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"Civis Indianus sum"?[1] Ambedkar on democracy and territory during linguistic reorganisation (and partition)[2]

Short Title: Ambedkar on democracy and territory

Oliver Godsmark

University of Sheffield

o.godsmark@sheffield.ac.uk

Abstract

This article considers Ambedkar's ideas about the implementation of democracy in India, in the context of the linguistic reorganisation of provincial administrative boundaries. In doing so, it looks to emphasise the importance of territorial configurations to Dalit politics during this period, and in particular the consequences of 'provincialisation', which has received little attention within the existing literature. Rethinking space by redrawing administrative territory provided Ambedkar with one potential avenue through which to escape the strictures of Dalits' minority status. In this vision, linguistic reorganisation (and partition) were harbingers of greater democratisation and potential palliatives to the threat of Hindu majority rule at the centre. In turn, however, Ambedkar simultaneously came to perceive the creation of these new administrative spaces as marking a new form of provincial majoritarianism, despite his best efforts to form alliances with those making such demands. In this sense, the article also seeks to address some of the shared processes behind linguistic

[1] The phrase, an adaptation of the infamous '*civis romanus sum*', is taken from Ambedkar's *Pakistan, or the partition of India* (Bombay: Thacker and Company Limited, 1946), in *Babasaheb Ambedkar writings and speeches* [henceforth *BAWS*], vol. VIII, (ed.) V. Moon, (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 2014 [1990]), p. 188.

[2] Elements of this article were presented at the 'Re-centring the "pariah"' workshop at the University of Leeds in June 2017. The author is appreciative of the audience's observations on that paper, as well as the critical recommendations offered by the two anonymous readers of this article.

reorganisation and partition, as two related forms of territorial redrawing. In the face of these demands, and the failures of both commensuration and coalition politics, Ambedkar turned to the idea of separate settlements for Dalits, whereby they might themselves come to constitute a majority. Whilst such a novel attempt at separation and resettlement was not ultimately realised, its emergence within Ambedkar's thought at this time points towards its significance in any history of caste and untouchability in twentieth-century South Asia.

Introduction

In October 1948, B. R. Ambedkar, the renowned Dalit politician, lawyer and thinker, published *Maharashtra as a linguistic province*.[3] The publication of this pamphlet made available to wider Indian society the memorandum that Ambedkar had recently submitted to the Linguistic Provinces Commission. The Commission had been tasked by the Indian Constituent Assembly with investigating the efficacy of linguistic reorganisation, or the redrawing of postcolonial India's provincial administrative boundaries on linguistic lines.[4] As the title suggests, Ambedkar had taken a personal interest in the possible creation of Maharashtra, a province imagined by its proponents as capable of encompassing the approximately 27 million Marathi speakers predominantly residing in western India at that time. Although *Maharashtra as a linguistic province* was Ambedkar's first formal publication on the issue, he had been

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[3] B. R. Ambedkar, *Maharashtra as a linguistic province: statement submitted to the Linguistic Provinces Commission* (Bombay: Thacker and Company Limited, 1948), in *BAWS*, vol. I, (ed.) V. Moon, (2014 [1979]), pp. 99-128.

[4] To avoid confusion throughout this article, I shall refer to sub-national units of administration within both colonial and postcolonial India as 'provinces', despite the fact that the nomenclature was changed to 'states' under the Indian Constitution of 1950. Where I have quoted directly from other works that use these phrases, I have retained the terminology used in the original.

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engaged periodically with the question of linguistic reorganisation since at least the late 1920s, and would continue to propose innovative ideas for the redrawing of India's administrative map until his untimely death in December 1956. As a Marathi speaker himself, Ambedkar envisaged the demand for Maharashtra as intersecting with his own particular conceptions and concerns regarding India's nascent democratic order. He heralded both the idea of Maharashtra, and linguistic reorganisation more generally, at different times and in different contexts, as both a potential harbinger of and a possible threat to greater equality. In both of these tellings, linguistic reorganisation was deemed particularly significant to India's Dalit population, who were subjected to a separate stigmatised existence outside caste Hindu society, but who had also begun to comprise a new political constituency under Ambedkar's leadership by the early twentieth century.[5]

This article employs Ambedkar's speeches and writings on linguistic reorganisation as critical conduits through which to engage with his wider thinking, thereby providing broader and novel insights into Ambedkar's understandings of the workings of democracy during India's post/colonial transition. In doing so, it seeks to make a valuable contribution to the growing field of 'Ambedkar studies'. Despite an impressive and constantly developing body of work, historians interested in both the politics and writings of Ambedkar have tended to pay little attention to his thoughts on linguistic reorganisation.[6] On the other hand, some recent works by political

[5] Dalit, literally meaning 'ground down' or 'broken to pieces', is used as the preferred designation for India's former 'untouchable' community, who are also known, in the parlance of the late colonial and postcolonial state, as 'Scheduled Castes'. I generally use Dalit as the preferred term throughout this article, but retain the original terms used in direct quotations.

[6] See, for example, E. Zelliot, *Ambedkar's world: the making of Babasaheb and the Dalit movement* (New Delhi: Navayana Publishing, 2013 [1969]); G. Omvedt, *Dalits and the democratic revolution:*

scientists have started to contemplate the viability of Ambedkar's approach to such schemes, particularly when considering the significance of caste to contemporary territorial re-imaginings within India in the twenty-first century. Louise Tillin has explored how demands for the creation of Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand were in part predicated on 'challenges to caste hierarchies and the politicisation of caste identities by political parties in Hindi-speaking north India…'.[7] Equally, Sudha Pai and Avinash Kumar have reassessed the various safeguards that Ambedkar envisaged might protect Dalits from the worst ravages of reorganisation and the associated 'problem of communal majorities'.[8] Whilst these works provide germane insights into how caste has shaped democratic practices in the context of schemes of reorganisation, they are often oriented around present policymaking perspectives.[9]

Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit movement in colonial India (New Delhi: Sage, 1994); C. Jaffrelot, *Dr Ambedkar and untouchability: analysing and fighting caste* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005); A. Rao, *The caste question: Dalits and the politics of modern India* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2009), chapter three; A. Kumar, *Radical equality: Ambedkar, Gandhi, and the risk of democracy* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015).

[7] L. Tillin, 'Caste, territory and federalism', *Seminar*, vol. 633, May 2012; see also, Tillin, *Remapping India: new states and their political origins* (London: Hurst, 2013), pp. 21-23, 44-45.

[8] S. Pai and A. Kumar, *Revisiting 1956: B. R. Ambedkar and states reorganisation* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2014), p. 79. See also, pp. 36-39, 60-61, 78-81, 84-85.

[9] For example, see Pai and Kumar's book description: 'And now, as new states are being formed, Ambedkar's works find renewed relevance … Ambedkar showed remarkable vision that administrators can learn from. In laying criteria for reorganisation of states … he has already addressed concerns that the contemporary common man now asks'. 'Revisiting 1956: B. R. Ambedkar and States Reorganisation', available at

http://www.orientblackswan.com/BookDescription?isbn=978-81-250-5514-3&t=e [accessed 15 March 2018].

This article, by contrast, aims to more effectively contextualise Ambedkar's thinking on reorganisation during his lifetime, by arguing that it developed in an environment shaped by the process of 'provincialisation' during the late colonial period.

Under the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935, introduced to assuage an increasingly assertive nationalist politics, legislative and bureaucratic power was conceded in a measured and incomplete manner to Indians at the provincial level. This 'provincialisation' of politics has an older, rather dated, and somewhat problematic scholarship, associated with the so-called 'Cambridge School' of the 1970s and 1980s.[10] This article, however, looks to rehabilitate the term by employing it in a new and innovative manner. It avoids engaging with it to signify a politics of patronage undertaken by mere 'mimic men' divested of agency.[11] Instead, it uses the term to focus more on what it can tell us about the socio-spatial impact of the intertwined processes of territorialisation and gradual, limited forms of democratisation that were under way in interwar India. In doing so, this article also moves beyond the prevailing emphases and imperatives of much of the existing historiography on Dalit politics during this period. Provincialisation, whether as a form of democratisation or territorialisation, has received little attention within Dalit studies to date. In relation to democratisation, for example, it has always been

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[10] J. Gallagher, G. Johnson, and A. Seal (eds), *Locality, province, and nation: essays on Indian politics, 1870 to 1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); G. Johnson, *Provincial politics and Indian nationalism: Bombay and the Indian National Congress, 1880 to 1915*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); C. J. Baker, *The politics of South India, 1920-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); D. A. Washbrook, *The emergence of provincial politics: the Madras Presidency, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

[11] T. Raychaudhuri, 'Indian nationalism as animal politics', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1979, pp. 747-763.

subordinated, for obviously compelling reasons, to accounts focusing on the demand for separate electorates and the implications of the Poona Pact for Dalit politics. When considering territorialisation, meanwhile, much of the best literature has focused on the extent of Dalit support for partition, as well as the implications of partition upon Dalit politics. However, its significance is perhaps implicit in the works of Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Dwaipayan Sen, who have considered the actions and feelings of Dalit representatives in Bengal as they contended with the emergence and growth of mass Muslim politics from the interwar years on.[12] This article, by contrast, more explicitly highlights the impact of provincialisation in stimulating majoritarian impulses as part of a related process in other parts of India. Concentrating upon provincialisation therefore provides an alternative, original, and broadened angle through which to engage with Dalit politics at this time. In fact, both the demands for Pakistan and Samyukta ('united') Maharashtra might be considered to emerge, at least in part, as a consequence of provincialisation during the interwar years.

This article therefore looks to associate Ambedkar's ideas about linguistic reorganisation with his opinions on the demand for Pakistan, particularly within his

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[12] S. Bandyopadhyay, 'From alienation to integration: changes in the politics of caste in Bengal, 1937-47', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* [henceforth *IESHR*], vol. 31, no. 3, 1994, pp. 349-391; S. Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, protest and identity in colonial India: the Namasudras of Bengal, 1872-1947* (London: Curzon Press, 1997); S. Bandyopadhyay, 'Transfer of power and the crisis of Dalit politics in India', *Modern Asian Studies* [henceforth *MAS*], vol. 34, no. 4, 2000, pp. 893-942; D. Sen, 'Caste politics and partition in South Asian history', *History Compass*, vol. 10, no. 7, 2012, pp. 512-522; D. Sen, '"No matter how, Jogendranath had to be defeated": the Scheduled Castes Federation and the making of partition in Bengal, 1945-1947', *IESHR*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2012, pp. 321-364.

seminal work *Pakistan, or the partition of India*, the third revised edition of which was published only two years before the publication of *Maharashtra as a linguistic province*. Pai and Kumar have also begun to briefly compare Ambedkar's approach to provincial reorganisation, on the one hand, and his thoughts and theories on the Pakistan demand, on the other.[13] Vasudha Bharadwaj has argued much more extensively that Ambedkar viewed the demands for Pakistan and Andhra Pradesh as analogous, particularly as they both coincided with the creation of new majority and minority communities as a consequence of territorial reorganisation.[14] But by thinking, as a historian, about both of these developments in the context of provincialisation, this article moves beyond a straightforward comparison, and instead sees the demands for Samyukta Maharashtra and Pakistan as emerging as a consequence of a related process experienced across late colonial British India. Too often they have been treated as discrete developments, despite being contemplated and debated by their contemporaries conterminously. In this telling, Pakistan was just one example of a multitude of new spaces conceived and sometimes fashioned in the decades immediately prior to and after independence. Indeed, this relates favourably to certain recent scholarship on the idea of Pakistan, which has foregrounded how at least some of its proponents envisaged the possibility that, as a vision for a federal political future, it could be equally applicable to other communities in South Asia.[15]

By focusing on the significance of territory and territoriality in Ambedkar's thought, this article also intersects with a wider literature on space within Dalit

[13] Pai and Kumar, *Revisiting 1956*, pp. 39-42.

[14] V. Bharadwaj, 'Ambedkar's paradox of differentiation: language, nation and recognition of states in post-colonial India', *IESHR*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2015, pp. 79-108 (particularly pp. 93, 98).

[15] N. Bose, 'Purba Pakistan zindabad: Bengali visions of Pakistan, 1940-1947', *MAS*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2014, p. 8.

studies, whilst taking it in altogether new spatio-temporal directions. This literature has moved beyond the principal concerns of an older generation of anthropologists interested in caste and untouchability, which tended to focus upon the significance of occupation and the body.[16] It has two prevailing dimensions. First, historians and social scientists have demonstrated the significance of the *cēri*, *palli*, *vada* or *jati muhalla* (caste neighbourhood) to the imposition of social boycott by caste Hindus on Dalits in both rural and urban settings.[17] Yet despite the adverse role of spatial configurations in perpetuating caste inequality, Dalits have consistently 'wrought the transformation of their villages from theatres of oppression to sites of struggle'.[18] The second aspect of those works interested in novel questions about spatial configurations within Dalit studies has therefore examined how Dalits themselves sought access to civic space in modern India. In fact, as Ramnarayan Rawat has noted, *jati muhallas* also served as sites through which a collective Dalit political consciousness could be created and nurtured.[19] This article provides a sense of how

[16] R. S. Rawat, 'Occupation, dignity, and space: the rise of Dalit Studies', *History Compass*, vol. 11, no. 12, 2013, pp. 1059-1067 (pp. 1063-1065).

