too is among the stakes of Spivak’s essay. In a striking moment toward its end, she cautions against “the relentless recognition of the Other by assimilation,” and notes: “It is in the interest of such cautions that Derrida does not invoke ‘letting the other(s) speak for himself’ but rather invokes an ‘appeal’ to or ‘call’ to the ‘quite-other’ (*tout-autre* as opposed to a self-consolidating other), of ‘rendering *delirious* that interior voice that is the voice of the other in us.’”²⁵ In the same vein, she goes on to acknowledge the “immense

problem of the consciousness of the woman as subaltern.” And by the time of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, she stresses the need for

the supplementation of collective effort by love. What deserves the name of love is an effort—over which one has no control yet at which one must not strain—which is slow, attentive on both sides—how does one win the attention of the subaltern without coercion or crisis?—mind-changing on both sides, at the possibility of an unascertainable ethical singularity that is not ever a sustainable condition. The necessary collective efforts are to change laws, relations of production, systems of education, and health care. But without the mind-changing one-on-one responsible contact, nothing will stick.²⁶

So maybe we should say: the minor is one conceptual name for the love that Spivak here describes. This love must not be confused with the heteropatriarchal love enjoined by ontotheological traditions. The latter comes as a sovereign command or demand. It seeks to consolidate collective efforts by giving them a heading, a goal. By contrast, Spivak’s concern is with the love that works through the “supplementation of collective effort”—in other words, by pulling back from the realization of solidarity through sovereignty (as ontotheological love would, affirming the sovereignty of Nation, Family, God, or Reason, for example). This love does not seek the un/freedom of sovereignty and autonomy, even if this un/freedom always remains the rampart that it must both build and breach. As such a love, the minor frames the subaltern in a distinctive way—as an actor seeking another freedom.

Love is not, of course, an explicit theme in Ismail’s writings. But what is “abiding” (the term of which Ismail says that “it means to display patience, to stay with it, endure it, work with it, even if it appears—and I speak, of course, of the question of peace in a textual object called Sri Lanka—unbearable, unending, unendurable”) if not a love that cannot—refuses to—know its place, ground itself?²⁷ And no one who knew Ismail can doubt the boisterous role that a certain political love played in animating his critique. This love was evident in the stories he told about friends—for example, about Richard De Zoysa, to whom an autographed poem by Arjuna Parakrama hung for years in his apartment hallway. De Zoysa, murdered by the majoritarian Sri Lankan state, whose poem “Lepidoptera,” which Ismail, if I recall, read out to me once, goes

Soon the ants of time
Carry you away from chalk and Chaucer
Into oblivion.
Farewell, lovely.
The heavy footed state, which made a mess
of your fragility, called this progress.²⁸

4.

If, in the wake of that farewell, we open up the issue of this other freedom, and return to the question “Who is the minor?” then we could note, in our third take, that this other freedom rising from the love of the minor cannot be thought save by way of religion. Indeed, “religion,” the act of making sacred through sacrifice, is the fount from which a range of concepts and quasi-concepts cascade out, one following from the other: belief as the act of making the sacred sovereign over the self; faith as the act of making an entity sacred without according it sovereignty over the self; deconstructive reading as the justice proper to faith; authority without sovereignty as the form of the impossible required by faith; political democracy and social democracy as, on the one hand, the concepts of an egalitarian sovereignty, and, on the other hand, as the quasi-concepts of an authority without sovereignty; and political friendship as the refusal of knowing one’s place distinctive to the minor.

Why say that the unavoidable point of departure for this other freedom is religion, and specifically the form of religion called faith? By now, we have learned to be skeptical of those too-quick formulations that resort to the contrast between a transcendent religion and an immanent secularism. But in the process we have often fallen into the assumption brilliantly and lucidly formulated by Talal Asad: that “religion” is itself a modern concept, that “late nineteenth-century anthropological and theological thought rendered a variety of overlapping social usages rooted in changing and heterogeneous forms of life into a single immutable essence, and claimed it to be the object of a universal human experience called ‘religious.’”²⁹

Asad’s assertion is correct, but it also remains too quick, obscures as much as it reveals. Yes, of course the concept of religion receives its modern form when counterpointed to the secular, and identified as a separate domain—analogue, as he might add, to the domains of “culture,” “the state,” “economics,” and so on. But this should not obscure from us the sense the word “religion”—like its equivalents such as *dharma*—always already carried even before modernity, and still intimates: the sense of another freedom. (The modern concept of religion, which Asad so persuasively describes, is a depiction of this other freedom from the perspective of the un/freedom involved in sovereignty and autonomy.) Derrida puts his finger on this other freedom suggestively in his “predefinition” of it:

However little may be known of religion in the singular, we do know that it is always a response that is prescribed, not chosen freely in an act of pure and abstractly autonomous will. There is no doubt that it implies freedom, will and responsibility, but let us try to think this: will and freedom without autonomy. Whether it is a question of sacredness, sacrificiality or faith, the other makes the law, the law is other: to give ourselves back, and up, to the other.³⁰

Religion as a responsibility and freedom without autonomy or, more precisely, sovereignty: such a religion receives lambent readings in the twentieth century from those two exemplary thinkers of the equality of the minor, Gandhi and Ambedkar.³¹ Both torque in a very striking direction the tendency commonplace in their times to define religion in terms of some version of the distinction between the sacred and the profane—for example, Émile Durkheim’s description in 1912 of the sacred as “things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”³²

The torque is this: where Durkheim offers a definition of religion, Ambedkar and Gandhi make it into what Derrida nicely calls a predefinition. Where definitions operate and are possible only within a sociological analytic, predefinitions inhabit an existential analytic. Martin Heidegger writes in *Being and Time* that “Sciences are ways of Being in which Dasein comports itself towards entities which it need not be itself. But to Dasein, Being in a world is something that belongs essentially.”³³ Or again:

If to Interpret the meaning of Being becomes our task, Dasein is not only the primary entity to be interrogated; it is also that entity which already comports itself, in its Being, towards what we are asking about when we ask this question. But in that case the question of Being is nothing other than the radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself—the pre-ontological understanding of Being.³⁴

Simply put, then, an existential analytic is at work whenever I myself in my freedom and responsibility am the being to be analyzed, and when I am in my very being (that is to say, in my freedom and responsibility) complicit with what I am asking about. Only where I lean into this complicity, become an accomplice to what I ask about, do I actively inhabit an existential analytic; at other times, this analytic is obscured from me—secondary, maybe repressed.

The counterpoint to an existential analytic, if we are to continue to work with Heidegger’s terms, would be a scientific analytic (or what could be called, when it takes society as its disciplinary object, a sociological analytic, which is arguably what Ismail is taking aim at in his “critique of social science and of representation”). Recall: “Sciences are ways of Being in which Dasein comports itself towards entities which it need not be itself.” In other words, I move toward scientificity whenever I engage with something that I regard as what I need not be myself—not myself, at least, in my freedom and responsibility. If, for example, I study a concept that I do not implicate myself in (whether by aversion or collusion), I would be closer to a sociological analytic than to an existential one. Relatedly, where scientificity is premised on the specificity and generality of definitions, an existential analytic has little space for generality and specificity; rather, an existential analytic

tries to move, in freedom and responsibility, from the predefinition to the singular (even though, as we shall see, such a movement will itself involve some engagement with the sociological analytic).

