

INTRODUCTION

Beyond citizenship  
Adivasi and Dalit political pathways in India

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*Abstract:* Does the dominant, statist conception of citizenship offer a satisfying framework to study the politicization of subaltern classes? This dialectical exploration of the political movements that emerge from the suppressed margins of Indian society questions their relationship to the state and its outcomes from the point of view of emancipation. As this special section shows, political ethnographers of “insurgent citizenship” among Dalits and Adivasis offer a view from below. The articles illustrate the way political subjectivities are being produced on the ground by confronting, negotiating, but also exceeding the state and its policed frameworks.

*Keywords:* Adivasis, Dalits, India, insurgent citizenship, people’s movements, subaltern studies

All anthropological difference represents the universal in front of an enunciation that, by trying to “neutralize” it, “communitarizes” it, because it institutes citizenship as the community of the “normals,” the “civilized men,” the “responsible subjects,” and so on. That is why such voices sketch what will appear to us, in *fine*, as the differential of subjectivity thanks to which the universal becomes (or rather re-becomes), a political figure, enabling a citizenship that is constitutive and not ruled or imposed from above.

—Balibar 2011: 477, my translation from French

As a normative framework, citizenship is often superimposed by citizenship studies onto people’s movements that most of the time do not refer to this concept. In *On the Jewish question*, Karl Marx (1844) reminds us that whereas citizenship as a language of rights and political participation acts as a political ferment, it remains too narrow and egoistic in its bourgeois definition to cover the wider range of popular praxis and collective aspirations necessary for human emancipation in a larger sense.

More than ten years ago, Sthatis Kouvelakis sought to rehabilitate this early writing of Marx, which had received considerable criticism for its so-called anti-Semitism and totalitarianism, in order to warn us that “the current proliferation of the ‘citizen’ discourse, which contrasts sharply with its relative effacement in a preceding period nonetheless marked by the ‘advances’ of citizenship (essentially expressed, we should say, by the discourses of socialism and of the anticolonial revolution), far from being a para-



dox, must be seen as a symptom (albeit ambiguous) of disempowerment” (2005: 718).

Two radically opposed conceptions of citizenship seem to emerge from Kouvelakis’s critique of the dominant discourse of citizenship in the neoliberal era: one, emancipatory in nature, sustained by oppositional ideologies, while the other belongs to the dominant ideology. Kouvelakis argues that the real advances of citizenship are in fact sustained by emancipatory movements whose political horizons lie beyond citizenship while the ideologies that advocate citizenship for itself in fact sustain institutionalization processes that increase people’s subjection. Citizenship thus remains a deeply ideological, contested, and ambivalent terrain, the political or emancipatory potential of which nevertheless deserves our critical attention as political ethnographers and engaged observers of people’s movements.

The theoretical and empirical interest in citizenship that has been witnessed in the last two decades has focused on processes and practices that exclude or include more or less actively members in a given political community. While some authors have insisted on the manners in which citizens are made by states (Lukose 2005; Ong 1999), others have focused more on the articulation of these “top-down” processes of “being made” with processes of self-making (Lazar 2008; Ong 1996, 2006), sometimes moving beyond this dichotomy all together (Lazar and Nuijten 2013). Collectively, these works have contributed much to our understanding of how ordinary people frame and make demands of the state and contest its foreclosures. Underlining such radical claims on citizenship and the state by dispossessed or marginal citizens, James Holston’s study of “insurgent citizenship” in Lula’s political mobilization in Brazil (2008) represents the most straightforward attempt to emphasize the more contentious aspects of citizenship while overcoming the duality of people’s movements versus the state. Based on a dialectical approach of institutional processes and their creative uses by emerging subaltern forces, Holston shows that “the dominant historical formulations of citizenship both produce

and limit possible counter formulations. As a result, the insurgent and the entrenched remain conjoined in dangerous and corrosive entanglements” (Holston 2008: 4). Although radical appropriations of citizenship by the margins remain institutionally and discursively bound, “the insurgent disrupts: it remains conjoined with the entrenched, but in an unbalanced and corrosive entanglement that unsettles both state and society” (Holston 2008: 13).