[17] J. F. Cháirez-Garza, 'Touching space: Ambedkar on the spatial features of untouchability', *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2014, pp. 37-50; R. Viswanath, *The Pariah problem: caste, religion and the social in modern India* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 31; G. Guru, 'The Indian nation in its egalitarian conception', in *Dalit Studies*, (eds) R. S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 31-49; Rawat, 'Occupation, dignity, and space', pp. 1064-1065; see also, R. S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana, 'Introduction: Dalit Studies: new perspectives on Indian history and society', in *Dalit Studies*, pp. 1-30 (p. 19); R. K. Hans, 'Making sense of Dalit Sikh history', in *Dalit Studies*, pp. 131-151 (p. 145).

[18] Viswanath, *The Pariah problem*, p. 16.

[19] Rawat, 'Occupation, dignity, and space', pp. 1059-1060.

Ambedkar engaged with space in this way, albeit by focusing on territory and territoriality, and by thinking through an alternative, novel scale of analysis that departs from the existing literature. Provincial reorganisation could be considered as a potential opportunity to escape the socio-spatial strictures imposed by the Hindu majority on Dalits, on the one hand, but also as possibly presenting new socio-spatial impediments to Dalit equality, on the other.

Finally, this article can also be situated within a wider comparative frame, and related to a broader scholarly literature that considers the significance of questions about territory and democracy that emerged simultaneously in much of the rest of the world in the first half of the twentieth century. In this sense, the end of the British Empire in India was obviously only one part of a global zeitgeist towards the breaking up of multi-ethnic imperial spaces. Ambedkar recognised as much, ruminating at length on the fallout from imperialism in Europe in his tome on the Pakistan demand, and comparing the successes and failures of various multi-ethnic political entities with prevailing ideas about a possible federal Indian union. [20] At the Paris Peace Conference in the aftermath of the First World War, the victors had gathered together to redraw the map of central, eastern and southeastern Europe, breaking up much of the German, Habsburg, and Ottoman empires in the process. However, despite persistent claims to national uniformity, the new, 'revivified', or enlarged territorial nation-states that emerged in 1919 were 'no less multi-ethnic'.[21] In this sense, they

[20] Ambedkar, *Pakistan, or the partition of India*, chapter IX. For more on these comparisons, see the conclusion to this article.

[21] D. Diner, 'Between empire and nation state: outline for a European contemporary history of the Jews, 1750-1950', in O. Bartov and E. D. Weitz (eds), *Shatterzone of empires: ethnicity, identity, and violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman borderlands* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013), pp. 61-79 (p. 67); cf. R. Brubaker, 'Aftermath of empire and the

prefigured the continuing diversity of postcolonial South Asia's successor states. As Dan Diner has pointed out, the interwar period in central, eastern and southeastern Europe witnessed 'a powerful tension between the newly introduced principle of an ethnically homogeneous nation state based on general suffrage, and the reality of a population composed of a multitude of minorities'.[22]

This is particularly apparent with regards to Czechoslovakia's First Republic, which was and continues to be venerated as the only functioning interwar democracy in central Europe, in a similar vein to how postcolonial India is often vaunted today as 'the world's largest democracy'. In this myth of Czech democratic exceptionalism, 'the considerable history of collaboration in Czechoslovakia under Nazi rule, the violence accompanying the expulsion of the Germans in 1945, and the excesses of the Communist regime after 1945' are blamed on the 'un-democratic habits and practices … quite literally introduced to Czech society by foreign invaders'.[23] As Tara Zahra, Eagle Glassheim and others have pointed out, there was actually much continuity between the Czech nationalist policies of the interwar period and subsequent developments during the Second World War and after. During these years, Czech nationalist associations demanded the closure of German schools and attacked German statues as vestiges of the Habsburg era.[24] Meanwhile, areas with a high

unmixing of peoples: historical and comparative perspectives', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1995, 189-218.

[22] Diner, 'Between empire and nation state', p. 68.

[23] T. Zahra, *Kidnapped souls: national indifference and the battle for children in the Bohemian lands* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 110.

[24] N. M. Wingfield, *Flag wars and stone saints: how the Bohemian lands became Czech* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007); E. Glassheim, 'National mythologies

density of German, Hungarian and Slovakian populations were subjected to land reforms that opened up agrarian tracts to Czech 'colonists'.[25] Central to all of these nationalist ambitions were prevailing conceptions of democracy that promoted and protected the collective rights and interests of the Czechs – whether as a minority in the newly acquired borderlands of the Sudeten or as a slim majority in Czechoslovakia as a whole.[26] Critical here was the decision to engage with democratic representative ideals that invested greater worth in 'the will of the people' than in liberal individualism, and which were understood as epitomising the viewpoints of the dominant nationality. This article suggests a similar emphasis on the democratic interests of various majority communities emerged as empire came to a close in India. These prevailing conceptions of democracy informed analogous plans for territorial redrawing, and ultimately raised the spectre of similar consequences amongst South Asia's minorities, including western India's Dalit population.

The rest of this article is arranged into three parts. It shuns a strictly chronological format in favour of highlighting distinct elements of Ambedkar's thinking that emerged, diminished, and intersected with one another throughout this period. The first part examines Ambedkar's attempts to develop alliances with other disadvantaged communities, such as non-Brahmans in Bombay (but also Muslims across India), in the context of the failure to achieve separate representation for Dalits after the Poona Pact. It argues that his support for linguistic reorganisation (and Pakistan) emerged out of such alliances, which promised to undermine the prevailing

and ethnic cleansing: the expulsion of Czechoslovak Germans in 1945', *Central European History*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2000, 463-475.

[25] D. Miller, 'Colonizing the German and Hungarian border areas during the Czechoslovak land reform, 1918-1938', *Austrian History Yearbook*, vol. 34, 2003, 303-319.

[26] Zahra, *Kidnapped souls*, pp. 112-115.

political dominance of the high-caste Hindu. The second part focuses upon Ambedkar's attempts to retain Dalits' political distinctiveness, in recognition of the oft-strained relations Dalits experienced with other disadvantaged communities. It was in this context that the demands for Samyukta Maharashtra (and Pakistan) came to be perceived as potentially majoritarian in intent, and therefore as threats to Dalit political autonomy. The third and final section considers Ambedkar's demands for separate settlements and sites of sanctuary for Dalits in the context of the Samyukta Maharashtra and Pakistan demands. Separate settlements theoretically would provide distinctive political spaces in which Dalits might themselves constitute a communal majority, thereby counteracting the prevailing tendency to see them subsumed within larger Hindu, non-Hindu, and non-Brahman constituencies. They also reflected attempts by Ambedkar to turn the reality of Dalits' socio-spatial separation within the villages of rural India into a political potentiality.

Ambedkar and the *bahujan samaj*

Over the last two decades, there has been an exponential growth in literature that looks to capture the complexities of caste politics and lived experiences during India's post/colonial transition.[27] The majority of this work has considered the extent of Dalit 'integration' into 'the more dominant streams of politics', such as the Congress-led nationalist movement, the Hindu Mahasabha, and various left-wing political organisations in the build up to independence.[28] Among the prevailing foci when assessing integration has been an emphasis on the failings of Ambedkar's All-India

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[27] For a more complete overview of this literature, see Sen, 'Caste politics and partition'.

[28] Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, protest and identity*, p. 173.

Scheduled Castes Federation (AISCF) in the 1946 provincial elections. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay cites the party's organisational weaknesses and 'the compulsions of a political situation created by the transfer of power process' to explain this 'crisis'.[29] Dwaipayan Sen and Ramnarayan Rawat, on the other hand, have closely examined the terms and implications of the Poona Pact of 1932. In their interpretation, the Pact's two-tiered electoral arrangement[30] seriously undermined the ability of the AISCF to turn popular support into actual seats in 1946, thereby maintaining an in-built advantage for the Congress's Dalit candidates.[31]

Such questions of reserved representation in the legislature for Dalits, whether separate electorates or reserved seats, were consistently linked to issues of territory and demography. In the aftermath of the Poona Pact, for example, both the provincial government and Ambedkar agreed that the fifteen reserved seats for Scheduled Castes in Bombay 'should be so distributed as to secure the maximum amount of

[29] Bandyopadhyay, 'Transfer of power', p. 895; see also, S. Bandyopadhyay, 'From alienation to integration', pp. 373-374; Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, protest and identity*, pp. 203-204.

[30] The Poona Pact established a two-tiered electoral arrangement, with Scheduled Caste constituents voting for Scheduled Caste candidates in a primary election. The four Scheduled Caste candidates that received the most votes then went forwards into a second election involving the entire 'General' (i.e. Hindu) constituency, including Scheduled Caste voters, who voted for their favoured Scheduled Caste candidate out of the four remaining nominees. The vexed relations between M. K. Gandhi and Ambedkar that led to the Pact, including Gandhi's 'fast unto death', have been described in detail numerous times elsewhere, and hence are not examined here.

[31] Sen, '"No matter how"', pp. 327-335; R. S. Rawat. 'Making claims for power: a new agenda in Dalit politics of Uttar Pradesh, 1946-48', *MAS*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2003, pp. 585-612.

representation which may be practicable for these [scheduled] castes'.[32] The district Scheduled Caste population was ultimately adopted as the basis of equitable distribution, with those districts with large Dalit populations generally being assigned more reserved seats.[33] This scheme was comparable with both erstwhile and forthcoming calls for proportional representation for Dalits on the basis of population in northern India, which was demanded in relation to provincial legislatures and bureaucracies, as well as for the subsequent Constituent Assembly.[34] In this instance, democracy was interpreted as an exercise in commensuration, in which special dispensation for disadvantaged and minority groups, such as separate electorates and proportionate representation, would best equalise their status. Nevertheless, whilst of the utmost significance, particularly as a potential means to challenge the political hegemony of the high-caste Hindu, the focus on such commensurative measures can potentially overshadow the simultaneous impact of other forms of democratisation and territorialisation upon the development of Dalit politics at this time. As Anupama Rao has demonstrated, Ambedkar actually developed his position on separate

[32] Mumbai, Maharashtra State Archives [henceforth MSA], Government of Bombay [henceforth GOB], Reforms Office File 249, 'Reforms Office Note on Dr. Ambedkar's Scheme of Constituencies for the Scheduled Castes', n.d. [*circa* May 1934].

[33] Ibid., B. R. Ambedkar, 'A scheme for the assignment of seats reserved for the Scheduled Classes by the Poona Pact to the constituencies to be formed under the new constitution', 2 May 1934.

[34] Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, protest and identity*, pp. 65, 70; C. Jangam, 'Dilemmas of Dalit agendas: political subjugation and self-emancipation in Telugu country, 1910-50', in *Dalit Studies*, pp. 104-130 (p. 116); R. S. Rawat, *Reconsidering untouchability: Chamars and Dalit history in north India* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011), pp. 160-161, 173-174; D. Sen, 'Representation, education and agrarian reform: Jogendranath Mandal and the nature of Scheduled Caste politics, 1937-1943', *MAS*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2014, pp. 77-119 (p. 113); Rawat, 'Making claims for power', pp. 596, 600-601; Sen, '"No matter how"', pp. 336-337.

representation 'through a sustained critique of the Muslim separate electorate', in which Muslims had come to be considered India's 'modal' political minority since 1909:

In fact, Ambedkar acknowledged that Muslims represented the principle of nationality, rather than political minority. They were a demographic majority in Baluchistan, Sind, Bengal, Punjab, and the Northwest Frontier Provinces. The territorialisation of number through the establishment of Muslim and Hindu majority provinces, a demand of the Muslim League from 1928, was a prelude for demands based on the territorialisation of nationality.[35]

It was the process of 'provincialisation' during the interwar years that had proved critical to the emergence of these territorial demands. In this telling, democracy could be easily construed as majority rule, in which the democratic 'counting of heads' was deemed to reflect the interests and concerns of the majority community.[36] But who actually constituted the 'majority' community? And in which administrative spaces was this majority to be measured? Most accounts covering the emergence of democratic forms in South Asia associate the emergence of 'a language of universal rights' with 'the upper-caste, elite Hindu man'.[37] Indeed, the creation of separate

[35] Rao, *The caste question*, pp. 134-135.

[36] For more on these different conceptions of democracy in late colonial and early postcolonial India, see O. Godsmark, *Citizenship, community and democracy in India: from Bombay to Maharashtra, c. 1930-1960* (London: Routledge, 2018); T. Sherman, *Muslim belonging in secular India: negotiating citizenship in postcolonial Hyderabad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[37] E. Newbigin, *The Hindu family and the emergence of modern India: law, citizenship and community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 8-9; see also, M. Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: the global restructuring of an empire* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University

electorates for Muslims and reserved seats for Scheduled Castes reinforced the idea that India was a principally Hindu nation, in which the 'General' constituencies came to be associated with 'Hindu' (including Dalit) representation. However, this did not exhaust all the potential pathways and contexts under which democratisation occurred. And it is here that we need to bring into the equation the significance of space, scale, and territory. As a consequence of provincialisation, in which a degree of political power was newly vested in the provinces, conceptions of political communities now frequently came to be mapped onto these particular administrative spaces. This was a process of territorialisation at the provincial level, which meant that the idea of communal majorities and minorities took on distinctive purchase at different scales and in separate contexts, which frequently departed from the 'Hindu majority, Muslim minority' paradigm at the centre, and with which, of course, Dalit politics also had to contend.