Both Ambedkar's and Gandhi's predefinitions of religion proceed by privileging the sacred. (Ambedkar cites Durkheim on this, perhaps not consciously realizing his departure from Durkheim.)³⁵ For them, the sacred is the criterion of religion in the sense that religion involves making something into an entity to which we offer a sacrifice, whether of ourselves or of others. The reason I call their invocation of sacrifice a predefinition is that it becomes an unavoidable aspect of freedom and responsibility (terms that should, for their full force, be appreciated as counterpoints to what appear as rights and duties from within the sociological analytic).

Symptomatic of this is the fact that for them there is no space outside religion. Gandhi insists that even atheists are religious; Ambedkar, likely himself an atheist, nevertheless affirms religion from at least the time of *Annihilation of Caste*. Relatedly, both are driven by the search for a "true religion." That phrase and its equivalents recur in the writings of both, and what they mean by it has little in common with what Asad identifies as the modern concept of religion. Gandhi's religiosity unspools through more conventionally recognizable forms, and is spelled out at length across his enormous corpus. Ambedkar's religiosity is explicitly affirmed only in a few late texts on Buddhism, but once we operate with the criterion of the sacred as sacrifice, then the pervasiveness of religiosity in his interventions too is evident.

Also, unlike Durkheim, neither Gandhi nor Ambedkar regards religion primarily as an object of study; they refuse to place it within a sociological analytic. Indeed, Ambedkar has some acid criticisms of the study of the philosophy of religion as merely a "descriptive science." For him, it must be "both descriptive and normative"; he says, "I shall be putting Hinduism on its trial to assess its worth as a way of life."³⁶ Thus, both attack many religious practices. Ambedkar's attack is sophisticated and unsparing, in a vein not that different from the young Marx, pointing to the work that religion as social order does in perpetuating the domination of the upper castes. Gandhi's attack is much less sophisticated—just dismissing many forms of religion as blind faith and superstition, refusing to engage with the work of domination they do. (His failure to recognize the systematicity of this domination is the nub of one of Ambedkar's many lines of criticisms of him; it is one sense in which he remains within the Brahmanical traditions that he criticizes in other ways.) But again, both attack these religious practices only in order to pursue a "true religion."

Such a framing of religion as an existential analytic constituted by the sacred wreaks havoc on disciplinary boundaries. For a start, it renders wobbly, and even irrelevant, the contrast between transcendence and immanence. After all, most of what we describe as "secular" traditions rest on making something sacred (the

nation, science, the human). So now religion becomes a promiscuously universal category, even if one that always takes on its valence in singular and historical situations and relations. Their framing also reveals the limits of more recent arguments, such as Asad's, that religion is a modern category coeval with secularism. Yes, it is that, to the extent that we seek to understand religion from within a sociological analytic. But if we are to understand the distinctiveness of religion in — not just from within — this analytic, the question we need to ask is twofold. First, how is the modern concept of “religion” shaped by secularism's appropriation of some sacralities — nation, science, human — for itself?

Second, and more importantly for my purposes here: what is the freedom and responsibility without sovereignty — the religion — from which we seek to set aside the “religion” produced by the sociological analytic? And because Asad, and most of the scholarship inspired by him, never quite ask this second question, their analysis remains within the very anthropological tradition that they critique; as Ismail put it in an email, Asad “returns the gaze — anthropologizes secularism.”³⁷ Or as Aamir Mufti, Ismail's friend since graduate school, astutely notes, Asad presumes a contrast between “the liberal-secular-modern (which is imperialist in its worldly career) and those ‘traditional’ forms that have somehow escaped its hold,” and engages with the latter primarily through a gesture of “ethnographic philanthropy” — the mode “widely disseminated and practiced in the contemporary world for the representation (of the life-world) of the (socially distant) other that exempts the other from the demand for self-critique that is constitutive of the self. This is a quintessentially liberal gesture in the global North.”³⁸

As critics not just of liberal secularism but also of the traditions of the societies they inherit and inhabit, Gandhi and Ambedkar cannot afford this ethnographic philanthropy (nor can Ismail — hence “abiding by,” his own atheist form of religiosity). So they find themselves drawn into the question of freedom and responsibility without sovereignty — the question, in other words, of religion as it arises in an existential analytic.³⁹

5.

To clarify for ourselves the distinction that Ambedkar and Gandhi strive to make between the religiosity they criticize and “true religion,” it helps to recall and reframe a familiar distinction between two forms of love, arguably implicit in Kierkegaard's contrast between the ethical and the religious, but more suggestively framed for our times as a distinction between belief and faith.⁴⁰ These are two ways of rendering — loving or not loving — the facticity of the world we encounter. (By “facticity” I mean the preempiricist phenomenon of being thrown into the world, of encountering our surroundings as having a meaning that we accept we cannot change arbitrarily.)

So if we find ourselves still taken up by the question “Who is the minor?” perhaps our fourth take could begin with an apparently negative stipulation: the minor are those who find it impossible to continuously or primarily inhabit the world in the modality of belief. Belief is at work when we render the facticity of our surroundings into knowledge—into things we know or assume we know and have grounds for. Beliefs change, of course. But the protocols that produce belief require that changes in them must legitimate themselves by pointing to changes in knowledge. In this sense, even though it is we who produce the knowledge, we are not quite sovereign knowers. Rather, belief involves making a knowledge sovereign over us.

Here I wish to just make four brief observations about belief before dwelling on faith for the rest of this essay. First, belief operates across the usual divide between secularism and religion. It is at work wherever we regard the facticity around us as something that we can have verifiably right or wrong beliefs about, about which we can ask questions that have knowable answers. Historically, theologians have found this verifiable ground in their various claims about how the divine manifests itself. This very verifiability made the divine sovereign over us. It continues to be at work in some questions asked by what we conventionally call religion: Where in Ayodhya was Rama born? Why is the theory of evolution wrong? But by different protocols the social sciences and sciences too create verifiable knowledge and communities of belief, communities that pursue answerable questions: How do we prevent or cure COVID-19? How effective are the vaccines for it? What percentage of people voted for the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party)? Across the conventional distinction between religious and secular knowledge, these answerable questions render facticity into belief, even where one community of belief would consider the other’s protocols of verifiability nonsensical, as I would those around creationism or the date and place of Rama’s birth.

Second, on both sides of that conventional divide, belief turns religious—that is, it comes to be oriented toward the sacred as sacrifice—wherever it demands, as token of love, the sacrifice of others or self for it; such a demand for sacrifice to a sovereign entity is what makes this love ontotheological. And it is not only conventional “religion” that demands sacrifices to its divinities. “Secularism” too sacralizes, as does most atheism. Most evidently, secular traditions sacralize the nation—the principal remaining entity in the name of which we can die and kill. (Durkheim fleetingly recognizes the sacralization involved in the nation, though he does not do too much with it.) Where belief turns religious, the sacred demands love from believers as its right, demands sacrifice of others or the believers themselves. This oppressive and violent love, need it be said, is not the love that Spivak writes of.