Whether or not people’s movements seek political alternatives, their ideological encounters with governmental politics succeed at least in contesting the state’s attempts to monopolize the political process, thus making way for hybrid and creative political cultures of insurgent citizenship. Based on three case studies in India, this special section focuses on some of those intersections or gray zones.

Exploring this dialectical process as it unfolds in the margins of Indian society requires us to focus on people’s political praxis, in the domain of popular politics that Jürgen Habermas, quoting Günther Lottes’s work on British Jacobinism, characterizes as “the plebeian public sphere” (Habermas 1993: vi, my translation).<sup>1</sup> According to Lottes, “The plebeian public sphere is so to speak a bourgeois public sphere whose social presuppositions have been suspended” (Habermas 1993: vi, my translation). But does plebeian participation in the public sphere merely represent a sociological alteration of a domain ruled by bourgeois principles, as Habermas argues, or does this sociological breakthrough in the domain of bourgeois politics unsettle and alter bourgeois politics qualitatively, as Holston maintains? According to Habermas, popular politics contrasts with popular culture, since the latter does not simply exist in the shadow of elite culture, as popular politics does: popular culture thus has its own autonomy and represents “the periodically recurrent, under a violent or moderate form, of a counter-project as against the hierarchical world of power, its official ceremonies, its daily discipline” (1993: vii, my translation). The very notion of *political culture*, however, questions this dichotomy and invites us to look

less pessimistically at the creativity of people's politics.

Illustrating this pessimistic representation of Indian democracy, Partha Chatterjee (2004) thus opposes civil society, as the public domain of the elite, to political society as the popular and chaotic domain of "the politics of the governed." He portrays people's politics as exclusivist or, borrowing from Benedict Anderson's category, "bound serialities" based on primordial identities. This a priori theoretical mapping, however, fails to perceive and give theoretical salience to the universality that also irrigates popular ideologies.<sup>2</sup> Paradoxically, while the Subalternist school to which Chatterjee belongs has developed a populist line of thought, such a dichotomy betrays an elitist point of view, along the lines of what French sociologists Claude Grignon and Jean-Claude Passeron (1989) have called "domino-centrism" / "legitimism" / "miserabilism," in opposition to "populism." Although the Subalternist paradigm has valorized peasant culture's rebellious manifestations, it has consistently denigrated the attempt by subalterns to adopt modern political means and ideas. While focusing on peasant revolts in the 1920s, the early Subaltern studies collective thus systematically kept silent on the mobilizations of the Dalit movement in the same period. Sadly, although it promised to provide a popular alternative to nationalist historiography, when it comes to the Dalit movement it replicated a similar bias by erasing its distinct political voice from its historiography, the populist paradigm of which it did not fit. Whether nationalist or Subalternist, Indian historiography has been consistent in its elitist recruitment among urban, upper-caste intelligentsias and in its manner of treating the anti-caste movement as a symptom of colonial alienation.

Dalit and Adivasi populations are respectively 16.5 and 8 percent, together a quarter, of the Indian population. Although they differ from one another, as well as internally, their political movements together tell a distinct story. Studying their political experiments requires the collection of empirical knowledge, ethnographic engagement, and reflexivity as well as a more in-

tegrated or "bottom up" rather than "top down" approach to conceptualization.

Unlike religious minorities—who can be equally disadvantaged, as the 2006 Sachar Committee Report on Indian Muslims highlighted—Dalits and Adivasis have been institutionalized respectively through state categories of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for the purpose of affirmative action policies (see Shah and Shneiderman 2013). Their politics has thus remained under the tentative hold of the state, perhaps with more efficiency for the Dalits than for the Adivasis. The very word "Dalit," for instance, which means "crushed" or "oppressed," is emblematic of a constitutive tension of Dalit emancipation. Propagated in the early 1970s by the revolutionary Dalit Panther movement which was itself inspired by US black radicalism, the term "Dalit" was intended to gather all victims of caste oppression and exploitation ("untouchables," workers and peasants, women, and so on) under the banner of emancipation. However, since their organizations are composed of "untouchables" exclusively, it rapidly became a politicized equivalent of the official term "Scheduled Castes," designating those officially recognized as "untouchables" only. While historically contesting Gandhi's more consensual and charitable term "Harijan" ("god's people," designating the same "untouchable" populations), it has today inherited the same stigmatizing connotations, due to its association with state welfare and positive discrimination. The way Dalit and Adivasi activists reflect and theorize on the stigmas of state welfare and position themselves vis-à-vis the categories that the state creates for the implementation of these measures can help us to better understand the importance for them of a liberal discourse of political equality.