Across the 1930s and 1940s, Ambedkar and other Dalit politicians often adopted policies that emphasised coalition building amongst disadvantaged communities. The Round Table Conference of the 1930s, for example, offered the potential for a kind of 'Minorities Pact' politics, in which Dalits, Muslims and other minorities would come together to contest Congress dominance. Significantly, as Faisal Devji has previously noted, the minority communities 'claimed to represent nearly half of India's population, thus reducing caste Hindus to a mere plurality rather than a majority'.[38] This form of politics was strengthened in the period between the 1937 provincial

Press, 2006), p. 14; S. Tejani, *Indian secularism: a social and intellectual history, 1890-1950* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press), chapters five and six; Rao, *The caste question*, p. 132.

[38] F. Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a political idea* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 170.

elections and the 1940 Lahore Resolution, during an era in which 'the [Muslim] League did not have the unstinting support of the Muslim majority provinces and was in search of allies'.[39] Despite changed circumstances after 1940, in which the League ultimately abandoned their claim to minority community status in favour of declaring that Muslims constituted a nation, Ambedkar initially came out in favour of the Pakistan demand, most obviously in his critical tome on the subject, *Pakistan, or the partition of India*. In Bengal, too, Sen has demonstrated the continuing efficacy of a strategic alliance between the League and the leading provincial AISCF politician Jogendranath Mandal. Sen highlights how, in May 1947, Mandal and the provincial AISCF launched a campaign against the spatial reconfiguration of Bengal through partition, which would otherwise '"decay the growing political consciousness" and "ruthlessly crush the solidarity of the Scheduled Castes of Bengal" … [as] Partition was essentially about the consolidation of caste Hindu power'.[40] Significantly, this campaign was simultaneous to the United Bengal proposal floated by H. S. Suhrawardy of the Muslim League and the Congressman Sarat Chandra Bose. In fact, though Bose's position was unrepresentative of other provincial Congressmen, most League politicians in Bengal were also against partition, for which there was no urgent need: Muslims already constituted a majority within the province. Support for a united Bengal formed one aspect of the alliance between Mandal and the League, which included the AISCF's participation in the League's Direct Action Day (which, for the AISCF, was also known, tellingly, as 'Anti-Poona Pact Day') in August 1946,

[39] Ibid., p. 175.

[40] Sen, '"No matter how"', p. 353; for more on how partition was considered to work in the favour of caste Hindus, see J. Chatterji, *Bengal divided: Hindu communalism and partition, 1932-47* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Mandal's nomination by the League to join the Interim Government as Law Minister in October, and ultimately Mandal taking up the role of Minister of Law and Labour in Pakistan's first cabinet after independence. In Sen's interpretation, then, the main political rival of the Namasudras (the largest Dalit community of east Bengal) was the high-caste Hindu. He cites the disadvantages of the Poona Pact of 1932 as distorting the extent to which Dalits were in favour of partition, as it had ensured the election of unrepresentative Dalit politicians (most often Congressmen).

Gail Omvedt has also described the late 1930s and early 1940s as Ambedkar's radical phase, emerging as a consequence of the fallout from the Poona Pact.[41] Angered by the inadequacy of this compromise for separate Dalit political representation, in 1935 Ambedkar publicly proclaimed that although he had been born a Hindu, he would not die a Hindu.[42] At the same time, Ambedkar was also conscious that, under the restrictive terms of the Pact, Dalits would have to find other means of acquiring separate representation that distinguished them from the Congress, an organisation that was portrayed as catering for the interests of the high-caste Hindu man. Recognising the failures of commensuration at this juncture informed his preparedness to ally with other disadvantaged communities to challenge the social, political and cultural dominance of high caste Hindu groups. In 1936 Ambedkar formed a new political movement, the Independent Labour Party (ILP), with the aim of generating a coalition of Dalits and non-Brahmans to counter the strength of the Congress amongst caste Hindus in Bombay. The coalition built upon an understanding of the shared subjugation of the Mahars (the largest Dalit caste in

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[41] G. Omvedt, *Dalit visions: tracts for the Times/8* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1995), chapter six; Omvedt, *Dalits and the democratic revolution*, chapter six.

[42] MSA, GOB, Home (Special) Department File 800(40) 4-A, IV B. Pt. I.

Maharashtra, to which Ambedkar belonged) and Marathas (the largest non-Brahman caste in Maharashtra) that had first been identified by Ambedkar's ideological forebear in nineteenth-century Maharashtra, the low-caste leader Jotirao Phule. Traditionally, this grouping had coalesced around the idea of the *bahujan samaj* (significantly, the 'people in the majority'), in contradistinction to what were perceived to be foreign and unrepresentative Brahman and Gujarati elites. Phule, for example, drew upon and inverted the narrative of the ancient Aryan invasion myth as compelling evidence of Brahman's foreign identity in western India, particularly when compared with all non-Brahmans (including Dalits) as the original 'sons of the soil'. [43] Equally, there existed a long tradition of anti-Gujarati sentiment in Maharashtra, stretching at least as far back as the Deccan Riots of 1875. During these riots, Gujarati moneylenders had been targeted and attacked by Marathi-speaking cultivators for refusing to provide credit needed to pay the latest instalments of the land tax.[44] Much of the rhetoric inciting the cultivating classes to violence at this time was framed around the status of the Gujarati moneylenders as aliens and outsiders.[45] Significantly, this negative portrayal of Gujarati speakers in Bombay would re-

[43] G. Omvedt, *Cultural revolt in a colonial society: The non-Brahman movement in western India, 1873 to 1930* (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976); R. O'Hanlon, *Caste, conflict and ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 [1985]).

[44] London, British Library, India Office Records, V/26/313/2 (1876), 'Deccan Riots Commission, Appendix A: Papers relating to the indebtedness of the agricultural classes in Bombay and other parts of India'.

[45] R. Kumar, *Western India in the nineteenth century: a study in the social history of Maharashtra* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 34; see also, D. Hardiman, *Feeding the baniya: peasants and usurers in western India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

emerge over sixty years later in the context of provincial democratic equations and the formation of Ambedkar's ILP.

Before the First World War, the Congress Party in Bombay was also perceived by non-Brahmans to epitomise such high-caste elitism, and was frequently characterised as exclusively articulating the concerns of Western-educated urban Maharashtrian Brahmans. However, within a couple of decades, many Marathas had been incorporated into the Congress, indicative of a notable shift in opinion. There were a number of reasons behind changing non-Brahman perceptions of the Congress in western India. They owed something to the party's attempts to reposition itself as a more representative and accountable organisation under Gandhi, as well as the adoption of socially ameliorative rhetoric by both Gandhians and the Congress Left. But growing non-Brahman support for the Congress was equally related to the diminishing significance of Maharashtrian Brahmans within the party in both Bombay and nationally, and the increasing recognition amongst elite members of non-Brahman castes, particularly the Marathas, that joining a well-oiled political machine now provided the best opportunities to access power under provincialisation.[46] As a result, many abandoned the erstwhile Non-Brahman Party (which had first been established to work the 1919 reforms and contest provincial elections) and chose to vote for and/or join the Congress. It was in this context, influenced by both the fallout from the Poona Pact and growing non-Brahman support for the Congress, that Ambedkar formed the ILP.

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[46] For a more detailed explanation of the reasons behind non-Brahman integration into the Congress in interwar western India, see Godsmark, *Citizenship, community and democracy*, Chapters Two and Four.

One of the main strategies employed by Ambedkar and the ILP, in an effort to wean non-Brahman support away from the Congress, was to focus on the oft-exploitative relationships that existed between employer and employee, factory owner and worker, landlord and tenant, and creditor and debtor, in which the Congress was characterised as representing the interests of the former. In the new provincial legislature elected in 1937, for example, Ambedkar attempted to introduce a bill to abolish the *khoti* system.[47] *Khoti* was a pernicious form of revenue extraction exacted upon Kunbi/Maratha and Mahar tenants in the Kolaba and Ratnagiri Districts, by the high-caste khots (landlords), many of whom were important local Congress leaders. Indeed, only the previous year, a specially appointed Maharashtra Congress Peasant Enquiry Committee had pledged only that *khoti* would be brought under a uniform system of control, rather than advocating its total abolition.[48] Ambedkar's bill, then, clearly distinguished the more radical and transformative ILP policy from that adopted by the provincial Congress organisation. It also helped that, on numerous occasions, these class-based distinctions could also be framed around discrete regional identities. In a speech at Islampur in April 1938, Ambedkar pressed the non-Brahman Marathas of Bombay to join the ILP rather than the Congress by invoking the shared hostility of non-Brahmans and Dalits towards the Gujarati *shetji* (trader): 'The Marwaris and Gujaratis, extorting exorbitant interest and extracting money from you by dishonestly taking your thumb impressions – all such people are to be found in

[47] MSA, GOB, Revenue Department File 7437/33-I, 'Khoti system: bill by Dr. Ambedkar for abolition of…', n.d. [1937].

[48] *Report of the Peasant Enquiry Committee of the Maharashtra Provincial Congress Committee* (Poona: Maharashtra Provincial Congress Committee, 1936), pp. 55-60.

the Congress ranks'.[49] Ambedkar's sense of indignation at such everyday extraction was magnified still further when voicing claims regarding government spending at the provincial level: 'At present the Gujaratis are ruling over us. Out of the three crores of rupees received from the Government of India [by the Government of Bombay], nearly two crores were spent on Gujarat the richest of the three divisions of the Province of Bombay'.[50] The tactic of raising regional sentiment was perhaps at its most apparent in the way in which Ambedkar and the ILP portrayed an incident that occurred in the princely state of Baroda in January 1939.

The majority of Baroda's inhabitants were Gujarati speakers, but the Gaekwads, a martial Maratha family from the Deccan, had established a polity and ruling dynasty in the region during the eighteenth century. After the Second Anglo-Maratha War (1803-05), Baroda was forced to sign an agreement with the East India Company that meant it became a princely state under overarching British jurisdiction. If we fast-forward to the late 1930s, a Congress-backed campaign for responsible government in this princely state had been gaining ground, leading to the creation of the Baroda Praja Mandal (People's Conference). In part, this was framed around a majoritarian sense of regional belonging, in which it was envisaged that the establishment of democratic rule in Baroda would coincide with the coming to power of the majority Gujarati population. The Mandal, for example, had only recently accused the Gaekwad of primarily staffing his bureaucracy with 'a very high and disproportionate

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[49] MSA, GOB, Home (Special) Department File 927-A, 'Full translation of the speech made by Dr. Ambedkar at Islampur, District Satara, as reported by the *Bharat Mata*', 27 April 1938.

[50] Ibid., File 927-A/I, 'Extracts from *Vividh Vritta* and *Nava Kal*', 10 January 1939.

percentage of outsiders and Maharashtrians'.[51] It was in this context that the prominent Congressman Vallabhbhai Patel, himself a Gujarati, had conducted a three-day visit to Baroda at the invitation of the Praja Mandal, during which it was contended that both he and others had made inflammatory speeches about the Gaekwad in particular and Maharashtrians in general. Possibly as a result of these speeches, a number of disturbances had occurred in the state, resulting in the death of a Maratha boy, Kumar Jayasingh Surve.[52] In a series of public meetings held in Kolaba District over the next few weeks, representatives of the ILP made consistent reference to these events in Baroda, claiming that Patel was responsible for Surve's 'murder', and maintaining that Patel had instigated 'a fight between the Gujarathis and the Maharashtrians' by stating 'Gujarath is for the Gujarathis'. Some members of the ILP even went so far as to boldly assert that, 'If the Maharashtrians are murdered like this in Gujarath the Gujarathis will be murdered here'.[53]

Ambedkar and the ILP's appeals to a regional Marathi identity in the context of provincialisation have been entirely overlooked in the literature on Ambedkar and Dalit politics to date. Yet, as an attempt to encourage the formation of a political coalition that overcame caste distinctions between Dalits and non-Brahmans, it can be

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[51] New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library [henceforth NMML], K. M. Munshi Papers, Roll 31, File 47 (1939), 'C. C. Shah (Gujarati President of Praja Mandal), Baroda Disturbances Enquiry', 20 August 1939.

[52] Ibid., File 49 (1939), 'Causes which led to incidents of 20th, 21st and 22nd January 1939 (Statement submitted by Commissioner of Police, Major Acquino)'; Ibid., Roll 30, File 47 (1939), 'In the Court of Judicial Inquiry, Vallabhbhai Disturbance Committee: Application. The loyalists of Baroda', 16 April 1939.

