

ETHNIC DOMINATION UNDER LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

How is ethnic domination produced, legitimised, and sustained under conditions of liberal democracy? This paper engages with this problem and provides a reconceptualisation that draws on the experience of Sri Lanka. Ethnic domination is typically understood in terms of a liberal normative framework, through the lens of the state, or primarily in terms of the one-sided coercive power of the dominant group. This paper points instead to the importance of looking into inner processes, moral frameworks, and the way these are acted upon by contending ethnic groups. Instead of outcome typologies such as “ethnic democracy” and “ethnocracy”, it emphasises the need to look beyond and below the state, and in particular, at the mechanisms through which stable hierarchies are produced.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka's first post-war census in 2012 reported that the Sinhalese were 75 percent, and the Sinhala-Buddhists, a 70 percent majority in the island, compared to Sri Lanka Tamils, Muslims and Indian Tamils, who formed 11 percent, 9 percent and 4 percent respectively (Department of Census and Statistics 2012). How are ethnic relations constructed and regulated in this scenario? How do these groups relate to one another socially and politically?

The answer to this question at one level lies in terms of the state and its constitutive principles. Sri Lanka has a liberal democratic constitution in which all individuals, irrespective of ethnic origin or religion, are provided and guaranteed equal citizenship rights. The post-colonial state constitutes itself as a paternalistic neutral arbiter that stands above a plural and divided society of equal individuals to protect, promote, and adjudicate. Leaving aside the widely cited, but relatively symbolic mention of Buddhism, Sri Lanka's 1978 constitution and its subsequent amendments explicitly provide for equality in article 12 on fundamental rights, 14 on religion and language, chapter 4 on national language, and article 27(6) of the directive principles (Sri Lanka Const. 1978, Wilson 1980, Shastri 2005, Welikala 2015, Schonthal 2016).

With the authority of a well established set of state institutions, including the judiciary, police, and independent commissions of oversight, many elements of this governance superstructure are designed to mould and regulate society. The state is formally required to ensure that a Tamil, Muslim, or Christian is treated on the basis of their citizenship, rather than on their religion or ethnicity, and is provided the same status, freedoms and protections as a Sinhala Buddhist.

But in practice, some people are more equal than others. De jure provisions that inscribe equality often fail to translate into de facto lived outcomes. The state has often proven to be ineffective in upholding or protecting the equal rights of minorities, and has on the contrary, been charged with partisan complicity. Ethnic relations are fraught with tension and have for long been the most significant systemic political fault-line in society (Wriggins 1960, Kearney 1967, Roberts 1978, Arasaratnam 1986, Tambiah 1986, Manogaran 1987, Spencer 1990, De Silva 2000). Tamils and Muslims routinely feel the burden of being a lesser category of citizen. In terms of language, culture, religion, or access to land, security, education, employment, and public services, or their treatment by the security forces, judicial system, and other arms of the state, there are many dimensions through which minorities perceive their lesser status.

How did this happen? By what process did a polity constituted of equal citizens in theory become transformed into an ethnically segmented hierarchy in practice? Why did the constitutional provisions and the state apparatus fail to prevent the ethnic conflict escalating into a deadly civil war, or to protect citizens of minority communities? How did the state that was designed to enshrine equality become institutionally complicit in producing and promoting this inequality? What reforms can be made to redress this and how can equal citizenship rights be restored?

Questions like this are at the forefront of contemporary debates on minority rights at a time when majoritarian ethno-populism is politically ascendant in many countries. But it is important to consider that this framing largely prejudges the answer, because it takes constitutional liberalism not just as a normative ideal, but as the natural state of being. That

is, the implicit assumption is that the equality of all under a liberal governance regime is the norm, so that it is inequality that is scrutinised and pathologised as an abnormality in need of correction. If instead one were to start with the actually-existing state of ethnic relations rather than with an utopian-normative ideal, then it opens up the problem in a different direction, and leads to a different set of insights.

One would then have to start with the uncomfortable observation that ethnic majority domination, or the relational ordering of ethnic communities into stable hierarchies is not an aberration but the prevalent reality (Lustick 1979). It is present not just in the regional neighbourhood with countries of similar heritage such as India, Pakistan, Myanmar, or Malaysia, but also in mature western liberal democracies where the demos purportedly presides over the ethnos. Andreas Wimmer similarly observes that an element of ethno-national dominance is one of the essential characteristics of the modern nation state (Wimmer 2004). McGarry & O'Leary describe a process of "hegemonic control", through coercion or co-option as "the most common mode through which multi-ethnic societies have been stabilized in world history" (McGarry and O'Leary 1994).