### **A political perspective on Adivasis and Dalits' encounters with the state**

It has been argued that citizenship represents the corner stone of participation to public life in India (Jayal 2013). However, what remains

unacknowledged is the extent to which Dalit and Adivasi movements and their interplays with the official domain also undermine state-centered politics and official norms. Does poor people's politics open up alternative forms of politics?

Dalits and Adivasis' political movements bring to our attention powerful indigenous interpretations of political participation that challenge their social exclusion, political subjection, and economic exploitation under the present regime. The spectrum is large and covers political parties, social organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and even, in the present perspective, armed struggles. Therefore their emancipatory politics do not gravitate only around the categories of the liberal state. Through their participation in socio-political movements and organizations or their sustenance of alternative political structures, Adivasi and Dalit activists have engaged in little noticed, but nevertheless impassioned and momentous reclamations of equality in which they have contested centuries-old exploitation, inferiorization, discrimination, and marginalization. Whether the official definition of citizenship is legal and fitting or not, these political voices entail alternative ways of doing politics and conceptions of democracy for which the liberal state's conception of citizenship alone does not account. But should we stick to this institutional definition of citizenship? Reminding us of the revolutionary conception of citizenship that can be traced back to the French Revolution, Etienne Balibar in fact reminds us that "the citizen can be simultaneously considered as the constitutive member of the state and as the actor of a revolution. Not only the actor of a founding revolution, the tabula rasa from where a state arises, but as the actor of a *permanent* revolution" (2011: 64–65, my translation).

After independence, the Indian poor in general, but Adivasis and Dalits in particular, have been stereotyped by official discourse as archaic anthropological subjects who had to be reformed in order to become proper citizens. Thomas Hansen reminds us that "for decades,

the new state thus carried on the fundamental double discourse that governed middle-class *society* through law and rational procedure, and ruled popular *communities* through rather repressive means and through the long-standing connivance and shared political imaginaries of local social elites and the local representatives of the state" (1999: 46). The Nehruvian state defined the poor "populations" as problematic entities whose lives represented an impediment to the nation's progress, thus justifying these populations remaining under a state of subjection and fostering an authoritarian model of development. As Perry Anderson's iconoclastic criticism of Nehru reminds us, "where the popular will failed to coincide with the nation as he imagined it, he suppressed it without remorse" (2012: 133). Moreover, citizenship came to be valorized in terms of social work by the enlightened elite, a task formerly attributed by Gandhi to the urban-caste Hindus and that targeted the poor Dalit and Tribals as the prime objects of reform. Welfare and positive discrimination programs to reach out to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) became the material basis of this state-sponsored social work, which mainly facilitated access to those benefits through brokerage with the administrations.

Positive discrimination in the way of quotas,<sup>3</sup> which officially provided for the inclusion of these categories in the elected assemblies and the administration, in fact became the main means at the disposal of the state and the conservative ruling class to turn potentially contentious citizens into subjects through clientelistic redistribution of these benefits. Along with other welfare resources that were made available to SCs and STs, the distribution of reserved administrative jobs through clientelistic and caste-based networks of the Congress Party became the material basis and the incentive around which electoral vote banks were formed. Therefore, state policies in favor of SCs and STs became practically redefined by the ruling class as means of subjection rather than emancipation. Conservative critiques of quota policies