[53] MSA, GOB, Home (Special) Department File 927-A/I, 'Extract from the weekly confidential report of the District Magistrate, Kolaba', 11 February 1939.

perceived as an example of a common strategy amongst disadvantaged communities in much of late colonial southern and western India. In both Bombay and Madras, challenger elites from non-Brahman castes made reference to regional symbols – whether Dravidian, Kannada, Malayali, Marathi, Tamil or Telugu – to challenge the 'foreignness' and 'otherness' of existing elites. Prerna Singh has recently argued that 'the shared solidarity that emerges from a collective identification can generate a politics of common good', in which 'elites bound by such solidaristic ties are more likely to push for progressive social policies that further the welfare of the subnational community as a whole'.[54] It is as a consequence of such solidarities, Singh suggests, that the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu have 'devoted substantial budgetary resources to welfare provision' and 'enjoy a far better level of social development than their counterparts in most other parts of India'.[55] There is a tendency in Singh's account to downplay recurring tensions within the Dravidian, Tamil and Keralan movements on the basis of caste and class, as well as nagging questions over the applicability of Singh's formula to other parts of South Asia that also experienced vocal subnational movements during the post/colonial transition. Yet this is not to dismiss the efficacy of much of her work. We can trace viable evidence of her thesis in the position adopted by Ambedkar at this critical juncture in his political career. During this period, Ambedkar also looked to soften caste tensions and divisions within the *bahujan samaj*, and as his reference to the skewed nature of government spending suggests, this could be reoriented around satisfying a larger regional common good (albeit exclusive of Brahmans and Gujaratis as 'outsiders'). Equally,

[54] P. Singh, *How solidarity works for welfare: subnationalism and social development in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 5.

[55] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

Singh's ideas about subnationalism are of great utility not only for thinking about variations in social development and standards of living within national boundaries, but can also help us better analyse Ambedkar's understanding of the workings of democracy in the provinces during this period.

We can see, for example, in Ambedkar's references to regional identification and the 'otherness' of the Gujarati, an attempt to forge a political coalition along class lines. Ambedkar was keen here to foster a shared solidarity, a perception of common neglect and abandonment at the hands of government and high-caste/Gujarati politicians, and a sense of the collective needs and goals of Maharashtrian workers and peasants, which would be capable of overriding the differences that otherwise existed between non-Brahmans and Dalits. If successfully orchestrated, this coalition could potentially make all the difference to the likelihood of ILP Dalit candidates being elected in seats reserved for Scheduled Castes under the Poona Pact. But it also promised much more: together, Dalits and non-Brahmans would be capable not only of toppling the political hegemony of Brahmans in Marathi-speaking districts, but also challenging the perceived dominance of Gujarati Congressmen within Bombay's provincial politics as a whole. If enough non-Brahmans joined the ILP, the party could also contest unreserved seats within the general electorate, relying on their numbers within Marathi-speaking constituencies rather than any form of commensurative logic. Ambedkar, of course, continued to consistently support efforts to protect Dalits through reserved seats and the demand for separate electorates during the 1930s. But this was only one component of a variety of strategies he employed: in this particular instance, he not only looked to split the caste Hindu vote by drawing non-Brahmans away from the Congress, but also sought the reinvigoration of a non-Brahman and Dalit coalition, in which Dalits would constitute part of the political

majority in Marathi-speaking districts of Bombay. In the context of provincialisation, Ambedkar and the ILP looked to appeal beyond the limited framework of Dalit politics after the Poona Pact, in tacit recognition that their representation would be best achieved through a broad-based movement. After the failure to achieve separate electorates, and in anticipation that the working of democracy in the province would most likely take on a majoritarian form, Ambedkar and the ILP attempted to modify the conception of provincial majoritarianism, reorienting it around a regional low-caste and working-class alliance. Focusing on his references to regional identification and assertion provides a more holistic understanding of Dalit politics during this period.

Ambedkar's regional concerns and imperatives in the context of democratisation are also apparent if we look back at his involvement in the Bombay Provincial Committee in 1928. The Committee was created to consult with the Simon Commission on constitutional reform, and to make recommendations based upon their particular knowledge of the province. Ambedkar, however, found a number of the recommendations made by the Committee objectionable, and submitted a minute of dissent to accompany the Committee's report. In his minute, Ambedkar raised concerns about the issue of apportionment, i.e. 'the question of distribution of seats among the different constituencies' within the provincial legislature. 'One unpleasant feature of the [Bombay Legislative] Council as now constituted', Ambedkar argued, 'is the over-representation of some part and an under-representation of the rest'.[56] Significantly, Ambedkar here equated the administrative divisions of Bombay with region and language. If seats were to be accorded on the basis of either population

[56] Ambedkar, 'Report on the constitution of the Government of Bombay Presidency', 1928, in *BAWS*, vol. II, V. Moon (ed.), 2014 [1982], p. 366.

ratios in the province or revenue generated by each constituent part, he submitted that Gujarat was currently overrepresented, whilst Karnatak and Maharashtra were not accorded enough seats. Ambedkar therefore contended that the allocation of seats to respective administrative divisions accorded Gujarat a greater number of representatives in relation to voters than the rest of the province, in what political scientists now call malapportionment. Rather than privileging the equality of individuals, the colonial state in this instance had sought to go some way towards equalising linguistic groups, replicating its policy towards Hindu and Muslim representation at the all-India level. Ambedkar, however, argued that such a system was an abject failure of democracy: 'For, in a system in which the value of a vote is high in one constituency and low in another, it is open to objection that every member of the community has not an equal share with each of the rest of the people in the choice of their rulers'.[57] Such logic is notable for its contrast with that which informed the simultaneous demand for Dalit separate electorates.

Ambedkar went on to frame his 'grievance' with what we term malapportionment in the context of the constitutional reforms of the interwar years, noting that protests were 'bound to increase as the responsible character of the Legislative Council increases and with it the influence which it will exercise upon the conduct of public affairs'.[58] In one way, Ambedkar's concerns over the distribution of seats might be perceived as an attempt to establish an impartial system on the basis of individual voter equivalence. Indeed, Ambedkar pressed for an end to restrictive property qualifications for the electorate over three decades, before the eventual inauguration of a universal franchise in an independent India. But we might also see the reforms as

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., p. 367.

an opportunity to reconfigure power relations in the interests of the low-caste, Marathi-speaking groups in Bombay, and at the expense of the Gujarati Bania and the Brahman, particularly given the later trajectory of Ambedkar's politics during the 1930s and 1940s. In this interpretation, 'one-person, one-vote' assumptions actually privileged the community within the province with the greatest demographic strength. Such realignments emphasised the significance of community and number to control over administrative territory in the context of provincialisation, and might be conceived as an early harbinger of the demand for Samyukta Maharashtra that had emerged by the 1940s. For certain imagined groupings and communities, provincial reorganisation became a tool through which to grasp political power, by recalibrating the province's religious, caste or linguistic demographics to facilitate certain kinds of majority rule. A similar logic also informed several imaginings of the Pakistan demand.

For Ambedkar, linguistic reorganisation could be a future portent of enhanced democratic governance. During *Maharashtra as a linguistic province*, he claimed that only the redrawing of boundaries would create the level of cultural uniformity necessary for the effective operation of democracy within the provinces. 'In a heterogeneous population', on the other hand, '… the working of democracy is bound to give rise to cases of discrimination, neglect, partiality, suppression of the interests of one group at the hands of another group which happens to capture political power'.[59] In making this point, Ambedkar adopted a similar logic to that which had informed his support for Pakistan, where he had speculated on the potential dangers to the Indian Union if Muslims had been forced to remain a part of it. He raised a similar spectre if demands for linguistic reorganisation were consistently rebuffed: 'The

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[59] Ambedkar, *Maharashtra as a linguistic province*, pp. 102-103.

demand for Linguistic Provinces is an explosive force … It is better not to allow it to get too hot when it may become difficult to prevent an explosion'.[60] His understanding of democracy here was also linked closely to both territory and demographics, which in turn, he contended, helped to foster a sense of 'nationality' within the provincial units. Following partition, Ambedkar distinguished between nationality 'in its legal and political sense' and 'in the social sense of the term'. With regards to the former, he argued linguistic provinces could not 'have that attribute of sovereignty which independent nations have'.[61] However, he otherwise mostly recognised that '… the Provinces have all the elements of a distinct nationality and they should be allowed the freedom to grow to their fullest in nationhood'.[62] Just like the demand for Pakistan, effective democratic governance was best achieved by substituting community for nation.

Ambedkar thus framed the demand for Samyukta Maharashtra as a viable means through which to escape the strictures of suppression by another community. In the context of the grievances behind the Pakistan demand, he had previously surmised: '… constitutional safeguards have failed to save [Muslims] from the tyranny of the Hindu majority'.[63] Yet the 'dominant' Gujarati-speaking community did not constitute a majority of Bombay's provincial population. In *Maharashtra as a linguistic province*, therefore, Ambedkar employed a semantic sleight to encompass Gujarati speakers within the same logic:

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[60] Ibid., p. 104.

[61] Ibid., p. 124.

[62] Ibid., p. 101.

[63] Ambedkar, *Pakistan, or the partition of India*, p. 42.

A meeting was held in Bombay in the building of the Indian Merchants Chamber. The meeting was attended by no more than sixty. With the exception of one Indian-Christian it was attended by only Gujarathi-speaking merchants and industrialists. Although it was small and sectional meeting, its proceedings were flashed on the front page of every important newspaper in India and the Times of India was so impressed by its importance that it wrote an editorial which … supported the resolution passed at the meeting regarding the future of Bombay. This proves what truth there is in the reply given by Lord Birkenhead to the Irish Leader, Mr. Redmond, in the course of the Irish controversy when he said that there are cases where a minority is a majority.[64]

Those at the meeting had endorsed a resolution that rejected the idea that Bombay City should be included in Maharashtra. For Ambedkar, this showcased the tyranny of Gujarati-speaking traders and industrialists in the city, who sought to argue for the 'monopoly of trade and industry', in which 'the owners may rule the workers but the workers must not be allowed to rule the owners'.[65] Whilst he accepted the point that Gujaratis monopolised trade and industry in Bombay City, he rejected the idea that the wealth of Bombay had been built solely on their endeavour. Instead, Ambedkar pointed to the role of Maharashtrians 'in supplying labour for the building up of the trade and industry of Bombay … It would be difficult for any economist with any reputation to save who could deny that labour has as much claim on the wealth produced as capital if not more'.[66] He thus campaigned for Bombay City to be incorporated in a Marathi-speaking province by referring to the mutual interests of Maharashtrian labour. Equally, Ambedkar maintained, these commonalities were

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[64] Ibid., p. 110. Underlined emphasis in the original.

[65] Ibid., p. 119.

[66] Ibid., p. 121.

arranged on the basis of antagonism towards the entrenched power of Gujarati-speaking capitalists.

Such passages referencing labour and capital throughout *Maharashtra as a linguistic province* evoke the 1930s and Ambedkar and the ILP's 'radical phase' outlined in the previous section of this article. Most accounts of Dalit politics suggest such radicalism came to an end as a consequence of Ambedkar's incorporation within the executive as India's first Law Minister in August 1947.[67] Yet his position on linguistic reorganisation at this time suggests an alternative or more ambivalent trajectory that is also worthy of further consideration. In fact, although he made reference to the constitutional safeguards that he himself was in the process of helping to create, he raised these protections to question the concerns of the Gujarati minority that they would be potentially victimised in any future Maharashtrian province: 'The [draft] constitution of India has noted the possibility of discrimination being made against a minority and has made more than ample provision for preventing it'.[68] The proposed fundamental rights of each and every citizen, the specific provisions against discrimination, and the role of the High Courts in issuing writs to individuals and governments accused of harming or harassing any minority, then, were considered as more than capable of protecting Gujarati speakers' interests. At this moment, we can see Ambedkar was still trying to forge a broad-based coalition of Dalits and non-Brahmans in Bombay/Maharashtra, in recognition that democracy in India would most likely be majoritarian in character. Separate representation, meanwhile, was ultimately considered by itself incapable of alleviating the emergence of such democratic forms.

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[67] Bandyopadhyay, 'Transfer of power', p. 936.

[68] Ambedkar, *Maharashtra as a linguistic province*, p. 120.

31

Provincialisation, linguistic reorganisation, and majoritarianism

Despite his suggestions that partition and linguistic reorganisation might serve as tools to both escape caste Hindu dominance and introduce effective democratic governance, Ambedkar's support for the redrawing of administrative boundaries had always been somewhat ambivalent. Whilst recognising the potential of prospective alliances with representatives of other disadvantaged communities, both Muslim and non-Brahman, Ambedkar had continued to encourage a vision of Dalits as a distinctive political minority by focusing on their particularly stigmatised and deprived existence. In doing so, he expressed concern about the potential impact of reorganisation upon Dalit representation and minority community assertion. In fact, provincialisation, and the calls for reorganisation that emerged in its wake, soon raised the spectre of new forms of majoritarianism at the provincial level, in which Muslims and non-Brahmans could now constitute the majority of the provincial population. Unlike Muslims in Sind, or non-Brahmans in Maharashtra and Karnataka, Dalits were a territorially dispersed minority that nowhere constituted a majority of the population in Bombay. This position was replicated beyond Bombay, where other numerically preponderate caste and religious groups, such as Muslims in Bengal and Punjab and non-Brahmans in Madras, were to ultimately benefit from a democratising system of government that still privileged community as the basis of representation.