Third, belief involves a distinctive freedom—one where we freely sublimate ourselves to, participate in, and in the process even reshape that which we subordinate

ourselves to. This freedom is not found only in what is conventionally called religion, where subordination to the divine is itself experienced as a freedom. For with modernity and its remaking of religion, this freedom has been transferred into modern “secular” traditions—for example, into collective forms such as sovereignty-centered nationalism, and also into individualist forms such as Lockean self-ownership or Kantian autonomy. Indeed, autonomy brings into play a distinctive form of belief, one where we make humans sacred by installing them as sovereign, rational beings, and, because we ourselves are these sacred beings, partake of the freedom that this sovereignty entails. This sovereignty makes us majors, enables our exit from a minority that can now be seen only in privative terms. Becoming major this way, we don the mantle of an equality of the major—perhaps an equality with other autonomous beings, with whom we share a fraternity premised on the relative invulnerability accorded by an order of rights.

Fourth, both Ambedkar and Gandhi are very critical of belief, as of the secular freedom promised by its modern incarnations. Gandhi often uses the word “superstition” to describe what I am here calling belief.⁴¹ In “modern civilization” he sees even more “superstition” than in most practices that form part of what is conventionally understood as religion. The Editor remarks in *Hind Swaraj*: “Civilization is like a mouse gnawing while it is soothing us. When its full effect is realized, we shall see that religious superstition is harmless compared to that of modern civilization.”

Ambedkar, in a parallax move, famously distinguishes in *Annihilation of Caste* between a religion of principles and one of rules: “Rules seek to tell an agent just what course of action to pursue. Principles do not prescribe a specific course of action.” For him, Hinduism is a religion of rules, one that does not allow for the emergence of a religion of principles.⁴² Analogously, in “Buddha or Karl Marx,” what he finds especially distressing about Russia is its “Communist Dictatorship.”⁴³ Especially where dictatorship occurs in the name of the people, as with communism, where the conceit is that the people make the dictatorship sovereign over them, the analogies with the religion of rules, and its order of belief, are striking.

6.

If, unable to accord primacy to belief, we find ourselves returning to the question “Who is the minor?” then a fourth take could be: the minor are those who are thrown into rendering the facticity of the world through faith. What I am calling “faith” here Ambedkar and Gandhi both describe as “true religion,” and Gandhi also describes as “pure faith.” Pure faith is at work in all those convictions and matters that we know or suspect that we have or can assign no grounds for, but to which we nevertheless accord facticity. Historically, long before the “death of God,” faith was practiced by all those religious devotees who were convinced of the existence of

their divinities but accepted that they could not prove it even to themselves. Such faith was the crux of the mystical traditions as distinct from theological traditions. It was the crux especially of the negative theology from which Derrida tries suspiciously hard to distinguish deconstruction.⁴⁴ The apophatic mystic said: God is not this, God is not that, I cannot find God, but God is this formless figure who is not and whom I cannot find.

To be clear, faith is not “believing something without good reasons to do so” (as in Steven Pinker) or “belief in spite of, or even because of, the lack of evidence” (as in Richard Dawkins).⁴⁵ True, it can very much look like belief without evidence; epistemologically, I am not sure that the two can be distinguished. But in the experience of their being, so to speak, there is a vast gulf between them.

This difference can be summed up in one phrase—the equality of vulnerability. Belief, I noted, is premised on subordination to, and sometimes sublation into, the sovereignty and invulnerability of the sacred. Even where equality in the community of believers is asserted, as happens often in modern democratic claims, this equality is often based on the institution of rights, or a sharing of invulnerability. By contrast, at work in faith is a reverential equality with the sacred itself: precisely because we are acutely aware here that faith is groundless, we cannot subordinate ourselves to the sacred. Cannot: even as we surrender to the sacred, we are thrown back into ourselves in our freedom and equality to what we surrender to. As such, faith always intimates (even if it does not usually accomplish) a surrender without subordination, a vulnerable freedom with the sacred.⁴⁶

Such faith not only murmurs in negative theology and apophatic traditions concerned with the divine. It also often pervades our relations with each other, and is most evidently condensed in the promise of the word “love.” To explain the love we give or receive or demand in terms of the reasons for it is always inadequate. In other words, where we accept and embrace its groundlessness, every act of love is also an act of faith—of groundless equality. And arguably this dimension of faith is not extinguished even when we repress its groundlessness, make ourselves believe that we can ground it in reasons. There is, moreover, a word we have long privileged to describe the “secular” everyday experience of a groundless love that is also a freedom and an equality. This word is friendship. Friendship is the relationship in which we groundlessly enact and embody an equality with those whom we love.

And if I use words such as “enact” and “embody,” I do so advisedly. For what also distinguishes faith from belief is that where faith requires practice—enactment and embodiment by individuals and the groups they form—practice is not a necessary part of belief. It is not only that belief can abstract itself into institutions and technologies, which are then charged with the work of practice. It is also that belief, especially where the tradition of autonomy comes to be dominant, occurs as principles, which actors can decide when to practice and when to put in abeyance.⁴⁷

Strikingly, Ambedkar's invocation of principles is not an autonomous one: while he affirms principles, he does so from a perspective that is already given to the Dalit as a minor. As he declares on one occasion, soon after stressing that Dalits and Muslims will always be minorities:

Sir, I say this, that whenever there has been a conflict between my personal interests and the interests of the country as a whole, I have always placed the claim of the country above my own personal claims. . . . But I will also leave no doubt in the minds of the people of this country that I have another loyalty to which I am bound and which I can never forsake. That loyalty is the community of untouchables, in which I am born, to which I belong, and which I hope I shall never desert. And I say this to this House as strongly as I possibly can, that whenever there is any conflict of interest between the country and the untouchables, so far as I am concerned, the untouchables' interests will take precedence over the interests of the country. I am not going to support a tyrannising majority simply because it happens to speak in the name of the country.⁴⁸

The Copernican revolution that Ambedkar and Gandhi effect in this world of faith is to systematically politicize the equality of vulnerability—transform it into the equality of the minor. The equality of the minor involves making friendship a political act, or, put differently, it involves practicing friendship not just with intimates but also with strangers. The protocols for such a political friendship would, needless to say, be entirely different from those for an intimate friendship. They would also involve a secularism incomparable with the majoritarian secularism the Indian state adopted after independence; arguably, it is this other secularism of the minor that accounts for Ambedkar's and Gandhi's skeptical relation with majoritarian secularism.

7.

If, taking our bearing from this welling of faith in the form of political friendship, we continue to ask “Who is the minor?” then we might find ourselves led to a fifth take: the minor is also a method. This dimension we can elicit by recalling another concept that Ismail was very committed to: reading, or, more precisely, deconstructive reading. Deconstructive reading is a very distinctive form of critique. Some especially sloppy recent formulations, such as Bruno Latour's, have suggested that critique has “run out of steam.” Others have identified critique tout court with the hermeneutics of suspicion.⁴⁹ But such formulations are almost always inadequately attentive to the differential work of power—specifically, of domination or its questioning—in the activities they club together.