have emphasized the “selfishness” of those SCs and STs who benefited from these quotas and stereotyped them as the “creamy layer.” However, reserved jobs also became politically interpreted by these communities as resources to build their political autonomy. In the Dalit case, for instance, their historical leader Ambedkar insisted on a political role for the subaltern elite (Jaoul 2007). Ambedkar insisted on the role of Dalit government servants as a political vanguard of their communities. Once having committed themselves fully to Dalit emancipation by adopting Navayana Buddhism as their new religion, their responsibility was to spark political consciousness among the Dalit masses and to promote education and progress. This politicized communitarian elite rejected the Gandhian model, which could conceive of Dalits only as beneficiaries of charity and welfare, and portrayed themselves as the true upholders of the republican values of citizenship. While criticizing the hypocrisy of the Brahminical ruling class, the Ambedkarite movement therefore emphasizes the value of political equality per se as a true egalitarian solution for those who were treated as inferior human beings for millenniums. Inside the movement, the debate whether or not to integrate economic factors and class into the critique of caste has been constant. This is clear from Ambedkar’s own fluctuations between class-based and caste-based electoral mobilizations (Jaffrelot 2004), before he eventually opted for religious conversion to Buddhism as the most decisive means to achieve emancipation from caste and class domination simultaneously. This internal debate was given a new lease on life by Marxist influence on the Dalit Panthers in the 1970s (Contursi 1993). More recently, the Ambedkarite Marxist intellectual Anand Teltumbde has pleaded for the integration of the Ambedkarite movement with the Left, based on two main arguments. First, he criticizes the Dalit movement’s obsession with the culturalist critique of Brahminism, which he sees as irrelevant to the present scenario where the non-Brahminical intermediate castes have become the most vehement perpetrators of anti-

Dalit violence. Second, he criticizes its commitment to legal means of struggle as irrelevant, since as these events of caste violence systematically reveal, the state itself becomes an instrument of caste oppression (Teltumbde 2010). While agreeing on the importance of the abstract concept of political equality as a significant symbolic resource for Dalit emancipation, the internal discussions of the anti-caste movement have therefore constantly specified the oppression that they faced and interrogated its gender, economic, cultural, and institutional dimensions.

Compared to the Dalits, Adivasis have a different, much more violent, and distant experience of the state. While Dalits’ inclusion in the caste system and agrarian economy facilitated their integration into the caste-based electoral clientele of the Congress Party, Adivasis have remained more cut off socially and territorially. In the hills and forests of central and eastern India, until recent years the experience of the state has proved much more coercive. In contrast with the Dalit subaltern elite, which has provided an internal mediation with the state, Adivasis have kept the state away to a larger extent (Shah 2010), whether through creative strategies to evade the payment of revenue (Gell 1997) or by joining the Maoist armed insurgency. In this context, emancipatory politics’ relationship to liberal notions of citizenship remains more questionable (Shah 2013a). However, these values are not absent from their struggles. On the one hand, they are being pushed forward by elite-based civil and human rights activists’ reports denouncing state repression and human rights’ violations (Shah 2013a). On the other hand, as Alf Gunvald Nilsen’s article in this special section shows, these values are actively propagated by Adivasi mobilizations’ “understanding of the state as an institution that derives its powers, its legitimacy, and indeed its very being from citizens and their participation in democratic processes.” Indeed, Nilsen shows with the Adivasi organization that he studies that the state became understood as “accountable to subaltern groups,” who thus asserted their citizenship against the grain of the

ongoing regimes of subjection whose roots are in colonial governmentality. The ability for the people's *sangathan* (organization) to display its strength vis-à-vis the state was a major factor in reclaiming citizenship rights, the emotional aspects of which in overcoming fear from the state Nilsen highlights.

Whether elite- or mass-based, what these references to citizenship have in common, therefore, is the determination to resist colonial patterns and methods of state rule over disenfranchised populations that were kept intact by independent India's ruling class. Adivasi movements mostly deal with the violence of the developmental state, leading to large-scale evictions for the sake of building dams or large-scale capitalist mining projects promoted by the state in previously undeveloped forest zones—what David Harvey (2003) designates as capitalist “accumulation by dispossession.” Dalit organizations, in contrast, mostly contest caste biases in implementation of government schemes and laws to protect them. This generalization, however, needs to be made cautiously. In her political ethnography of Kerala, Luisa Steur, for instance, highlights the manners in which Ambedkarite and Communist ideologies influence Adivasi-led movements and how these ideologies hence remain open to politically relevant “subaltern appropriations” (2011: 107). In more recent work, she in turn highlights the existence of Dalit-led resistance against accumulation by dispossession in discussing the case of Dalit villagers' resisting the destruction of their communal forest by the French Michelin Company in Tamil Nadu (Steur 2015). What Adivasi and Dalit insurgent citizens have in common, despite the different sources of their discontent, is their challenge to being treated merely as governed subjects. Their movements instead seek to produce engaged citizens, for whom citizenship is informed by ideological understandings of what a truly Indian democracy ought to be and by their active participation to public life.