We can trace these concerns in Ambedkar's thought right back to his earliest engagements with the idea of provincial reorganisation. In 1928 he rejected the demand for the separation of Sind from Bombay on the basis that it failed to enthuse all Sindhi speakers and only represented the 'sectional' views of the majority Muslim

community, whilst 'the Hindus of Sindh' were 'array[ed] … in opposition to it'.[69] To back up this assertion, he made reference to the Delhi Muslim Proposals of March 1927, which had emerged as a consequence of a meeting of thirty prominent Muslim politicians under the chairmanship of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The proposals entailed the creation of the Muslim-majority province of Sind, provincial status for the Muslim-majority areas of Baluchistan and the Northwest Frontier (which were ruled directly by the British at the centre under a Chief Commissionership at the time), proportional representation in the Muslim-majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal, and the reservation of a third of seats in the central legislature for Muslims. In return, the Muslim members agreed to give up separate electorates, which Muslims had first received in 1909.[70] For its proponents, the creation of five Muslim-majority provinces with Hindu minorities in the northeast and northwest was considered to provide security against the maltreatment of Muslim minorities by the Hindu majority elsewhere. But for Ambedkar, it was highly problematic: 'It is a system of protection by counterblast against blast, terror against terror and eventually tyranny against tyranny'.[71] It had the 'dreadful' and 'frightful' effect of treating minorities 'as hostages rather than citizens, whose rights are subject to forfeiture, not for any bad behaviour chargeable to them but as a corrective for the bad behaviour of their kindred elsewhere'.[72] He repeated these criticisms almost two decades later, in the

[69] Ambedkar, 'Report on the constitution', p. 318; see also, S. Ansari, 'Political legacies of pre-1947 Sind', in *The political inheritance of Pakistan*, (ed.) D. A. Low (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), pp. 173-193.

[70] M. Hasan, 'The Delhi proposals: a study in communal politics', *IESHR*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1980, pp. 381-396.

[71] Ambedkar, 'Report on the constitution', p. 319.

[72] Ibid., pp. 320-321; see also, Ambedkar, *Pakistan, or the partition of India*, pp. 109-110, 122-123.

context of the collapse of Minority Pact politics, in *Pakistan, or the partition of India*.[73] The demand also had further sinister implications for other minorities residing in what would become Muslim majority provinces. It is noteworthy that Ambedkar began to refer not only to Hindu Raj, but also to 'Muslim Raj', and more generally to both 'communal Raj' and 'the Raj of the majority community' by the mid 1940s.[74]

In Bengal, provincialisation had provided new avenues for the Muslim majority population in the province to challenge the political power of the *bhadralok* (the educated and socially 'respectable' upper-caste Hindu middle classes). The rise of an increasingly assertive Muslim politics emerged originally in relation to the peasant mobilisation initiated by the Krishak Praja Party during the 1930s, but was later subsumed by the Muslim League as a consequence of the Lahore Resolution and the Pakistan demand.[75] Muslim political consciousness in Bengal also coincided with an upturn in communal violence between Muslim peasants and other agricultural groups, such as the Namasudras, a Dalit community primarily residing in east Bengal. Although the violence was most often over economic and land-based issues, it was frequently given a communal colouring by interested political parties, colonial authorities, and the local and provincial press. As a result, Bandyopadhyay argues, in contrast to Sen, such circumstances helped foment increased Dalit anxiety about the potential for Muslim political domination in a Muslim majority province after independence. It is in this context that Bandyopadhyay suggests many Namasudras

[73] Ambedkar, *Pakistan, or the partition of India*, p. 362.

[74] Ibid., pp. 358, 359.

[75] P. Chatterjee, 'Partition and the mysterious disappearance of caste in Bengal', in *The politics of caste in West Bengal*, (eds) U. Chandra, G. Heierstad, and K. B. Neilsen (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 83-102 (pp. 85, 90, 91).

became active in the campaign to partition Bengal in 1947, a campaign launched by the Hindu Mahasabha in 1946 and endorsed by the Congress after the Tarakeswar Convention in April 1947. This was part of a grassroots effort to ensure that the Namasudra heartlands were allotted to West Bengal and the Indian Union, during which they supported and became integrated within the wider nationalist movement and Hindu community.

Coupled with the revised position of the Government of India, which had come to the view that Dalits simply constituted a part of the larger Hindu community during negotiations over the transfer of power, the changed conditions of the mid-1940s pushed Ambedkar towards reaching out to a number of other, more unlikely bedfellows. In a little known letter Ambedkar contacted W. E. B. Du Bois, the leading African American civil rights campaigner of this period, to ask his advice about how the National Negro Congress had gone about petitioning the United Nations.[76] Around the same time, he corresponded with Winston Churchill, the former prime minister, in an attempt to align the protection of Dalit interests with the premier opposition party within Britain at the time. Churchill responded favourably to Ambedkar's overtures, pledging that the Conservative Party would 'protect the future of 60 million Untouchables "whose melancholy depression by their co-religionists

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[76] South Asian American Digital Archive, 'B. R. Ambedkar to W. E. B. Du Bois', n.d. [July 1946]; and 'Du Bois to Ambedkar', 31 July 1946, http://www.saada.org/search/ambedkar; cf., S. D. Kapoor, 'B. R. Ambedkar, W. E. B. Du Bois and the process of liberation', *EPW*, vol. 38, no. 51-52, 2003, 5344-5349; D. Immerwahr, 'Caste or colony? Indianizing race in the United States', *Modern Intellectual History*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2007, pp. 275-301.

constitutes one of the gravest features in the problems of the Indian subcontinent'".[77] The correspondence between the pair culminated in Ambedkar's visit to England in the autumn of 1946 to press the Dalits' cause. However, both of these initiatives ultimately failed to have the desired effect, and shortly thereafter Ambedkar performed what seemed to be an abrupt volte-face.

Just over a month after his trip to England, Ambedkar made a remarkable speech in the Constituent Assembly, where he committed to the idea of 'a United India' and called upon the League to give up the demand for a separate Pakistan.[78] Ambedkar's speech marked a major (albeit temporary) shift in his political career, bringing him much closer to the Congress at the very moment of India's transition to independence. By August 1947, Ambedkar had been chosen as the Chair of the Constitution Drafting Committee and as the first Minister of Law and Justice in the new Indian government's cabinet. Scholars interested in Dalit politics during the transition to independence have proposed a number of different explanations for this relative détente in the relationship between Ambedkar and the Congress, in which more recent works have emphasised the degree of political calculation that existed behind the new relationship on both sides.[79] But all of these attempts to forge alternative alliances

[77] 'Ambedkar finds champion in Churchill', *The Bombay Chronicle* (Bombay), 31 May 1946, in *BAWS*, vol. XVII, part II, (eds) H. Narake, M. L. Kasare, N. G. Kamble, and A. Godghate (2014 [2003]), p. 210.

[78] Ambedkar, 'Resolution regarding aims and objectives', *Constituent Assembly Debates*, 15 December 1946, in *BAWS*, vol. XIII, (ed.) V. Moon (2014 [1994]), p. 9.

[79] E. Zelliot, *Ambedkar's world*, pp. 190-191; E. Zelliot, 'Congress and the untouchables, 1917-1950', in *Congress and Indian nationalism: the pre-independence phase*, (eds) R. Sisson and S. Wolpert (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 182-197 (p. 193); Bandyopadhyay, 'Transfer of power', pp. 934-936; Cháirez-Garza, '"Bound hand and foot and handed over to the caste Hindus":

emerged in the context of Ambedkar's concerns about Muslim majoritarianism within (an initially imagined) Pakistan. By September 1947, Ambedkar was calling upon Dalits residing in Pakistan to 'return' to India:

I would like to tell the Scheduled Castes who happen today to be impounded inside Pakistan to come over to India by such means as may be available to them. The second thing I want to say is that it would be fatal for the Scheduled Castes, whether in Pakistan or in Hyderabad, to put their faith in Muslims or the Muslim League. It has become a habit with the Scheduled Castes to look upon the Muslims as their friends simply because they dislike the Hindus. This is a mistaken view.[80]

Ambedkar's new position on Pakistan was seemingly borne out by subsequent events. Over the next few years in Bengal, anti-Hindu violence and riots on the part of the Muslim majority was principally targeted at the Namasudra community that had remained behind. Representing the Namasudra as the 'Hindu Other' collapsed the distinction between caste Hindus and Dalits and, when coupled with the violence, encouraged many to flee their homes and cross the border into India.[81] By October 1950, even Jogendranath Mandal, who had initially accepted a position in the Pakistani cabinet after independence, now decided to migrate to West Bengal, citing

Ambedkar, untouchability, and the politics of partition', *IESHR*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1-28 (pp. 24-26); Rawat, *Reconsidering untouchability*, p. 179.

[80] Quoted in D. Keer, *Dr Ambedkar: life and mission* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1981), p. 399; see also, Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, culture and hegemony: social dominance in colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Sage, 2004), pp. 236-237.

[81] S. Bandyopadhyay and A. B. R. Chaudhury, 'Partition, displacement, and the decline of the Scheduled Caste movement in West Bengal', in *The politics of caste in West Bengal*, pp. 60-82 (pp. 63-68).

the League's broken promises to protect the Dalit minority community that had remained behind in East Pakistan.

The perceived threat to minorities posed as a consequence of various forms of boundary redrawing was actually a frequent refrain in Ambedkar's thought during the gradual transition to democratic rule in South Asia, in which Pakistan figured as only one representation of a much wider demand for provincial autonomy. The call for the separation of Sind, for example, itself in part a precursor to the Pakistan demand, was not raised or debated in a vacuum. At the same time as Ambedkar was contesting this demand for separation, he was also raising concerns about the calls for the separation of Karnatak from Bombay.[82] A decade later, in the context of pressure from an increasingly vociferous Samyukta Karnatak movement, the matter again became the subject of debate, albeit this time in the Bombay Legislative Assembly. Rising to respond to the resolution on Karnatak's creation, Ambedkar posed the possibility it engendered for the 'dismemberment of minorities' in the provincial legislature:

I cannot forget that in Karnatak we [Dalits] have only two seats. I am sure those members of the Scheduled Classes who come from the Karnatak must be feeling that their strength lies in the fact that there are 13 members from other parts of the Presidency to look after them? What is to happen to them?[83]

Ambedkar went on to frame this concern about minority rights in the context of the threat posed by provincial majoritarianism. 'I have my fears', he remarked, 'that if

[82] Ambedkar, 'Report on the constitution', pp. 316-317.

[83] B. R. Ambedkar (Bombay City), 'Resolution re: creation of a separate Karnatak province', 4 April 1938. *Bombay Legislative Assembly* [henceforth *BLA*] *debates,* vol. III, part 18-34, March-April 1938, p. 1722.

Karnatak is created as a separate Province, it would be a Province of all the Lingayats against everybody else'.[84] Just as the prospect of partition raised the spectre of Muslim majoritarianism in an imagined Pakistan, linguistic reorganisation had the potential for similar repercussions in the context of both caste and language. By 1953, Ambedkar was again voicing similar concerns in the context of increasingly strident demands for the creation of Andhra, Karnataka and Maharashtra. In an article for the *Times of India*, Ambedkar noted that numerically preponderate non-Brahman castes, whether the Jats of Punjab, the Reddis, Kammas and Kapus of Andhra, or the Marathas of Maharashtra, normally dominated all political opportunities: 'Take Andhra – there are two or three major communities spread over the linguistic area … They hold all the land, all the offices, all the business. The untouchables live in subordinate dependence on them'.[85] He repeated this point in his *Thoughts on linguistic states* in 1955: 'Castes are so distributed that in any given area there is one caste which is major and there are others which are small and are subservient to the major caste'. This, he suggested, owed much 'to their comparative smallness and their economic dependence upon the major caste which owns most of the land in the village'.[86] As a result of this distribution of major and minor castes within any given area, linguistic reorganisation had potentially significant consequences for smaller communities, in which the dominant position of numerically preponderate castes would be both strengthened and perpetuated within the new province. Minorities,

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ambedkar, 'Need for checks and balances', *Times of India*, 23 April 1953, in *BAWS*, vol. I, p. 134; see also, Ambedkar, 'Andhra State Bill, 1953', 2 September 1953, in *BAWS*, vol. XV, V. Moon (ed.), 2014 [1997], p. 856.

[86] Ambedkar, *Thoughts on linguistic states* (Delhi: Anand Sahitya Sadan, 1955), in *BAWS*, vol. I, p. 167.

meanwhile, were 'sure to be discriminated against and denied equality before law and equal opportunity in public life'.[87]

These tensions between majority and minority castes, or between non-Brahman and Dalit, had a longer history stretching back into the interwar period and emerging in the context of provincialisation. In rural Maharashtra, for example, attempts at Dalit political assertion had provoked antagonism between the majority Marathas and minority Mahars that played out at the local level in the context of their socio-economic relations. During the late 1920s, as part of a larger attempt to ameliorate their impure and degraded status that had included the temple entry movements over access to civic space, many Dalits in western India had increasingly repudiated their 'hereditary' village tasks, such as the burying of dead cattle. In response, some villagers in the Ratnagiri District had warned, 'that unless they do continue to perform these duties they will prohibit them (the Mahars) from tending cattle and collecting grass in the lands held by them (the Marathas)'.[88] Concerns at Dalit assertion also emerged in the reaction of non-Brahman politicians to the Poona Pact. In a note penned in October 1932, the Collector of Ahmadnagar noted that 'One or two Maratha leaders feared that Marathas though they formed the biggest community in the Deccan districts, are in danger of being converted into a minority in Council on account of the special weightage given to Minorities'.[89] The impact of provincialisation, then, as a form of both democratisation and territorialisation, was to

[87] Ibid., p. 168.