A formulation attentive to the work of power would put things differently. Where the tradition of critique arguably inaugurated by Kant works in the spirit of the major or mastery, whether this mastery be exercised through expertise or hermeneutics,

the tradition of reading works in the spirit of the minor. In the South Asian context, Daniel Elam's recent work nicely teases out the stakes of reading as an act of "minor critique." Noting that reading is "a disavowal of authorial mastery," Elam stresses how the four figures he attends to—Lala Har Dayal, Ambedkar, Gandhi, and Bhagat Singh—refuse to speak as experts, and are concerned with the political dimension of their interventions.⁵⁰ In the spirit of this argument, Elam notes that Ambedkar was a voracious reader who read "in ways that cannot be catalogued," and who moreover read in ways that undid the claims of texts to authority—most famously, the *Manu Smriti*, the classical text that authorized caste, among other forms of domination.⁵¹

Between obeying *Manu* and burning *Manu*, we find the most radically egalitarian practice is reading *Manu*. Obeying *Manu* is a justification for continued authoritarian caste oppression. Burning *Manu* asserts authority over *Manu*, thereby gesturing toward, perhaps, caste equality (a value that is, as we have noted, necessary but insufficient). But when Ambedkar reads *Manu* closely—when Ambedkar critiques *Manu*—he reveals something more devastating to caste: *Manu*'s authority, far from transcendent, is simply irrelevant. It is in this final move that Ambedkar offers the beginning of a model for the true annihilation of caste hierarchy.⁵²

Put slightly differently, where burning is an act of rebellion against the master, reading does something more radical: it asserts another form of authority. The annihilation of caste occurs not only because reading has located instabilities and internal contradictions within the text that render it incoherent. It occurs also—primarily—because of the authority of this egalitarian horizon, which propels the reading.

The practice of deconstruction intensifies this egalitarian horizon. The intensification is signaled in the epigraph with which Ismail begins the introductory chapter of *Abiding by Sri Lanka*—a quotation from Spivak: "I would rather think of the text as my accomplice, than my patient or my analysand."⁵³ With the patient and the analysand, as with an object, we have an unequal relation. As for the accomplice, etymology is suggestive here: an accomplice is one with whom we find ourselves folded or plaited together. To treat a text as an accomplice is to treat it as distinct from oneself but also as something one is affected by. Put differently, to read, and especially to read in a deconstructive spirit, is to be unable to maintain an invulnerable relation with the text: even where the text is a detested antagonist, reading is, to begin with, an acknowledgment that it makes us privatively vulnerable, and that we respond to this by undoing that privation without resorting to the spirit of mastery. Deconstruction is justice, yes, but it is not the justice exercised by the sovereign (which is more correctly described as the law of the land); it is the justice that stays faithful to the vulnerability and equality of the minor, that seeks

to convert a privative vulnerability into a nonprivative one. Indeed, if love is not to be ontotheological, then it can be so only by enacting a nonprivative vulnerability that is nevertheless not a subordination.

8.

If, spurred by our glimpse of this egalitarian horizon, we find ourselves asking yet again “Who is the minor?” then we arrive at a sixth take: the minor is a striving for the impossible. To get a sense of what is at stake in this word, “impossible,” we could recall its counterpoint—the possible. To say that something is possible is to both be able to define it as an end or goal, and to at least dimly see a path to that end or goal. To say that something is impossible is to say one or both of two things: that we see no path or means to the end or goal, and/or that we have only the dimmest apprehension or intimation of what the end itself is.

Why does the impossible matter? Because on both sides, whether as belief or as faith, impossibility is the mark of a religious matter. But impossibility is configured very differently in both. Belief, especially in the form of autonomy, involves an idealist impossibility; for example, nobody is ever going to realize the categorical imperative in all or even most of their relations. I use the term “idealism” to stress that “impossibility” refers here to an idea in a distant future toward the realization of which sovereign power must try to organize society concretely and materially. Such an idealism is surely at work in the call in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution to a republic organized around justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity; the Constitution’s length surely has to do in part with instituting possible paths to this ideal. A similar idealist impossibility is at work in the recognition by scientists that they will never arrive at final answers, will always find new questions, that what they know is itself suffused with a certain unknowability.

But the equality of the minor is not this idealist impossibility. It involves something far more intriguing and challenging—a messianic impossibility. What distinguishes the impossible as such a quasi-concept (I draw on the prefix “quasi-” to acknowledge that the impossible here is weak in one key aspect that holds a concept together—sovereignty, or the heading) is that it involves striving to realize the impossible in the here and now. Such a realization is by its very nature always fragile and fleeting; it is also impossible in the sense that we cannot ever quite know that we have realized it. Indeed, precisely because it is in the here and now, it is centrally about a comportment but also a moment that may surge out of our everyday relations when we least expect it. And the equality of the minor is a very distinctive messianic impossibility; it involves a sociality organized around relinquishing sovereignty over oneself, whether as an individual or a group. This is also why the term “faith” is so apposite for describing the messianic impossible: here the surrender of sovereignty is not a subordination

to a higher sovereignty; rather, it is a surrender without subordination; it is a nonprivative vulnerability.⁵⁴

But this raises a further question: What kind of social and political relations does surrender without subordination entail? Here I cannot stress enough that to relinquish sovereignty, as the minor does, is never to relinquish power. Rather, it involves the exercise of power centered around authority rather than sovereignty; it is even an authority without sovereignty. Authority and sovereignty are very different forms of power, though we have, barring a few exceptions, barely dwelt on the concept of authority, and even less on its distinction from sovereignty.⁵⁵ Alexandre Kojève, who is one of the few to explicitly make the distinction, provides a helpful first approximation of what is at stake in authority: “Authority is the possibility that an agent has of acting on others (or on another) without these others reacting against him, despite being able to do so.”⁵⁶ In other words, central to authority is the assumption of a certain freedom by those who accede to authority, the acknowledgment also of a rightness to power. By contrast, if you have sovereignty over me, whether institutionally as a representative of the state or socially because of your dominance, the question of rightness or my assent is suspended: sovereignty is something you can exercise even punitively.

Of course, authority and sovereignty are not necessarily antithetical to each other. The coming together of the two produces what Elam calls “authorial mastery” or, in the case of societies, hegemony. Thus, the historical caste order of graded inequality was hegemonic among many of the privileged castes precisely in the sense that they accepted its authority, even where they challenged their particular position within that order. Such a hegemonic coming together of authority and sovereignty characterized also Gandhi’s 1932 fast, which was so invidiously violent in part because this coming together was justified as pure authority. Of course, authority and sovereignty need not come together in this way at all. It is very possible to have sovereignty without even a semblance of authority, which is what a tyrant exercises, or for sovereigns to claim an authority they do not possess, which is what we call authoritarianism.