On the ideological plane, “insurgent citizens” of India indeed are varied—they refer to Maoism, Ambedkarism, environmentalism, in-

digenism (in its several variations [Steur 2011]), and radical interpretations of Gandhism, for instance—and their relationship to the state can be differentiated in terms of their varying degree of continuity and discontinuity with the national project of the state and its regulatory normative framework. On the one hand, Maoists, like other separatist rebels, break away from the state and propose alternative state projects that aim at supplanting the official regime. Thus in the forest strongholds of Dantewada under Maoist control, “citizenship of the Maoist state comes at the cost, both good and bad, of citizenship of the Indian state” (Sundar 2014: 477).

At the other end of the spectrum, the Ambedkarites' legalistic movement fully adheres and even attributes some form of sanctity to the Indian Constitution that was written by Ambedkar, whose unfaithful and biased implementation by the ruling class they condemn. The microhistories and ethnographies of Dalits' and Adivasis' encounters with citizenship and the state can thus help us grasp the various ways in which the permanent revolution of the Dalits and Adivasis is kept alive. Our aim is therefore to highlight dialectically the possibilities of contesting the foreclosures of the state's “citizen-subject” (Balibar 2011) through a political process of appropriation, alteration, and vigilance.

As noted by Holston, “insurgent citizenship” inevitably intersects with the state's “entrenched citizenship” and reproduces certain of its limitations. In India political participation is often premised on certain minimum levels of education, while a large portion of unprivileged communities remain illiterate (as a result of the state's initial failure to make education compulsory for all).<sup>4</sup> Political organizations give responsibilities to educated and upwardly mobile individuals among Adivasis and Dalits. The educated, aspiring “insurgent citizen” challenges the cultural norms of the “respectable citizen” who has historically been synonymous with an upper-caste urban male. The anti-Brahminical movement provides a telling case in which non-Brahminical sections of society (Dalits, Other Backward Castes Adivasis, and religious minorities) are

brought together tentatively as a new democratic majority contesting the political domination of the upper castes. Brahminical culture or “Brahmanwad” (Brahmin rule) is denounced as an undemocratic legacy undermining and neutralizing the official democratic values of the Indian state. This political culture is shaped by popular praxis and ideology, involving devotional practices, caste networks, and popular forms of sociability that bridge the idea of citizenship to the life world of the subaltern. Their dependence on the relatively better-off sections in their communities sustain a certain form of elitism within subaltern communities. Although their manner of building authority reproduces internal forms of class and gender domination, these movements nevertheless enable a relative democratization of the political process by seeking the participation of women and less educated people from their communities. As I discuss below, these intentions nevertheless remain fraught with obstacles. At the cultural level, traditional artists, writers, and performers play a major role in the vernacularization of these counterhegemonic political ideologies. For example, the popular statues crafted by roadside artisans of Ambedkar wearing a suit and tie and holding the Constitution exemplify quite tellingly how ideas of citizenship can be materialized and the state rendered as a sympathetic and accessible entity by the local Dalit movements, thus creating potent images of and for democratization (Jaoul 2006).

Ignoring these dialectical possibilities in favor of a binary paradigm of peasant resistance to the colonial state, the Subaltern studies collective in India has discarded the possibilities of a finer understanding of the state’s impact on the peasant lifeworld. As Uday Chandra argues, Ranajit Guha’s emblematic book *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* typically represents the Adivasis as the most “quintessential subaltern radicals defending older, nobler ways of life” (Chandra forthcoming: 1). As far as contemporary Adivasi acts of/movements of resistance are concerned, in spite of the strategic essentialism that may be at stake, one needs to

focus on these acts’/movements’ entanglements with state categories and hierarchies. As Chandra rightly points out, the “state and ‘tribe,’ paradoxically, constitute each other over time in the margins of modern India,” while “subaltern resistance, whether violent or peaceful, is best understood as the negotiation, not negation, of modern state power” (3).