[88] MSA, GOB, Home (Special) Department File 355/64 III, 'Extract from the confidential diary of the District Superintendent of Police, Ratnagiri', 23 June 1928. Quoted in Godsmark, *Citizenship, community and democracy*, p. 42.

[89] *Ibid.*, Reforms Department File 172, 'Collector, Ahmadnagar', 10 October 1932. Quoted in Godsmark, *Citizenship, community and democracy*, p. 45.

give increased significance to number in provincial electoral equations. Within Marathi-speaking districts of Bombay, Ambedkar and the ILP's attempts to forge a coalition of the *bahujan samaj* in this context were frequently at odds with other majoritarian conceptions of democracy. In such understandings, reserved seats constituted Dalits as a distinct minority political constituency, which ate into the majoritarian interests of the Maratha (non-Brahman) community.

Marathas increasingly looked to rely upon their demographic weight to capture political power, in a way that was to inform their demand for linguistic reorganisation of Bombay by the 1940s and 1950s. In fact, Ambedkar portrayed voting in elections to the provincial legislative assemblies as 'always communal', in which '[t]he majority community carries the seat by sheer communal majority'.[90] Despite their secular pretensions, the Congress maintained this system by putting up candidates from castes which belonged to the majority community in any given constituency: 'It is by exploiting the caste system that the Congress wins'.[91] As a result, Ambedkar came to describe the creation of a linguistic province as 'the handing over of Swaraj to a communal majority … Those who cannot understand this aspect of the problem would understand it better if instead of speaking in terms of linguistic State we spoke of a Jat State, a Reddy State or a Maratha State'.[92] Despite his continuing support for reorganisation, then, Ambedkar became increasingly concerned about its implications for Dalits in particular and various communal minorities more generally.

Ambedkar also regularly framed his concerns about both linguistic reorganisation and Pakistan in the context of their implications for national unity and nation

[90] Ambedkar, *Thoughts on linguistic states*, p. 168.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ambedkar, 'Need for checks and balances', p. 134.

building. In his earliest writings and speeches on reorganisation in the late 1920s, Ambedkar positioned himself as a nationalist critic of separation. In the context of the demands for Sind and Karnatak, he proclaimed '… the most vital need of the day is to create among the mass of the people the sense of a common nationality the feeling not that they are Indians first and Hindus, Mohamedans or Sindhis and Kanarese afterwards but that they are Indians first and Indians last'.[93] Likewise, in 1938, he described Samyukta Karnatak as running 'directly counter' to the ideal that citizens 'be Indians first, Indians last and nothing else but Indians'.[94] Although Ambedkar's position on reorganisation changed during the 1940s, nationalism continued to be applied as a justificatory logic to support his views. Similarly, Ambedkar in part framed his initial support for the Pakistan demand during the early 1940s as informed by the dangers that keeping a recalcitrant and hostile Muslim nation within the Indian Union posed to ultimate national unity and effective democratic governance.[95] Ambedkar's uneasy alliance with the Congress came to an abrupt end in October 1951, when he resigned from the Cabinet in protest at the dilution of the Hindu Code Bill in the interests of conservative caste Hindus. His decision to resign over the Bill reflected Ambedkar's wider frustrations with the Congress, and its continuing lack of sympathy for Dalit concerns.[96] Yet despite the collapse of this relationship, Ambedkar continued to be convinced by the efficacy of Indian nationalism. Writing in *Thoughts on linguistic states* in 1955, Ambedkar reflected,

[93] Ambedkar, 'Report on the constitution', p. 317.

[94] Ambedkar, 'Resolution re: creation of a separate Karnatak province', p. 1723.

[95] Ambedkar, *Pakistan, or the partition of India*, pp. 187-188, 194, 339, 341.

[96] Bandyopadhyay, 'Transfer of power', p. 937.

I am glad that India was separated from Pakistan. I was the philosopher, so to speak, of Pakistan. I advocated partition because I felt that it was only by partition that Hindus would not only be independent but free … A merely independent India would not have been a free India from the point of view of the Hindus. It would have been a Government of one country by two nations and of these two the Muslims without question would have been the ruling race …[97]

In this telling the creation of Pakistan was the best solution to the communal question, for it allowed both Muslims and Hindus to govern themselves, whilst simultaneously reducing the demographic (and thus political) potency of a previously powerful and hostile minority community.[98] Partition, then, was in the national interest. Before 1947 this also raised the prospect of a potentially bright future for Ambedkar, in which caste and religious affinities would be politically inconsequential. Once the communal question was resolved, Ambedkar speculated, 'nothing can stand in the way of a party re-alignment, of the Congress and the Maha Sabha breaking up and of Hindus and Musalmans forming mixed political parties based on an agreed programme of social and economic regeneration'.[99] Ambedkar here raised the prospect of democracy as non-discrimination in a future independent India, in which individual rights would take ultimate precedence over community affiliation.

Ambedkar continued to broadly adhere to the principle of self-determination in the late 1940s and 1950s, particularly in the context of demands for provincial reorganisation. Equally, he continued to argue that such forms of reorganisation, like partition, produced 'what democracy needs', pointing out that a province that 'is

[97] Ambedkar, *Thoughts on linguistic states*, p. 146.

[98] Ambedkar, *Pakistan, or the partition of India*, pp. 99, 111, 117-120, 125-126.

[99] Ibid., p. 359.

homogeneous in its population can work for the true ends of democracy, for there are no artificial barriers or social antipathies which lead to the misuse of political power'.[100] Despite his coterminous concerns about provincial majoritarianism, then, Ambedkar here suggested that creating more homogenous provinces potentially paved the way for the replacement of *communal* majorities and minorities by *political* majorities and minorities. However, it was at this juncture that Ambedkar also began to express renewed concern about the potential impact of reorganisation upon national unity: 'When the partition took place I felt that God was willing to lift his curse and let India be one, great and prosperous. But I fear that the curse may fall again'.[101] . As Anupama Rao has written, 'Having embraced the political universalism of the Constitution … Ambedkar had little enthusiasm for a linguistic state based on equivalence among caste, region, and history'.[102]

In *Maharashtra as a linguistic province*, he again made reference to linguistic notions of nationality, but this time in a much more critical sense. He suggested that, unchecked, linguistic provinces might 'result in creating as many nations as there are groups with pride in their race, language and literature. The Central Legislature will be a League of Nations and the Central Executive may become a meeting of separate and solidified nations …'.[103] This also had important implications for the everyday machinery of governance, whether in a legislative, judicial or administrative sense, posing significant questions about the ease of correspondence between the centre and the provinces if each province adopted a different language as their official language.

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[100] Ambedkar, *Maharashtra as a linguistic province*, p. 103.

[101] Ambedkar, *Thoughts on linguistic states*, p. 146.

[102] Rao, *The caste question*, p. 185.

[103] Ambedkar, *Maharashtra as a linguistic province*, p. 102.

Ambedkar's solution was for each new province to embrace the language of the central government (English initially, and Hindi once 'India becomes fit for this purpose') as its official language, instead of the provincial alternative.[104] This would not only make democratic governance more effective, he believed, but also prevent the further dismemberment of the Indian Union.

Ambedkar's attempts to position himself as a nationalist critic of linguistic reorganisation, however, prompted regular accusations of hypocrisy from contemporary politicians and political commentators. In 1938, in the context of Ambedkar's intervention in the debate over Samyukta Karnataka, K. G. Gokhale rebuked Ambedkar for employing what he considered to be contradictory logic. Gokhale, a Brahman Congressman who had previously served as the Secretary of the Kannada Sahitya Sammelan and Harijan Sangha in Belgaum, made reference to Ambedkar's speech in the provincial legislative assembly to point out that, '… although Dr. Ambedkar said that he stood for nationalism first and nationalism last, he himself began by saying that he belonged to the Scheduled Classes and he demanded his rights as a member of the Scheduled Classes'.[105] Gokhale went on to suggest, in a somewhat pernicious manner, that, 'If Dr. Ambedkar has any faith in democracy and if democracy means rule of the majority, then minorities must honourably, whole-heartedly, sympathetically and heartily accept that particular rule'.[106]

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[104] Ambedkar, *Thoughts on linguistic states*, p. 145; see also, *Maharashtra as a linguistic province*, pp. 104-105.

[105] K. G. Gokhale (Belgaum South), 'Resolution re: creation of a separate Karnatak province', *BLA debates*, p. 1726.

[106] Ibid., p. 1728.

Gokhale's response to Ambedkar perfectly sums up the difficulties Ambedkar faced adopting both a coherent and potentially emancipatory position for Dalits in relation to various ideas about territorial reorganisation. Assuming a nationalist critique of both partition and linguistic provinces immediately raised questions for Ambedkar's own critics, particularly with regards to his own attempts to encourage a distinctive Dalit identity. But the second part of Gokhale's rejoinder is also indicative of the ways in which provincialisation and reorganisation, particularly when they were linked to broad understandings of nationality and 'universal rights', could be considered as a harbinger of majoritarian democratic rule. Having increasingly recognised the futility of commensurative logic during this period, Ambedkar was now also forced to realise that his support for non-discrimination and universalism in general, and partition and reorganisation in particular, could also perpetuate alternative forms of democratic majoritarianism oriented around non-Brahman and Muslim rule in these provincial administrative spaces. Gokhale also considered Ambedkar's critique to be somewhat negligible: Dalits, as a minority, would have to accept the consequences of reorganisation as a feature of India's greater democratisation after independence. In this sense, the insights that Gokhale's statement provides into the potential fallout from linguistic reorganisation parallels Anupama Rao's recognition that the demand for Pakistan demonstrated Dalits' unenviable position, 'as a territorially dispersed minority with *nowhere else to go*; the impossibility, precisely, of converting minority into nationality at the critical moment of postcolonial transition'.[107]

Settlement, separation, and exchange of population

[107] Rao, *The caste question*, p. 159, original author's emphasis; see also, pp. 148-149.

It was in light of concerns about both the failings of commensuration and the threat of majoritarianism, whether the latter was conceived as Hindu, Muslim, or Maratha, that Ambedkar and the AISCF contemplated another strategy to carve out an autonomous domain for Dalit politics. Mimicking the contemporary demands for Pakistan and Samyukta Maharashtra, they called for the establishment of separate settlements as a potential antidote, where Dalits might constitute a demographic majority themselves. Such calls for territorial separation were attempts to spatially inscribe the distinctiveness of Dalits' identity upon the landscape. At the same time, Ambedkar and the AISCF also looked to positively transform more longstanding spatial configurations that continued to play a major role in the perpetuation of caste inequality in rural India. 'The existing village system', Ambedkar asserted, 'has the effect of making the Scheduled Castes in the villages slaves of the Caste Hindus'.[108] One of its defining features was the socio-spatial separation of untouchables from the rest of the village community: 'The Scheduled Castes are not allowed to live inside the village. They have to live on the outskirts. They are not allowed to take water from the village well. They are not allowed to send their children to the village schools'.[109] Ambedkar, then, dwelt on the estrangement and isolation of Dalits from the heart of the village as one of the defining features of their social exclusion and as a major stumbling block to the removal of the stigma of untouchability.

In his 1948 book, *The untouchables: who were they and why they became untouchables?*, Ambedkar narrated a history of Dalit social separation to explain their

[108] AISCF, 'Memorandum Submitted by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to the Cabinet Mission', 5 April 1946, in *BAWS*, vol. XVII, part II, p. 176.

[109] Ibid., p. 177.

contemporary circumstances. He linked the origins of untouchability to the story of the 'Broken Men', who were described by Ambedkar as the direct ancestors of Dalits, and who had 'traditionally' performed the duties of village watchmen across rural India. According to Ambedkar, the 'tribes' of the Broken Men had been defeated and routed by rivals in 'primitive times', and had been forced to live as 'stray individuals' because they 'could not join another tribe and become a member of it'.[110] Ambedkar described these Broken Men as agreeing to 'do the work of watch and ward' in return for 'food and shelter' from settled tribes.[111] This was a mutual agreement that seemingly benefited both parties. But a difficulty arose in identifying where the Broken Men would live: only persons of the same tribe could live together, whilst the Broken Men were considered to be aliens. For Ambedkar, this clarified why they became 'untouchable'. Whilst in other societies (Ambedkar cited the work of Sir Henry Maine on Ireland, for example), Broken Men and settled villagers had become mixed and amalgamated over time, the Broken Men in India were kept outside and separate through the application of untouchability at a later date, as a consequence of which their peripheral-ness became 'a perpetual and a permanent feature of the Indian village'.[112] As a result of this history, Ambedkar maintained that Dalits suffered not merely from 'social separation', but from 'territorial segregation', which he described as a '*cordon sanitaire* putting the impure people inside a barbed wire into a sort of cage'.[113] The physical space occupied by Dalits literally demarcated their social separation.

[110] Ambedkar, *The untouchables: who were they and why they became untouchables?* (New Delhi: Amrit Book Company, 1948), in *BAWS*, vol. VII, (ed.) V. Moon (2014 [1989]), pp. 275, 276.