But the active pursuit of authority without sovereignty is a different matter altogether. Here, power centered around sovereignty is relinquished as the flip side of activating a power centered around a groundless love.⁵⁷ Where sovereignty evaluates actions in terms of consequence or effect, authority without sovereignty is democratic in that it tries to transform us in our very being, and freely have us ourselves enact this transformation—what Spivak in a related context describes as an uncoercive or a noncoercive rearrangement of desire.⁵⁸ Such transformations have consequences and effects, of course, but that is not the point; the point is rather the very enactment of this very freedom together. For example, when Ambedkar exhorts Dalits to self-respect, this is not a means to an end. Self-respect is a pure

means, and one moreover with incalculable consequences because once we accord equality to ourselves in self-respect, it is difficult to predict how we will behave.

It is such authority without sovereignty that allowed Gandhi's fasts in the forties to bring Hindu-Muslim violence to a halt; it is such authority without sovereignty that led half a million to follow Ambedkar in 1955 by converting to Navayana Buddhism. Authority without sovereignty—surely this is the name we should accord to the power of the messianic impossible?

9.

But the equality of the minor does not only take the form of refusing to participate in the sovereignty of the state, as might seem to have happened on the most dramatic interpretations of Gandhi's civil disobedience, or Ambedkar's conversion to Navayana Buddhism. Rather, it is to relinquish sovereignty. And to relinquish is not to either reject or overcome.⁵⁹ It is to acknowledge that some participation in sovereignty-centered freedom is unavoidable, even necessary to redress some inequities, and nevertheless to constantly cultivate a self-discipline that gives up on this sovereignty beyond what is possible or calculable. Gandhi recognized his own participation in a sovereignty-centered freedom: he pointed out on several occasions that he was heading a movement that sought to establish a government with its own police, army, and parliament—in other words, a sovereign regime centered around “parliamentary *swaraj*.” As for Ambedkar, he led the writing of the Constitution for that parliamentary democracy.

How do those such as Ambedkar or Gandhi, who are faithful to the equality of the minor, participate in the very sovereignty that they are also giving up on, and how is sovereignty itself transformed in the process? Heeding the undertow of these questions while asking “Who is the minor?” brings us to a seventh take: the minor is the figure who, working in the interstices of the idealist impossible called political democracy, tries to transform it into the messianic impossible, which he regards as an irrepressible potentiality of political democracy.

To unpack this: Ambedkar clearly has an ambivalent relation with political democracy as a form of sovereignty (a phenomenon that, as I argue elsewhere, includes two forms of power at slight odds with each other, liberal and republican democracy, the first centered around the sovereignty of individuals, and the second around the authority of that sovereignty).⁶⁰ We can see why. Political democracy as a sovereign form folds within itself a paradoxical tension. On the one hand, it affirms the principle of “liberty, equality and fraternity.” Belief in the slogan requires minimally enshrining—making worthy of sacrifice to and for—political rights for individuals and groups, and maximally enshrining social and economic rights too. Such enshrining bears the potential to transform the majority into a plurality—a society where respect for each other's equality and

liberty makes it impossible to form anything more than temporary and contingent majorities.

But only the potential. Ambedkar notes that parliamentary democracy (for him, just one form of political democracy as a sovereign order, though he does not to my knowledge explicitly specify any other forms) privileges liberty over equality. Thus he writes, “Democracy is another name for equality. Parliamentary democracy developed a passion for liberty. It never made even a nodding acquaintance with equality. It failed to realize the significance of equality and did not even endeavour to strike a balance between liberty and equality with the result that liberty swallowed equality and has made democracy a name and a farce.”⁶¹ One might extrapolate: to privilege liberty over equality is to institutionalize a peculiar kind of equality—the equal right to inequality. This inequality unfolds on two registers. On the one hand, the equal right to self-ownership stages the liberal separation of the economic and the political; it intensifies economic inequality and eventually political inequality too, all the more so under the capitalist order. As Ambedkar observes in *States and Minorities*,

Ask those who are unemployed whether what are called Fundamental Rights are of any value to them. If a person who is unemployed is offered a choice between a job of some sort, with some sort of wages, with no fixed hours of labour and with an interdict on joining a union and the exercise of his right to freedom of speech, association, religion, etc., can there be any doubt as to what his choice will be. How can it be otherwise?⁶²

On the other hand, the right of free association and the free exercise of religion intensify existing social inequalities, or create new ones. Political democracy in its sovereign form may ban the most violent manifestations of discrimination, and those that attack the autonomy of individuals may be banned, but the quieter and more structural forms of discrimination, which have invidious long-term effects, cannot be abolished in the same way.

Quite apart from these two matters, liberty and equality are premised here on domination: citizens are equally free because they are uniquely rational—“rational” as in possessing the capacity to know and master the world. The individual who is the unit of political democracy in its sovereign form is thus already major, conceived in terms of the right and ability to master their surroundings, whether this mastery takes the form of self-ownership or autonomy. As such, even as it creates institutional spaces for minorities, this individualism already negates the minor. And the minor who is negated includes not only the nonhuman but also those humans deemed undeserving or incapable of citizenship—women, Muslims, the colonized, refugees, and so on. In converting the minor into a minority, thus, what becomes recessive is precisely the figure of the minor itself.

Given all this, why does Ambedkar affirm political democracy in its sovereign form, including its parliamentary manifestation? Perhaps in part because political democracy in its sovereign form can never quite eradicate the space—so troublesome to majoritarianism already—for individual rights. But arguably also because he senses that political democracy in its sovereign form can turn radical, nurture the potentiality of a social democracy. There are two lines of flight, aporetic to each other, in his arguments about these radical forms—one intensifying the idealist impossibility of sovereignty, and the other more autoimmune, intensifying the messianic impossibility of faith.

The first emerges very clearly in *States and Minorities*. (That document, it should be noted, exemplifies the constitution that Ambedkar individually aspired to far more than the Indian Constitution hammered out through negotiation and compromise—itsself necessary to the practice of democracy—in the Constituent Assembly.) There, he stresses the “four premises of Political Democracy.” He begins with a familiar and very Kantian one—that “the individual is an end in himself.”

But among the remaining three premises are two quite unusual ones, which Ambedkar arguably sees as implicit in the first: “That the individual shall not be required to relinquish any of his constitutional rights as a condition precedent to the receipt of a privilege,” and “that the State shall not delegate powers to private persons to govern others.”⁶³ These two principles lead him to argue that it is wrong to associate liberty with reduction of state intervention. Rather, “this liberty is liberty to the landlords to increase rents, for capitalists to increase hours of work and reduce rate of wages. This must be so. It cannot be otherwise. . . . In other words what is called liberty from the control of the State is another name for the dictatorship of the private employer.”⁶⁴

Thus, the startling extension he gives to political democracy’s founding principle—the idealist impossibility of individuals as ends in themselves—is that this very Kantian principle itself requires a state socialism. At the same time, he recognizes that political democracy is not just about that principle; it is also about the empirical world of majorities. So those “who want the economic structure of society to be modelled on State Socialism must realize that they cannot leave the fulfilment of so fundamental a purpose to the exigencies of ordinary Law which simple majorities—whose political fortunes are never determined by rational causes—have a right to make and unmake. For these reasons Political Democracy seems to be unsuited for the purpose.” “The way out seems to be to retain Parliamentary Democracy and to prescribe State Socialism by the Law of the Constitution so that it will be beyond the reach of a Parliamentary majority to suspend, amend or abrogate it.” This democratic exception to democratic majority would allow the state to provide “protection against economic exploitation,” and do so moreover by controlling key sectors of the economy.⁶⁵ He combines this emphasis on state socialism

with a panoply of measures also providing for the protection of minorities. In *States and Minorities*, then, we find the idealist impossibility of autonomy—the crux of political democracy as a sovereign form—getting an especially militant makeover in the direction of a social democracy that would simultaneously protect the marginalized and the oppressed.