Ethnic domination exists in its more exposed form in monarchies, explicitly non-liberal regimes, or in the herrenvolk democracies where rights and entitlements are more openly stratified by ethnicity, race, religion, or proximity to a ruling clan. The more analytically challenging task is to explain how it functions in the presence of a liberal democratic framework, in which citizenship and political participation is nominally de-ethnicised on an equal, individual basis. That adds a significant additional layer of complexity in articulating and theorising the triangular relationship between the majority, minority and the state. This paper draws on the experience of modern Sri Lanka as an entry point to conduct a broader reflection on the problem of ethnic domination in liberal democracy. How is it produced, stabilised, and legitimised? On what basis do the minorities accept their subordinate position? What are its limits and tipping points? In addressing these questions, the paper also provides a critique of some of the influential conceptualisations at hand such as "ethnic democracy" and "ethnocracy". It points instead to the importance of looking into inner processes instead of outcome typologies, looking beyond and below the state, and in particular, at the mechanisms through which stable hierarchies are produced. These are very broad and far-reaching problems, so that it will be possible only to present a broad and synoptic outline here of the problem in the space available.

Before proceeding, it is important to address some matters of terminological and contextual housekeeping. The term "ethnic" here is not uncontroversial and requires some explanation. One has firstly to be mindful of Rogers Brubaker's (2004) critique of groupism, and of using the vocabulary that is self-generated within the field of study as a category of analysis. Ethnicity is not that which explains, but that which is in need of explanation. To use it without due care is to reify and reproduce it. Unfortunately, this is not an easy problem to transcend because of the subject matter of this paper, and the way that the term ethnicity has become commonplace in the reference literature under critical engagement. There is no easy alternative term that could adequately substitute without making the text cumbersome and even obscure.

The relevance of using ethnicity and ethnic categories is also significant because of the evolving nature of this term in the literature vis-a-vis related terminology such as race, religion, caste or nation. Many of these terms have, as Donald Horowitz (2000) describes, a "family resemblance", in terms of the policy-relevant dilemmas they pose in the management

of conflicts within pluralistic societies. For example, “confessionalism” in Lebanon, “sectarianism” in Northern Ireland and “communalism” in India are all localized monikers for group conflicts based on religious communities. As a result, many scholars working on comparative politics have opted to elide these differences by using “ethnic” conflict as an over-arching term of convenience that conceptually equates these different terms. Using this terminology is thus, with due caveats, still valuable in working comparatively and engaging with the broader literature.

The study of ethnic domination is at one level facile as a self-evident reality in the everyday life and political history of most multi-ethnic environments. But it is also challenging in ways that reflect the nature and operation of this phenomenon. The possibility of studying ethnic domination is constrained by the way it presents itself as a problem for the liberal conscience, so that much of the writing is normative, ethical, and even polemical in tone, in ways that seem to overwhelm or pre-determine the analytical content. While it would be futile to pretend that it is possible to transcend ethical preconceptions, the intention here is to engage with the world as it is, rather than as it ought to be.

In a country like Sri Lanka, where liberal democratic norms have a long tradition, and where equal rights are widely embraced and defended, the idea that one’s position in society is determined on the basis of an ethnic stratification is on the one hand disturbing, and even shocking. But on the other hand, it is also so self-evident a reality that it needs no explanation. As Ashley Doane (1997) explains in the case of white Americans, the domination of ethnic majority communities is invisible and taken for granted. The equation of the dominant group’s culture with the state and the country is normalised and unremarkable. Sri Lanka is *ipso facto* seen by many as the land of the Sinhala Buddhists, as India is of the Hindus, China of the Han, or Myanmar of the Barmars.

As a result of this equation of one community with the country, the majority is often not even seen as an “ethnic” community in the sense that this term is seen to refer to smaller, peripheral, or immigrant minorities - in much the same way that discussing gender has become short-hand for matters relating to just the one non-dominant gender. Neither is the politics of mobilizing in defence of the interests of that majority viewed as a sectional demand or a special interest, as the politics of the minorities is. Instead, the ideologues of dominant ethnic majorities consider themselves to be above the petty politics of ethnicity, and conflate their parochial concerns with the broader national interest.

This invisibility of ethnic domination is compounded by the way that it is often explained away as a falsehood, an instrumentalised narrative, or as a superficial manifestation of some other deeper problem. In Sri Lanka, there are two distinct ways in which this happens. Firstly, there is the idea that ethnic grievances are fabricated and fanned by ethnic minority elites who have a vested interest in doing so. Under conditions of civil war, Sri Lanka’s former President D.B. Wijetunge famously pronounced a variant of this logic in 1993, that there was actually no ethnic problem in the island, but just a terrorist problem.