[111] Ibid., p. 276.

[112] Ibid., p. 285.

[113] Ibid., p. 266.

Before considering the AISCF's specific demands for separation in greater detail, it is worth noting that we can situate Ambedkar's thinking on this matter within a wider Dalit political milieu, not only in the context of an impending independence, but also stretching back into the interwar period. In the United Provinces, for example, a demand for 'Achhutistan' (*achhut* being a less negative Hindi-language term for 'untouchable') appeared in August 1941, drawing direct inspiration from the League's Lahore Resolution, and demanding a separate territorial entity for Dalits 'in a portion of India'.[114] This demand re-emerged in the Punjab after the formation of the All India Acchutistan Movement in November 1946, suggesting an *achhut* homeland be located in the Jullundur and Ambala divisions, and with a call for the government to fund the costs of relocation for Dalit communities from other parts of the province.[115] There was similar talk or calls for separate homelands amongst Dalit communities in northern Bengal and the Central Provinces at this time.[116]

In the south, meanwhile, both the Madras Government and Cochin State had become involved in nascent schemes of Dalit resettlement, dating back to as early as the first decade of the twentieth century.[117] By 1937-38, 417,794 acres of land had been provided specifically for Dalits in Madras, whilst 41 colonies had been established for Dalits on new land in Cochin. In western India, Ambedkar had also raised the possibility of securing separate land for Dalits as far back as 1926, and suggested potential plots in either Sind or Indore State in 1929.[118] The Starte

[114] Rawat, *Reconsidering untouchability*, p. 171.

[115] U. Butalia, *The other side of silence: voices from the partition of India* (New Delhi: Viking, 1998), pp. 238-241.

[116] Bandyopadhyay, 'From alienation to integration', pp. 380-381.

[117] Viswanath, *The Pariah problem*, chapter six.

[118] Zelliot, *Ambedkar's world*, pp. 187, 255.

Committee, appointed to provide recommendations for the amelioration of the condition of Bombay's 'depressed classes and aboriginal tribes' (i.e. Dalits and Adivasis) in 1928, also raised the possibility of donation of land to Dalit communities. In its report of 1930, it suggested 'that some of the Depressed Classes would take up land in Sind if a suitable scheme could be worked out by the Barrage Revenue authorities in consultation with the Backward Classes officer'.[119] It is significant that Ambedkar was himself one of the Committee's members, demonstrating how he had already began to contemplate the efficacy of such schemes in the context of provincialisation. But what this brief foray into the variety of demands and arrangements for Dalits' territorial separation throughout the twentieth century also demonstrates is that the AISCF's strategy was not just a novel, inadequately theorised scheme. In this telling, separation had already come to be perceived as a potential political opportunity for Dalits. This was particularly the case in a contemporary context in which other forms of territorial and administrative reorganisation were being contemplated and experienced, and which otherwise threatened to equally impinge upon Dalit political autonomy.

In fact, Dalits constituted a minority (whether sizeable or not) of the electorate in any given constituency under the electoral arrangements introduced by the reforms of 1919 and 1935. Even after the introduction of universal suffrage in an independent India, it was clear that they would almost always continue to be a minority as against the demographic weight of the caste Hindus. Of course, this minority status varied depending on the size of the Dalit community in any given part of the country. In

[119] Bombay Depressed Classes and Aboriginal Tribes Committee, *Report of the Depressed Classes and Aboriginal Tribes Committee, Bombay Presidency* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1930), p. 42.

Uttar Pradesh today, for example, Dalits 'make up the single largest social group among all communities and historically defined caste groups in the state', even if they still constitute a minority percentage of the total population.[120] For Ambedkar, however, minority status ultimately meant that 'the Scheduled Castes cannot even exercise their right to vote for a candidate of their choice, if the Hindu villagers do not like him'.[121] It was in this context, in an unpublished manuscript called 'Untouchables or the children of India's ghetto', that Ambedkar took issue with the idealised portrayal of the village in both colonial and nationalist depictions of Indian society. He directed particular criticism towards Sir Charles Metcalfe's description of India's village communities as 'little republics'. Ambedkar pointedly remarked,

In this Republic, there is no place for democracy. There is no room for equality. There is no room for liberty and there is no room for fraternity. The Indian village is the very negation of a Republic. If it is a republic, it is a republic of the Touchables, by the Touchables and for the Touchables … The Untouchables have no rights … They have no rights because they are outside the village republic and because they are outside the so-called republic, they are outside the Hindu fold.[122]

In this way, then, Ambedkar was able to connect ideas about the implementation of democracy in India with territory, noting how the location of Dalits on the peripheries of the village, in a literal as well as a metaphorical sense, meant that they were denied access to the same rights and privileges as caste Hindus. When combined with the

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[120] Rawat, *Reconsidering untouchability*, p. 5.

[121] 'Memorandum Submitted by Ambedkar to the Cabinet Mission', p. 177.

[122] Ambedkar, *Untouchables or the children of India's ghetto* (unpublished manuscript), in *BAWS*, vol. V, (ed.) V. Moon (2014 [1989]), p. 26.

question of number, this posed an intractable problem: 'Although the Untouchables number 50 millions, which appears in lump to be a formidable figure, in fact they are scattered all over the villages in India so that in each village they form a small minority pitted against a great majority of the caste Hindus'.[123] From 1942 onwards, therefore, Ambedkar made repeated references to the creation of separate settlements for Dalits, and even a single separate settlement known as 'Dalitstan'. Like the aforementioned call for Achhutistan, Dalitstan most obviously replicated, even in its appellation, the Muslim demand for Pakistan. On a theoretical level, Ambedkar justified this claim on the basis that Dalits were 'not a sub-continent of the Hindus but a separate element in the national life'.[124] However, critical to the practical validation of such claims in the context of the transfer of power was turning Dalits from a minority into a majority constituency. Ambedkar recognised as much when, in a candid interview with the British journalist and author Beverley Nichols, he explained the logic behind separate settlements: 'In every village there is a tiny minority of Untouchables. I want to gather those minorities together and make them into majorities'.[125] In this scenario, then, Ambedkar acceded to and himself employed a definition of democracy that ultimately privileged forms of communal majoritarianism.

During the same interview, Ambedkar also accepted that there remained a number of practical complexities that impacted upon the substance of the scheme, which would involve not only the transfer of huge numbers of people from their established

[123] Ambedkar, 'Held at bay', in Ibid., p. 265.

[124] Ambedkar, 'We are a separate element in the national life', in *BAWS*, vol. XVII, part I, (eds) H. Narake, M. L. Kasare, N. G. Kamble and A. Godghate (2014 [2003]), p. 350.

[125] Ibid.

homes, but also the reallocation of vast tracts of land. Such spaces had to be both located and then suitably prepared for habitation, whilst funds for both relocation of people and allocation of land had to be found. Unlike Pakistan and Samyukta Maharashtra, which were predicated on the present status of Muslims and Marathas/Marathi speakers as majorities within existing administrative spaces, Dalitstan required the relocation and concentration of Dalits in an entirely new territorial entity. As a consequence of the practical difficulties associated with such a scheme, ultimately the idea did not long outlive Pakistan's creation. Yet, whilst Dalitstan in the abstract was always somewhat intangible, underdeveloped and unsubstantiated, Ambedkar did begin to propose a number of supposedly practicable solutions to the AISCF's plan for (plural) separate settlements. In 1943 he argued, albeit still somewhat vaguely at this stage, that the government should meet the cost of Dalit resettlement.[126] But in the aftermath of the Second World War and in the context of resumed talks over the transfer of power, Ambedkar and the AISCF accorded these ideas greater substance. In April 1946, for example, he told the *Times of India* 'that there were large areas of cultivable waste land lying untenanted in the country which could be set apart for the settlement of Scheduled Castes. Government could form a trust to give effect to the proposal'.[127] A scheme for Dalit separation and resettlement was further fleshed out in the AISCF's memorandum to the Cabinet Mission earlier that same month. The AISCF proposed that a Settlement Commission be established to oversee the process of resettlement; that all cultivable and

[126] Ambedkar, 'Mr. Gandhi and the emancipation of the untouchables', in *BAWS*, vol. IX, (ed.) V. Moon (2014 [1991]), p. 422.

[127] 'Scheduled castes settlement be made at par with Bantus', *Times of India* (Bombay), 23 April 1946, in *BAWS*, vol. XVII, part I, p. 351.

unoccupied government land be handed over for that purpose; and that the Commission should be funded by the central government at a minimum rate of five crore (fifty million) rupees per annum, to fulfil a variety of duties including the purchase of 'new land from private owners in fulfilment of the scheme of settlement'.[128]

The AISCF's demand for recognition as a distinctive element within Indian society, of which both the calls for separate electorates and separate settlements were a part, was rejected by the Cabinet Mission in May 1946, which ultimately decided to recognise the Congress as representative of all India's non-Muslim communities. But Ambedkar did not give up the demand for separate settlements entirely at this juncture. In this regard, we would perhaps do well to think a little more carefully about the continuing efficacy of such Dalit demands for territorial distinctiveness after the Cabinet Mission, particularly in the context of the events and implications of partition. In Delhi and Punjab, government officials in charge of refugee camps discriminated between caste Hindu and Dalit refugees from Pakistan.[129] Meanwhile, the majority of poor Dalits arriving in West Bengal tended to be more reliant upon the state than those refugees drawn from amongst the *bhadralok*, and therefore were more likely to be dispersed to poorly equipped resettlement camps situated at a distance from urban centres.[130] The West Bengal government justified their decision on the

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[128] 'Memorandum submitted by Ambedkar to the Cabinet Mission', pp. 178-179.

[129] Butalia, pp. 227-228; R. Kaur, *Since 1947: partition narratives among Punjabi migrants of Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[130] J. Chatterji, 'Dispersal and the failure of rehabilitation: refugee camp-dwellers and squatters in West Bengal', *MAS*, vol. 41, no. 5, 2007, pp. 955-1032; U. Sen, 'The myths refugees live by: memory and history in the making of Bengali refugee identity', *MAS*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2014, pp. 37-76 (pp. 69-72); Bandyopadhyay and Chaudhury, 'Partition, displacement, and the decline', pp. 68-69.

basis that they simply did not have enough land to resettle the Namasudra agriculturalists, but the decision to disperse might be equally considered an attempt to deny the Dalit refugee a demographically concentrated political constituency in the environs of Calcutta. As a result of partition and their subsequent migration and displacement, then, Bandyopadhyay and Chaudhury argue that Dalits lost the geographical anchorage in eastern Bengal that had previously buttressed their movement. Accordingly, the Namasudras were pushed into strategic support for the Congress and left-leaning political parties led by non-Dalit actors, and ensured that they identified as part of a broader 'refugee' movement, in which a separate Dalit political identity (and caste politics in postcolonial West Bengal more generally) came to be subsumed.[131]

Whilst many poor refugees from East Bengal were dispersed to faraway camps and former wastelands, others 'tended to cluster in agrarian, or semi-agrarian, tracts along the borders between the two Bengals'.[132] They chose to settle in the districts because of kinship ties and networks, or in the context of communal rioting, in which displaced refugees who crossed the border drove Muslims out of these districts and occupied their homes.[133] Most looked to scratch out a subsistence on smallholdings in the countryside. However, poor soil conditions meant many increasingly 'moved to towns or semi-urban tracts in order to supplement their living from the soil with other sorts of work'.[134] Undoubtedly, many of these refugee communities were drawn from caste Hindu communities. But it is worth noting that the Namasudras constituted the

[131] Bandyopadhyay and Chaudhury, 'Partition, displacement, and the decline', pp. 69-75.

[132] J. Chatterji, *The spoils of partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 123.

[133] Ibid., pp. 124-126.

[134] Ibid., p. 127.

largest proportion of the non-Muslim peasantry in East Bengal, who were now forced to migrate. Many of those who were able to avoid the ignominy of dispersal came to be heavily concentrated in such urban or semi-urban spaces. Ultimately, then, Dalits gradually became a significant political constituency as a consequence of their concentration in particular parts of the province, thereby realising aspects of Ambedkar's recognition of the significance of territorial clustering.[135] This has also diminished their otherwise problematic reliance on reserved seats. Praskanva Sinharay has pointed to the contemporary electoral strength of the Namasudras by describing the successes of the Matua Mahasangha (an organisation representing the Matua religious sect, primarily followed by Dalits in Bangladesh and West Bengal) in the 2009 general elections. Particularly important here was the territorial concentration of Dalits in the Bagda, Bangaon, and Gaighata divisions of North 24 Parganas district. This ensured all political parties had to adopt a '"politics of compensation" vis-à-vis the Mahasangha by providing material gifts and promising administrative support to flatter the community'.[136] Accordingly, 'It was evident that because of the sheer organisational strength of the Mahasangha in terms of votes, the identity of being a Matua could now "trump" the identity of an "illegal migrant"'.[137]

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[135] More research into the question of migration, resettlement, and voting patterns amongst Dalits in postcolonial India is required, particularly in the context of increasing Dalit migration from India's villages to urban and semi-urban settings after independence. Whilst this ultimately goes beyond the remit of this article, explorations of this nature certainly provide potentially profitable avenues for future scholarship.