But elsewhere, Ambedkar reads political and social democracy otherwise—not through belief and idealist impossibility but through faith and messianic impossibility. Thus, he writes on one occasion of “the *spirit* of social democracy” (emphasis mine), and later, in the Constituent Assembly speech, declares that social democracy is

a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. Liberty cannot be divorced from equality, equality cannot be divorced from liberty. Nor can liberty and equality be divorced from fraternity. Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things. It would require a constable to enforce them.⁶⁶

Envisioned here is the way that the slogan “liberty, equality, and fraternity” keeps open the possibility of an autoimmune transformation toward the spirit (though here we should, if we meticulously follow Derrida, really say “specter”) of political and—even more—social democracy. And even though this specter or spirit will often seek the bulwark of institutions and of belief, it is quite different from them; it is a “way of life,” something to be enacted in the comportments of everyday actions.

And surely the slogan “liberty, equality, fraternity” can only be declared in this way—as a matter of faith? Are all humans equal or free? We might passionately aver this, but the claim cannot be rationally grounded. For the larger part of human history, we have not treated each other as equal or free. And fraternity: what could be more laughable than the claim that humans have treated each other in that spirit?

This other and more radical sense of political and social democracy leans into the groundlessness of the slogan “liberty, equality, fraternity”; it accepts that this declaration can only be uttered in the spirit of faith. Indeed, for those from oppressed or other marginalized groups, how can the slogan be uttered in any spirit other than that of faith? Going by the knowable reasons proper to belief, there were no grounds for Martin Luther King Jr. to accord humanity to the whites who had never even really acknowledged their responsibility for slavery and the

Jim Crow era, or for Ambedkar to recognize the humanity of the dominant castes who had for millennia visited unspeakable violence on Dalits, and continued to do so in his time. By the reason proper to belief, it would have to be said that US whites and Indian dominant castes are incapable of ever treating others as equals, and so should be excluded from any society founded on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. To not exclude them involves faith of the highest order.

In sum, political democracy is marked by a curious potential for a radical autoimmunity—the potential to take the slogan “liberty, equality, fraternity” in the direction of a messianic impossibility, an impossibility that arguably precedes the institutions of political democracy themselves but is more likely to be nourished where political democracy prevails. This is why majoritarian regimes, as they become more powerful, try to dismantle even the institutional mechanisms of political democracy, as the BJP seeks to do in India today.

This is also why it is quite misleading to assume, as Carl Schmitt does, that “*all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts*,”⁶⁷ or to make the friend-enemy distinction the basis of politics. It is unsurprising that Schmitt, arguably the most sophisticated twentieth century theorist of majoritarianism, was unable to see what was distinctive about parliamentary democracy or, more broadly, the sovereign forms of political democracy; what is surprising is that so many contemporary theorists of democracy have echoed Schmitt. Yes, nondemocratic secular concepts of state are indeed theologized. But matters are messy with political democracy: it tries to theologize, make into belief, what is unavoidably a mystical proposition—the slogan “liberty, equality, fraternity.” And to the extent that it theologizes this belief, it privileges liberty above the other two, institutes the equal right to inequality, effects a liberal separation of the political and economic, thus both enhancing the power of capital and intensifying social oppression.

But it never completely accomplishes this transformation. Political democracy remains marked by what Claude Lefort, far more attentive to the nuances of democracy than Schmitt, describes as the “empty place of power.” To stress this empty place, Lefort points out, is not the same as saying that power belongs to no one. Rather, it

implies reference to a society without any positive determination, which cannot be represented by the figure of a community. It is because the division of power does not, in a modern democracy, refer to an outside that can be assigned to the gods, the city, or holy ground; because it does not refer to an inside that can be assigned to the substance of the community. Or, to put it another way, it is because there is no materialization of the Other (which would allow power to function as a mediator, no matter how it were defined) that there is no materialization of the One.⁶⁸

Perhaps it is in recognition of the fact that this empty place of power always undermines theological claims that Lefort places a question mark at the end of his title—“The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?”

10.

If, leaning faithfully into the messianic impossibility of “liberty, equality, fraternity,” we ask once more “Who is the minor?” then we might find ourselves returned to the question with which we began: How does the minor refuse to know its place? And this time around, we could take up an observation made glancingly before, and say: it is through the modality of political friendship that the minor refuses to know its place. Even more: the minor is the comportment of political friendship, is the political friend. The political friend is central to both Ambedkar and Gandhi. And while Ambedkar does not, to my knowledge, explicitly displace the concept of fraternity with friendship, it would not take too much effort, if there was the space, to show that he reads fraternity in terms of friendship.

This reading should not surprise us. As a modern form of solidarity, “fraternity” displaces and sublates the rule of the father into the rule of brothers, as Carole Pateman long ago taught us to recognize.⁶⁹ This fraternity, so to speak, does not only take the form of autonomy. It also keeps open the possibility of suspending differences by insisting on the identity—fusion—of brothers. Such a suspension of differences, when it occurs, also suspends the very question of equality: between those who are one, why should equality even matter? So just as the slogan can be hijacked by “liberty,” it can be hijacked by “fraternity.” Arguably, it is the latter hijacking that describes the whole family of ideologies that we often lump together under the term “fascism.”

Perhaps it is to warn also not only against the danger of liberty but also against this second danger of fraternity (though it was not at the time as prominent in India as it is now) that Ambedkar insists, recall, that the slogan “liberty, equality, fraternity” is “a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy.” And by the time of *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, fraternity is clearly understood in terms of *maitri* (friendship), arguably the key term in that text.