Systematically equating the popular relationship to the state with resistance does not permit us to grasp the more subtle and ambivalent manners in which this relationship gets transformed in the course of politicization. While adopting political means, people do not merely (even if they do sometimes) mock or make merry of the state and modernity as Ashis Nandy believes (Nandy and Jahanbegloo 2006). In fact, as Julien Bonhomme and I argued in a study of the popular representations of statesmen in different parts of the world, subalterns also seek to appropriate parcels of the state’s aesthetics of authority for other means, whether for political or ritual purposes (Bonhomme and Jaoul 2010). Therefore, one is prompted to look at what specific popular uses are made of the state’s values and hierarchies. To what extent can the appropriation of the state’s symbolic resources inform resistance to the social order? We need therefore to highlight and understand how the state and its culture of officialdom feature in Dalit/Adivasi emancipatory projects and for which purposes.

The Ambedkarite movement reveals that the official realm is not apprehended only negatively by Dalits as control and discipline, but that it can also be relied on positively as a set of prestigious official values with democratic content that sustains their cultural critique of caste. Dalit intellectuals, who are deprived of intellectual legitimacy by the Brahminical tradition, often build their political authority by emphasizing their positions in bureaucratic hierarchies (diplomas, titles, positions occupied in the administration). Likewise, although the Maoists contest the legitimacy of the Indian state, their partisan hierarchies value the intellectual knowledge delivered by state universities. Nandini Sundar has highlighted the manner in which

“the Indian state and the incipient Maoist state in central India mimic while repudiating each other.” In fact, this happens not only when the state adopts the guerilla tactics of the Maoists, but also when in their strongholds, “the Maoists mimic state practices of governmentality” (Sundar 2014: 469). Paradoxically, even though alternatives are being pursued, state hierarchies are thus given a new lease on life in the margins of the state by those very organizations that seek to create an alternative political order, pointing to subtle influences of the state on people’s movements. Looking at how discourses of emancipation are perceived by those directly concerned, Roy’s article in this special section points to a fundamental tension between the discourse of emancipation, which is devised from above, and the subaltern’s refusal to be dominated by those who preach those ideas.

In opposition to the views of activists, who seem to consider that emancipation is achieved once the subalterns obey their injunctions, Indrajit Roy emphasizes that the laboring Musahar populations “did not uncritically accept the ideas of emancipation that emanate from the ideologues of these organizations.” Instead, they insisted on advancing their own views of a “better world,” to which idioms of social equality, respect, and dignity were central. This, Roy argues, “indicates the extent to which they believe themselves to be socially equal to the party functionaries and the ideologues of emancipation.”

Studying these little-acknowledged struggles that characterize the subaltern’s relationship with their organizations often points to resistance to persisting inequalities within emancipatory projects themselves. These struggles between intellectuals and educated activists, on the one hand, and peasants, on the other, highlight a form of peasant resistance against those activists who have been schooled, are aware of laws, and often embody state values and norms, thus distinguishing themselves from the marginal populations from which they sometimes hail. The passionate debates that Roy witnessed in North Bihar regarding the will of activists to celebrate the Musahar caste’s main festival on a

unique date, while Musahar villagers insisted on celebrating on different dates in different hamlets, is significant of the former’s internalization of state norms through a unified calendar. On the one hand, the attempt “to erase the different dates that prevailed in different hamlets so that they might present a unified force in demanding recognition of their cultural distinctiveness from the state government ... enables members of the Musahar community to assert their equality against members of the privileged communities.” But on the other hand, the rationalization that political culture entails also means the penetration of state norms among the subalterns. The outcome, however, need not necessarily be subjection. Rather than simply signifying the internalization of the state’s norms and practices, there is a creative aspect in these popular imitations of the state that transform, alter, and democratize to a considerable extent what they imitate. Sundar points to the manner in which the state, in the context of Chhattisgarh’s state-led counterinsurgency against the Maoists, has lost the battle on the terrain of principles: “By its willful violation of laws governing land acquisition and human rights in Adivasi areas, the government has ceded the principles on which the Indian Constitution is founded to the Maoists” (Sundar 2014: 470). In a different manner, the central place given to the Indian Constitution in Ambedkarite iconography also reveals a manner of challenging the state’s monopoly on democratic values.