[136] P. Sinharay, 'Building up the Harichand-Guruchand movement: the politics of the Matua Mahasangha', in *The politics of caste in West Bengal*, pp. 147-168 (p. 161); cf., Bandyopadhyay and Chaudhury,'Partition, displacement, and the decline', pp. 75-79.

[137] Sinharay, 'Building up the Harichard-Guruchand movement', p. 163.

We might also consider Ambedkar's scheme for Dalit resettlement in the context of his earlier imaginative thinking regarding partition. *Pakistan, or the partition of India* demonstrates that, unlike most prominent Congress and League politicians at the time, Ambedkar was already contemplating the possibility of the wholesale exchange of populations between India and Pakistan, from as early as 1945. Whilst Ambedkar recognised that partitioning Bengal and Punjab would potentially produce greater religious 'homogeneity', there was still the tricky question of the minorities left on the wrong side of each border. In Sind and the North-West Frontier, for example, 'there are no districts in which the Hindus … are concentrated. They are scattered and are to be found in almost every district of the two provinces in small, insignificant numbers … There is only one remedy and that is to shift the population'.[138] Ambedkar went on to elaborate a scheme for the exchange of populations between India and Pakistan upon independence. Whilst he mistakenly assumed that there would be little migration within Punjab and Bengal, Ambedkar proposed that a scheme of 'state-aided transfer' should be instituted by both new states for a limited period of time, applying to 'certain well defined minorities who on account of ethnic or religious differences are sure to be subjected to discrimination or victimisation'.[139] 'The machinery for effecting and facilitating the transfer of population' was to be agreed upon in a treaty between India and Pakistan and paid for by both states, thereby ensuring that minorities were able to move 'without impediment and without loss'.[140] Equally, he proposed that migrating families should be reimbursed by the state for the loss of immovable property. Ambedkar also recognised that many would choose to

[138] Ambedkar, *Pakistan, or the partition of India*, pp. 114-115.

[139] Ibid., p. 382.

[140] Ibid., pp. 380, 382.

stay on, using this to justify his belief that the scheme should be voluntary rather than compulsory: 'Men love property more than liberty. Many will prefer to endure tyranny at the hands of their political masters than change the habitat in which they are rooted'.[141] In proposing this scheme, then, Ambedkar sought to prove that resettlement, separation, and the exchange of populations, rather than being the 'staggering' and 'baffling problem' suggested by its critics, was ultimately both possible and achievable.[142]

Separate settlements continued to appear on the Dalit political agenda in the years after 1947. In their election manifesto of 1951, for example, the AISCF continued to promise to 'reserve land out of uncultivated land or reclaimed land for the benefit of landless labourers'.[143] In the context of linguistic reorganisation, Ambedkar's idea of separate settlements took on a somewhat altered form, but its territorial and demographic premises remained the same. In 1948, Ambedkar was in favour of creating a unitary province of Maharashtra that was capable of containing all Marathi speakers.[144] But by 1955, after becoming increasingly disillusioned with the kind of 'Pact politics' described earlier in this article, and conscious of the threat posed by the rising tide of Maratha majoritarianism, he had changed his mind. Ambedkar now argued that linguistic reorganisation could 'also mean that people speaking one language may be grouped under many States provided each State has under its jurisdiction people who are speaking one language'.[145] Accordingly, Ambedkar

[141] Ibid., p. 384.

[142] Ibid., p. 379.

[143] 'Election manifesto of the AISCF, by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar', n.d., in *BAWS*, vol. XVII, part II, pp. 393-394.

[144] Ambedkar, *Maharashtra as a linguistic province*, pp. 109-110..

[145] Ambedkar, *Thoughts on linguistic states*, p. 146.

fashioned a new plan for reorganisation in western India, whereby Marathi-speaking areas would be constituted into four new provinces: Maharashtra City State (Bombay); Western Maharashtra; Central Maharashtra; and Eastern Maharashtra. On the one hand, Ambedkar believed this would go some way towards ameliorating the economic inequalities that existed between the regions, in which each proposed province would be best placed to look after its own interests. If grouped together in a unitary province, Ambedkar claimed it was unlikely that the wealthier regions of Western and Eastern Maharashtra would be interested in the development of Central Maharashtra.[146] But the scheme also shared many similar characteristics to the demand for separate settlements for Dalits that had emerged a decade earlier. Creating four provinces, rather than one, was a tactic to counter the otherwise demographically negligible position of Dalits within an imagined Maharashtra: 'As the area of the State increases the proportion of the minority to the majority decreases … and the opportunities for the majority to practice tyranny over the minority becomes greater. The States must therefore be small'.[147] The division of a unitary Maharashtra was also premised on Ambedkar's idea that Bombay City would serve as a sanctuary for Dalits, because no community formed an outright majority in the city (Marathi speakers constituted around 48 per cent of the city's population at this time):

The minorities and the Scheduled Castes who are living in the village are constantly subjected to tyranny, oppression, and even murders by the members of the majority communities. The minorities need an asylum, a place of refuge where they can be free from the tyranny of the

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[146] Ibid., p. 161.

[147] Ibid., p. 165.

majority. If there was a United Maharashtra with Bombay included in it where can they go for safety?[148]

Ambedkar's proposal therefore drew upon both an idealised image of the emancipatory potential of migration to the metropolis, and his aforementioned critique of the village. Both of these ideas had been central to the wider Dalit imagination since the nineteenth century.[149] The idea of separate settlements also outlasted Ambedkar's death, appearing in the call for the allocation of wastelands to landless labourers in the charter of demands presented to the government by the Republican Party of India (the successor organisation to the AISCF) in 1964.[150] Rather than treating Ambedkar's demands for separate settlements and sites of sanctuary as hastily assembled and somewhat unsophisticated, or as simply a poor man's version of Pakistan, we might interpret them to be relatively refined attempts to solve the democratic conundrum that defined Dalit politics during this period. On the one hand, reserved seats, as a form of democratic commensuration, simply perpetuated Dalits' minority status and the political dominance of the caste Hindu majority. Under the terms of the Poona Pact, it was unlikely that Dalit politicians elected to office by a caste Hindu majority in any given constituency would be truly representative of wider Dalit opinion. On the other, an attempted alliance with other subjugated communities, along the lines of a Dalit-Muslim-Non-Brahman axis that was capable of potentially constituting a political majority, had collapsed in acrimony as Muslims and Marathas claimed majority status within rearranged

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[148] Ibid., pp. 157-158.

[149] Rao, *The caste question*, pp. 68-69; Cháirez-Garza, 'Touching space'.

[150] Zelliot, *Ambedkar's world*, pp. 208-209; Rawat, *Reconsidering untouchability*, p. 182.

provincial/national political arenas. Separate settlements theoretically provided one means to overcome this impasse, providing spaces where Dalits could constitute a majority of the population themselves. Although this would be incapable of ultimately challenging caste Hindu majoritarianism at the centre, or even in the provincial arena, it potentially provided localised spaces, or constituencies, where Dalits could either be elevated into positions of power or emerge as the beneficiaries of a 'politics of compensation' as a result of their sheer numbers.

Conclusion

Although Dalit demands for reallocation of wastelands continue to be occasionally articulated, the separate settlements imagined for Dalits by Ambedkar and the AISCF have yet to be comprehensively created. However, considering the reasons that lay behind the emergence of this demand in the context of the postcolonial transition has provided us with new insights into Dalit politics during this period. Rethinking space by redrawing administrative territory initially offered Ambedkar one potential pathway out of the Poona Pact impasse in which commensurative practices had become mired. Ambedkar's attempts to forge coalitions with other disadvantaged communities, which were capable of challenging Congress and high-caste Hindu dominance, emerged in this context. Yet, despite offering his support to both Pakistan and linguistic reorganisation at various historical junctures, Ambedkar was always somewhat ambivalent about their consequences. Whilst both could be considered as possible harbingers of greater democratic governance, Ambedkar believed they also increasingly raised the prospect of provincial forms of majoritarianism. The collapse of coalition making was a consequence of this shift in emphasis, away from

countrywide minority to provincial majority, and from community to nation, amongst some Muslim and non-Brahman representatives. In these circumstances, the demand for separate Dalit settlements can be perceived as a response to the failures of both commensuration *and* coalition in the context of provincialisation. In fact, they demonstrate an attempt by Ambedkar to employ a similar definition of democracy to that emphasised in the demands for Pakistan and Samyukta Maharashtra, based around a form of communal majoritarianism at an alternative scale and in an unconventional space.

Ambedkar recognised patterns of both closure and opportunity at the provincial level in late colonial India, as a consequence of the impact of 'provincialisation'. Provincialisation here might serve as shorthand to describe the dual processes of democratisation and territorialisation that occurred in interwar India, which mapped onto prevailing notions of the efficacy of community within Indian politics and society, and which provided fertile ground for the demands for Pakistan and linguistic reorganisation in subsequent decades. Focusing on provincialisation has provided not only a new site through which to examine the impact of territorial configurations upon Dalits, but also effectively historicises the relationship between provincial reorganisation and caste considered in the works of some contemporary political and social scientists. At the same time, the focus on provincialisation also allows us to think about the similar historical antecedents and processes that existed behind the emergence of majoritarian demands for Pakistan and linguistic reorganisation, as well as their impact on caste politics. Ambedkar most certainly responded to both the Pakistan demand and the call for Samyukta Maharashtra in an analogous manner: he initially expressed his support for what he supposed to be demands for greater democratisation, which promised to diminish the power of the high-caste Hindu in the

context of pact politics and coalition making; he went on to hedge this support with certain qualifications to protect minority interests; and he ultimately became increasingly concerned about the implications of both these demands for Dalit autonomy, to the extent that he sought alternative strategies of separation.

Finally, emphasising the manner in which territory mediates processes of democratisation also has wider implications beyond this article's South Asian setting. Ambedkar himself was aware of such parallels, and compared his proposals on separate settlements for Dalits with proto-apartheid measures that had been provided under the South African Native Trust and Land Act of 1936. In this partial telling, and before the full horrors of the apartheid regime had become evident to Ambedkar, the allocation of territory to black Africans or 'Bantus' was described positively, as safeguarding 'Bantu' interests through such separate administrative zones.[151] Interestingly, this paralleled a simultaneous move by apartheid apologists to describe the scheme as 'Bantustan', borrowing from the terminology of the contemporary Pakistan demand in an attempt to provide it with progressive connotations, despite the racial discrimination and forcible relocations that actually underpinned it.[152] At other times, Ambedkar and his contemporaries were to compare the socio-spatial segregation of Dalits with the experiences of the African-American and Jewish ghettos.[153] In *Pakistan, or the partition of India*, meanwhile, Ambedkar also referenced the 1923 agreement on population exchange between Greece and Turkey to resolve the 'minority problem' as a paradigm for India and Pakistan: 'Experience

[151] Ambedkar, 'Scheduled castes settlement be made at par with Bantus', p. 351.

[152] On the further interactions between South Africa and India at the United Nations in the context of the postcolonial transition, as well as their implications upon Dalit politics, see, Cháirez-Garza, 'Bound hand and foot', pp.

[153] Cháirez-Garza, 'Bound hand and foot', p. 14.

showed that safeguards did not save the minorities … the best way to solve it was for each to exchange its alien minorities within its border, for its own which was without its border, with a view to bring about homogeneous States'.[154] He dedicated an entire chapter of the book to 'the fate that has befallen other countries which, like India, harboured many nations and sought to harmonise them', drawing upon the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and Czechoslovakia as examples to illustrate this point.[155]

We can therefore place Ambedkar's attempts to reorganise territories and populations within a wider global logic of the early to mid-twentieth century, which emerged in the context of conflicts between communities within 'multi-national' spaces over the substance of democracy. The Armenian and Nazi genocides are the most obvious examples of the problems engendered by democratic majoritarianism, in which movements designed to represent 'the interests of the people' deliberately targeted, excluded and murdered minorities who did not cohere with their understanding of the ethnic nation. Yet, as both Ambedkar and, more recently, Michael Mann have pointed out, '[c]leansing by emigration was then officially ratified by the 1918 Peace Treaties', during which states were allocated to dominant ethnic groups.[156] Across the world, we continue to live under a dominant political system of liberal democracy, which, in the early twentieth century, 'made sacred a majoritarian and territorial form of sovereignty'.[157] Provincialisation in India, as a form of both territorialisation and democratisation, encouraged similar developments, in which political legitimacy was vested in the majority of 'the people' – whether

[154] Ambedkar, *Pakistan, or the partition of India*, p. 115.

[155] Ibid., p. 205.

[156] Michael Mann, 'The dark side of democracy: the modern tradition of ethnic and political cleansing', *New Left Review*, vol. 235, 1999, pp. 18-45 (p. 33).

[157] Ibid., p. 44.

understood on the basis of caste, language, or religion – at the expense of minority 'others'. Indeed, Ambedkar's schemes for resettlement might be seen as a milder form of cleansing, whether in the context of partition, linguistic reorganisation, or Dalit resettlement. Although justified to avoid a repeat of the situation in Europe, both the tragedy of partition and the continuing socio-spatial discrimination experienced by Dalits means that such schemes have most often succumbed to much of the same undesirable logic.