But what is political friendship? For a start, both political and intimate friendship are marked by a finitude that distinguishes them from the equality of the major. The latter, we saw, is marked by a certain infinitude. This does not only take the form of the autonomy of the cosmopolitan citizen. It can also take the converse form of the sodality of a community of brothers. Hence the last passage in Savarkar’s *Hindutva*: “Whenever the Hindus come to hold such a position whence they could dictate terms to the whole world down. A Hindu is most intensely so, when he ceases to be Hindu; and with a Shankar claims the whole earth for a

Benaes ‘Waranasi Medini!’ or with a Tukaram exclaims ‘my country!’ Oh brothers, ‘the limits of the Universe—there the frontiers of my country lie?’”⁷⁰ An apparently rooted ideology like Hindutva can claim the world precisely because here brotherhood is premised on a mastery that makes the brothers infinite.⁷¹

By contrast, both intimate and political friendship are bounded: embodied, enacted by finite persons in finite relations. In other words, place, whether geographical or topological, is thoroughly constitutive of both sorts of friendships. But the finitude involved in these two friendships is very different. Intimate friendship involves acts of discrimination—this one as a friend, not that one, even though these are not sovereign acts, for we do not quite choose our intimate friends. But political friendship is fundamentally indiscriminate. And it reveals, in the process, another way of being indiscriminate—one that emerges from leaning into finitude rather than leaning into infinitude. To lean into finitude is to recognize ourselves not as cosmopolitan beings but as neighborly beings. Sociologically, our neighbors are those intimates and strangers around us, whether geographically or topologically, among whom we are thrown because of our finitude; preontologically, our neighbors are those around us to whom we are vulnerable, or who are vulnerable to us. Political friendship is a distinctive radicalization of this finitude: it is the practice of equality with all neighbors, which is why it can also be called a democratic neighborliness.⁷²

Though both intimate and political friendship begin from place, both also refuse to know their place; it is precisely in doing so that they become friendship. Thus, intimate friendship is not just about comfort and familiarity; it is also to challenge and question the friend, as well as to be there for the friend in unexpected ways. Unlike in the case of the equality of rights, there is no template for this equality with the intimate friend created by refusing to know one’s place. The equality of vulnerability involved in intimate friendship is thus a fraught art, always at the risk of going wrong.

That fraughtness is further intensified with political friendship. At least our intimate friends are usually those to whom we are already equal in some sense prior to the friendship; this is why Aristotle noted that friends tend to be alike. We might add: intimate friendship supplements and maybe even replaces that prior equality of similarity with an equality of vulnerability. By contrast, among neighbors, no such equality of similarity can be presumed. Not only are neighbors usually expected to know their place, but between them there may be dissimilarity, distrust, perhaps even animosity; between them, inequality and hierarchy is often the norm.

In this context, political friendship is the fraught project of engaging with neighbors in the spirit of a democracy that is organized by a faith in equality, or by not resorting to sovereignty and rights, by insisting, sometimes defiantly, on a

freedom beyond rights. Such a refusal to know one's place can take many forms — *satyagraha*; a refusal of everyday relations of domination, as occurred in the various movements of self-respect; conversion outside the very order of belief, as happened with Navayana Buddhism; and more. Such a refusal knows also that it will often encounter its own limits. Surely Ambedkar saw Indian villages as neighborly spaces so suffused by the domination of Dalits — by a vicious everyday sovereignty — that he saw no possibility for political friendship within them, that he was inclined to annihilate them altogether. Surely also, the attempt to create a social democracy centered around sovereignty is another symptom of the recognition that democratic neighborliness cannot do without the complement of sovereign power. And yet, even so, the most crucial stake of freedom is precisely this moment of faith in “liberty, equality, sovereignty” — hence the privileging of Navayana Buddhism by Ambedkar, or *satyagraha* by Gandhi.

Such attempts at democratic neighborliness can misfire disastrously, as happened most evidently with Gandhi's figure of the “Harijan.” These disastrous possibilities are also an omnipresent danger of political friendship. For unlike in the case of the order of rights, there is no institutionalizable template for political friendship. The vulnerability that is being offered as equality must in each instance be calibrated differently, in a way that tries, in that very difference, to keep alive the spirit of the equality of the minor in each singular relation between communities or individuals. In each case also, the construal of what should be offered can be wrong, or the very offer of equality can also recoil in a way that intensifies inequality. This is the constitutive uncertainty and unknowability that haunts the equality of the minor; this is the sense in which the minor not only refuses a place but never quite knows whether it is refusing a place in the right way. It is because of this humility that it resorts to sovereignty cautiously, trying to always inflect even sovereignty with at least the spirit of the minor.

So political friendship is not just one comportment; it is a whole sheaf of comportments. What are these comportments, and how are they to be enacted? How is the equality of the minor to be offered to the socially or politically subordinate, dominant, or indifferent, or to those who are so different that it is challenging to meaningfully raise the question of equality?

Addressing these questions is a separate task, and a large one. It is one that every politics that strives for an equality of the minor will have to struggle with. In lieu of taking up that large task, I would like to only recall here the distinctive feistiness with which Ismail sought to offer, in his way, a certain political friendship, a certain equality of the minor. What he gave to almost all of his relations was a combative generosity.⁷³ I invoke generosity and the gift because in his case combativeness was also the offer of a certain equality, an invitation to argue back, and so to clarify one's own line of thinking, or abandon it. This indiscriminate gift of disagreement was also perhaps part of what made Ismail such a striking

figure on campus. For he sometimes forgot that many would find this offer itself unnerving and even intimidating when it came from somebody as brilliant as he was. After all, most of us have learned, as part of our liberal mannerisms, to practice a fictitious equality when we encounter, among our colleagues and even friends, arguments that are shoddily conceptualized or articulated. I sometimes think that, as the quintessential form of liberal equality, this fictitious equality of polite disengagement too may on occasion be enabling. But Ismail would have none of that. He insisted on treating others as equals by pointing to what he saw as the flaws in their arguments, and asking them to explain why these were not flaws. For those unused to it, that demand could be very unsettling indeed.

Of course, this generosity also quickly surrendered its combativeness, especially where he sensed vulnerability in those he questioned, or where he loved with the same gusto that he brought to arguing. Perhaps, indeed, it was the other way round: the gusto—the gastronomic etymology of that word is especially appropriate here—he brought to his arguments was an overflow of the gusto with which he loved—abided by, made finite—not only Sri Lanka but the intellectual and political world that he neighbored.

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Notes

1. Q. Ismail, *Abiding by Sri Lanka*, xvi.
2. Q. Ismail, *Abiding by Sri Lanka*, xxvi.
3. Q. Ismail, *Abiding by Sri Lanka*, xli.
4. Q. Ismail, *Abiding by Sri Lanka*, 126.
5. Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 2.

6. Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 7.
7. Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 10.
8. Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 182.
9. Though the phrase “equality of the minor” is from my book *Unconditional Equality*, I hesitate to claim authorship of the concept—it only crystallizes what many, including Ismail and Gandhi, have been saying.
10. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 16. There is no reference to Deleuze and Guattari’s essay in either Ismail or Gandhi, and this is very likely not indeliberate.
11. See, for example, Q. Ismail, “What, to the Minority, Is Democracy?”; Q. Ismail, “F*** You, Mr. President.”
12. Being accorded the position of minors codifies in a distinctive way what Ben Baer describes as “the subaltern positionality of every human” during infancy. See Baer, *Indigenous Vanguard*, 10. It institutionalizes that subaltern positionality by specifying rights for and duties toward it, though of course the rights are significantly less than those exercised by majors.
13. M. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 294. Here, I have translated Gandhi from Gujarati myself, providing his own translation in parentheses where there is significant divergence.
14. Ambedkar, *States and Minorities*, 384.
15. Scott, *Refashioning Futures*; Elam, *World Literature*.
16. Ismail criticized this vigilantism incessantly in public forums, including in his articles in *Groundview*. In addition to the pieces mentioned before, see Q. Ismail, “Critiquing the President’s Victory Speech.”
17. Skaria, “Why Hindutva Is a Racist Supremacism.”
18. Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?,” 17.
19. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 284.
20. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 100. Among the issues on which we disagreed was that of how to read Chakrabarty. See Ismail’s brilliant “(Not) at Home in (Hindu) India”; and Skaria, “Project of Provincialising Europe.”
21. The figure of minor/ity is quite explicit in the writings of M. S. S. Pandian and Shail Mayaram, as in the later writings of Gyanendra Pandey, though within the *Subaltern Studies* volumes themselves, this figure looms largest in Ismail’s own piece. See Q. Ismail, “Constituting Nation, Contesting Nationalism.”
22. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 255.
23. Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 310.
24. Q. Ismail, “Speaking to Sri Lanka.”
25. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 294.
26. Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 383.
27. Q. Ismail, *Abiding by Sri Lanka*, xxx.
28. De Zoysa, “Lepidoptera.”
29. Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 31.
30. Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 71.
31. I would argue that a more precise predefinition of religion would be a “freedom without sovereignty” rather than “will and freedom without autonomy.” While the concept of religion certainly becomes more clearly visible with the emergence of autonomy, the Enlightenment form of sovereignty, religion precedes autonomy, and so is more properly understood as being without sovereignty. Relatedly, precisely because there is no will