### **From social marginality to political centrality: Reconsidering anthropological difference**

As a matter of fact, do bourgeois ideals of political equality remain *essentially* bourgeois once appropriated, reformulated, given concrete implications, and embodied by the margins? Insurgent citizenship in fact defines a workspace of equality that requires our attention.

In his contribution to this special section, Nil-sen argues that “the politics of insurgent citizen-

ship might be thought of as a form of 'catalytic work' that opens up a field of political possibility and can constitute a foundation on which counterhegemonic imaginaries can be constructed." Nilsen shows that tribal political assertion involves emotional work that challenges the bourgeois understanding of the citizen as a pure embodiment of reason. My own article shows that Ambedkar's demanding politics of Dalit emancipation has led him to create a new religion named Navayana Buddhism, which seeks to integrate under the label of "religion" both liberal notions and a more encompassing Marxist view of human emancipation. By adopting religion as a means toward emancipation, Ambedkar not only sought to undermine the religious foundations of caste hierarchy. He also took exception to the limitations of state policies and state power in order to abolish caste. However, I show that the mediation of religion has its own logic and effects. This brings up a fundamental tension in the Navayana movement, between the necessity of ritualization in order for Navayana Buddhism to obtain social recognition as "religion" and a more secular interpretation. Although one of the important implications of the Navayana movement consists of blurring the frontier between "religion" and "politics," "public" and "private," it also entails the "complication of the political" (Abensour 2000: 43) that any utopian discourse implies. These difficulties can be observed concretely at work through the issues faced by Ambedkarite activists when putting Navayana into practice, especially in the domestic sphere, where it meets resistance and generates compromises with popular religiosity. Therefore, Navayana represents neither an orientalized version of citizenship nor a form of crypto-Marxism. My article argues that to understand it fully, one has to go beyond these secular interpretations and take seriously its claim to religious status. Therefore, Navayana teaches us that when appropriated by the margins, not only does the bourgeois concept of political equality converge with Marxism, but its anchorage in subaltern life also questions our conventions.

Kouvelakis attracts our attention to the fact that the language of abstraction that characterizes liberal political discourse often acts as a veil that hides its own particularisms ("the particularism of white, male, colonizing property owners" [2005: 712]). People's struggles, on the contrary, entail a deabstraction whereby these values acquire concrete implications and meanings by unsettling patterns of domination and exploitation in everyday life. Thus "the 'reiteration' of 'abstract' utterances must itself be seen more as their *transformation* than as their sheer repetition" (712). Indeed, "the struggles of dominated peoples, even when they are expressed in terms of right and rights, *exceed* right; they speak, in the final analysis, of something else" (717).

Contemporary French Marxist political philosophers have stressed the political relevance for society at large of reclaiming political equality from the margins. Jacques Rancière argues that the subject of political emancipation is a historically contingent, unpredictable political subject whose formation is premised on the periodical renewal of political actors and of the shapes taken by their actions (1998: 111). He argues that when a marginal subject becomes identified with the political destiny of the whole community and the common good, it achieves universality. The passage from particularity to universality therefore represents the essence of political emancipation according to Rancière. Balibar's passage, quoted at the beginning of this introduction, similarly overturns the discourse of anthropological difference, which aims to disqualify politically by attributing political salience to these very categories of exclusion and relocating them as the putative centers of a political revolution (2011: 477).