- possible without sovereignty, the action involved in religion cannot be encompassed within the problematic of will. For more on religion as a freedom without sovereignty, see Skaria, *Unconditional Equality*; Skaria, “Non-Willing Freedom.”
32. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 44.
 33. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 33.
 34. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 35.
 35. Ambedkar, “Untouchables,” 179.
 36. Ambedkar, “Philosophy of Hinduism,” 5.
 37. Email correspondence between Vinay Gidwani, Qadri Ismail, and Ajay Skaria, March 24, 2013. It needs be mentioned that Ismail’s *Culture and Eurocentrism* is a critique of the central category of anthropology, “culture.”
 38. Mufti, “Response to Talal Asad’s ‘Reflections’”; for Mufti’s remembrance of Ismail, see Mufti, “Qadri and I.”
 39. Symptomatic of Gandhi’s commitment to this existential analytic is the distinction he makes between “history” and “*itihaas*” (a word we would normally translate as “history”), and his emphatic assertion that all politics must be religious. On this, see Skaria, “Strange Violence of Satyagraha.” Ambedkar comes to this analytic from the other direction — by beginning from and breaching the sociological analytic.
 40. For the ethics-religion distinction, see Søren Kierkegaard’s (or, more precisely, Johannes de Silentio’s) *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*. I reframe Kierkegaard’s distinction as one between belief and faith. To partially anticipate remarks later in the essay, where ethics is primarily for de Silentio a matter of duty, to emphasize belief is to stress additionally the desire for certitude and sovereignty that belief grounds itself in. Relatedly, where religion for de Silentio is primarily a matter of a leap of faith, I will be stressing the equality and relinquishment of sovereignty that is constitutive of faith. The belief-faith distinction I make here is analogous not so much with Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s famous contrast as with Hannah Arendt’s in her “What Is Authority?” To be sure, Arendt makes the distinction only in passing, remarking most notably: “Only belief, but not faith, has an inherent affinity with and is constantly exposed to doubt” (“What Is Authority?,” 94). But that distinction resonates, in ways she does not quite acknowledge, with the contrast she draws elsewhere (for example, in *The Life of the Mind*) between knowing and thinking; relatedly, what she calls faith resonates also with her central category of “action.”
 41. For Gandhi’s understanding of “superstition,” see Skaria, “No Politics without Religion.”
 42. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 76.
 43. Ambedkar, “Buddha or Karl Marx,” 461.
 44. Derrida, “Différance.” Derrida acknowledges that his “detours, locutions and syntax” resemble those of negative theology, “occasionally even to the point of being indistinguishable from negative theology” (“*Différance*,” 6).
 45. Quoted in Howard-Snyder, “Does Faith Entail Belief?,” 142.
 46. I discuss surrender without subordination in Skaria, *Unconditional Equality*.
 47. I discuss the difference between the principle and the vow in Skaria, *Unconditional Equality*.
 48. Ambedkar, “On Participation in the War,” 258.
 49. Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?”; Felski, *Limits of Critique*.
 50. Elam, *World Literature*. Like Edward Said in *Representations of the Intellectual*, Elam seems to counterpoint “amateur” to “expert.” This is not incorrect, but I would suggest that the

amateur-expert contrast runs the risk of depoliticizing what is a more primary difference: it is their politicalness, and the promiscuity this involves, that makes minors appear like amateurs. Relatedly, Elam sometimes seems to ascribe qualities such as immaturity or failure or inconsequence to the minor, but this is inadequate; it only inverts the terms of majoritarianism.

51. Elam, *World Literature*, 47.
52. Elam, *World Literature*, 70.
53. Quoted in Q. Ismail, *Abiding by Sri Lanka*, xi.
54. For an extended discussion of surrender without subordination, see Skaria, *Unconditional Equality*. For a beautiful account of Gandhi's practice of a messianic impossibility, see Chandra, *Gandhi*.
55. Hannah Arendt and Alexandre Kojève are the among the very few who have attempted to dwell on the concept of authority as distinct from sovereignty (or "force," as Kojève prefers to call it). See Arendt, "What Is Authority?"; Kojève, *Notion of Authority*.
56. Kojève, *Notion of Authority*, chap. "A:Analyses."
57. Kojève is emphatic that love has nothing to do with authority, despite the similarities: "If someone does what I ask him to do out of 'love' for me, he does it spontaneously, because he would do anything to please me without my having to intervene or act on him" (*Notion of Authority*). In other words, love involves no authority because the reaction has occurred without the demand being made. But surely this is part of the paradox of the phenomenon of love where it is faithful to the otherness of the beloved—that it responds to the other without a demand having been made. As such, the line between love and authority is by no means as clear as Kojève presumes.
58. Spivak, "Terror."
59. As Ramsey McGlazer points out in a reviewer's comment on this essay, "*relinquo* in Latin means both to hand, and to stand, down." See also Skaria, "Relinquishing Republican Democracy."
60. Skaria, "Non-Willing Freedom."
61. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done*, 447.
62. Ambedkar, *States and Minorities*, 410.
63. Ambedkar, *States and Minorities*, 409.
64. Ambedkar, *States and Minorities*, 410.
65. Ambedkar, *States and Minorities*, 410.
66. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done*, 482; Ambedkar, "Speech on Draft Constitution," 1216.
67. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 35.
68. Lefort, "Permanence of the Theologico-Political?" 160.
69. Pateman, *Sexual Contract*, 78.
70. Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 141. (The first edition of this book was titled *Essentials of Hindutva*; from the second edition, it was titled *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*)
71. For two insightful readings of this passage, counterpointing it also to Gandhi, see Sawhney, "Religion and Hospitality in the Modern"; and Sawhney, "Godse's Gandhi."
72. I thank Vinay Gidwani for conversations that immensely clarified the distinctions between the neighbor and the political friend.
73. The remarks about Ismail in this and the next paragraph are adapted from those made at a memorial held for him on November 5, 2021. See E. Ismail et al., "Transcript of Professor Qadri Ismail Memorial."

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