The political ethnography of India's highly differentiated and segmented subaltern classes, however, shows us that in spite of the theoretical relevance of such perspectives from the margins, projects of emancipation that seek to reinscribe citizenship with their own political projects and ideologies see their universal claims negated socially. Outside commentators belonging to dom-

inant sections of society disqualify such projects as confined to the defense of their communities' particular interests and particular views. Hence the anti-caste movement is generally addressed in India as the "Dalit movement," restricting its scope and ambitions to establish a casteless society. Opposition even extends to accusations of "casteism" for bringing the caste question back into the public domain. Another set of complications, more internal, derives from the sociological or anthropological differentiation of these groups' social bases. Since Dalits and Adivasis are themselves differentiated in terms of religion, tribe/caste, class, gender, age, and so on, their politics stumbles across divisions and internal forms of domination that constantly threaten to undermine and limit its scope. Certain Dalit castes like Chamars and Mahars with higher emphasis on education and upward mobility have developed traditional affiliations with the Ambedkarite movement, while other Dalit castes became marginalized in the movement itself and have therefore been more prone to join mainstream parties.

It is also undeniable that these movements often reproduce or even themselves contribute to certain forms of exclusion. Adivasi and Dalit individuals taking responsibility in their organizations are generally the ones who have embarked on upward mobility. Their emergence as community leaders not only contributes to some forms of political domination over their poorer and lesser educated counterparts but also fundamentally affects gender dynamics, to the detriment of women, whose levels of illiteracy are higher. Moreover, middle-class Adivasi and Dalit activists, who tend to dominate the organizations in various movements, often promote puritan norms and female seclusion, to the detriment of the relatively higher gender equality among these subaltern groups (Shah 2010). The internal hegemony that organizations seek to achieve by building their authority and seeking obedience can also create adversity, and even backlash, from within and can produce opponents and betrayers of the movement (Shah 2013b).

While these movements challenge their communities' traditional authorities and hierarchies, themselves often sustained by the power that the latter derive from political affiliations to mainstream parties (as in the case of tribal "gerontocracy" highlighted by Chandra [forthcoming]), these movements also reinforce other, perhaps more contemporary, forms of domination that operate in society at large. Therefore, as Roy and I argue in our respective contributions to this issue, there is a need to highlight the forms of resistance adopted by dominated sections of the mobilized community (the illiterate, women, poor, and so on). Since it is easy for hegemonic forces to take advantage of them, they pose one of the greatest challenges facing Dalit and Adivasi organizations. Therefore, the incorporation of internally suppressed voices of the community's internally dominated categories (women, the poor, youth) represents the best opportunity for such movements to bring their politics closer to the universal horizon of emancipation as an unlimited process of permanent revolution.

Last but not least, Nilsen rightly reminds us that "material deprivation is closely intertwined with political subordination" and that these political dynamics have achieved little in terms of socio-economic improvement. This raises "questions about the extent to which subaltern mobilizations around citizenship in India have in fact resulted in the kind of democratic deepening that would be required" (p. 32) for substantial change to follow political awakening. At the political level itself, one may also note that the permanent revolutions that can be witnessed across certain times and places will fail to alter India's class structure more effectively if these struggles remain scattered and without a common front.

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## Notes

1. “La sphère publique plébéienne est pour ainsi dire une sphère publique bourgeoise dont les présuppositions sociales ont été suspendues.” This quotation is from the foreword to the second French edition of Habermas’s classical book.
2. “Unlike the utopian claims of universalist nationalism, the politics of heterogeneity can never claim to yield a general formula for all peoples at all times: its solutions are always strategic, contextual, historically specific and, inevitably, provisional” (Chatterjee 2004: 22). It remains to me unclear why Chatterjee endorses this thesis of Benedict Anderson, since earlier in his book he criticizes Anderson’s dichotomy between ethnicity and nationalism for attributing universality to the latter only (4–6).
3. Scheduled Castes obtained quotas in administrative jobs in the wake of Ambedkar’s protracted struggle for minority status in the early 1930s (or rather as a compromise solution once this status was canceled in the 1932 Poona Pact due to Gandhi’s fast against it). These public job quotas were officially readopted after independence, and extended to the Scheduled Tribes, in proportion to their percentage in the population, as is also the case for the SCs. Although they were initially supposed to last only for a renewable period of ten years, they were reconducted ever since on the ground of persisting inequality.
4. It was not before 2009 that the Indian parliament adopted the “Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act” for children between 6 and 14 years old. While its implementation still remained largely incomplete, in 2015, a new amendment to the law on child labor has diluted this official commitment to education for all by rehabilitating work in “family industries” for children under 14.

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