Secondly, the denial or avoidance of the problem of ethnic domination and the grievances it generates takes the form of searching for deeper causes in the political and economic realm. Ethnic domination is thus constructed as epiphenomenal, and as the superficial manifestation of more fundamental problems of poverty, regional under-development, or disarticulated elite-mass relations. This diagnosis, which is in fact the way that successive governments have projected their understanding of the conflict, calls for its resolution through economic

growth, employment generation, or more inclusive governance institutions. To be sure, these explanations are not without foundation, but it is also not possible to escape the reality that they constitute the ways in which the irreducibly ethnic aspect of ethnic domination is dismissed or diminished in public discourse, government policy or academic analysis.

2. ETHNIC DEMOCRACY AND OPEN ETHNOCRACY

The idea of ethnic domination under liberal democracy has been elaborated in terms of two influential regime typologies: Sammy Smooha's "ethnic democracy", and Oren Yiftachel's "ethnocracy". Ethnic democracy is:

a form of state that combines majoritarian electoral procedures and respect for the rule of law and for individual citizenship rights with the institutionalized dominance of a majority ethnic group over a society. (Peled 2015)

A dominant nation appropriates the state while retaining partial democratic features. Outsiders to this dominant nation have equal citizenship rights, but are viewed as a security threat, and this effectively translates into distinctly inferior rights and outcomes in practice. As Smooha explains, "Ethnic democracy meets the minimal and procedural definition of democracy, but in quality it falls short of the major Western civic ... democracies ... It is a diminished type of democracy because it takes the ethnic nation, not the citizenry, as the cornerstone of the state and does not extend equality of rights to all" (Smooha 2002, 478).

Oren Yiftachel's (1999, 2006) description of ethnocracy is presented as a distinct alternative to Smooha's ethnic democracy, although the differences are arguably more of emphasis and degree of severity rather than substance. Ethnocracy is described as a "regime facilitating the expansion, ethnicization and control of contested territory and state by a dominant ethnic nation... [which] appropriates the state apparatus and shapes the political system, public institutions, geography, economy, and culture, so as to expand and deepen its control over state and territory" (Yiftachel and Ghanem 2004: 649). Where ethnocracies have liberal democratic features such as civil rights, elections, or media freedom, they are described as "open" ethnocracies. Nevertheless, even in this case, outsiders to this dominant nation have equal citizenship rights, but are viewed as a security threat, and this effectively translates into distinctly inferior rights and outcomes in practice.

In both these typologies, liberal democratic governance co-exists uneasily, and is undermined by the assertive dominance of a majority ethnic group that wields state power. Many elements of the two models presented are resonant with the Sri Lankan experience (McDowell 2012, Uyangoda 2011, Welikala 2015), and Sri Lanka has explicitly been identified in comparative research as an illustrative case study of ethnocracy (Yiftachel and Ghanem 2004). Indeed, Yiftachel's description of the way that ethnocracy is produced by the nationalist ideology of the majority community, by its capture of state power, and of the way this is used to promote the project of Judaization of the state, territory, and society resonates closely with the experience of post-colonial Sri Lanka.

Does Sri Lanka's Sinhala-dominated state thus amount to much the same as Yiftachel's ethnocracy or Smooha's ethnic democracy? Any adequate response to this question must of course go beyond the simple 'yes' or 'no', to provide theoretical and empirical treatment of where it is rooted, how it emerged historically, and how it is produced and sustained. For

example, how deeply is it inscribed? Are the Rajapakas the architects of ethnocracy or are they merely its symptoms? Does the de-installation of the Sinhala-dominated state require an election defeat or deeper forms of institutional and constitutional change? Or, as Tamil nationalist ideologues have long held, is it so deeply embedded that it is unreformable? Is ethnic democracy or ethnocracy produced by the weakness of the liberal state, or is it because of the strength of an ethnicised state? Does it exist in written statutes or is it the unwritten reality that lives in common law and ad hoc practice behind the veil of liberal democratic normality? Is it a process and a direction of travel? Or is it a state of being and the culmination of such processes?

Regrettably, neither Smootha nor Yiftachel adequately address or engage with these serious challenges that their terminology provokes. The concerns, in short, are three-fold. Firstly, both concepts suffer from being too Israel-specific. Secondly, as a result of being defined as idealised regime types, both ethnic democracy and ethnocracy are over-articulated in terms of their superficial external manifestations, but under-articulated in terms of their inner dynamics. They are consequently too rigid and singular in their operation, and paint a picture of a seamless, one-sided, coherent machine of domination. Thirdly, the top-down focus of these models means that they are also very state-centric.

The problem, to begin, is that these typologies have been framed in response to a contentious debate in the 1990s over whether Israel can be categorised as a democracy in terms of its regime type (Ghanem et al 1998, Dowty 1999). Their definitions consequently bear the imprint of being forged with this debate in mind. As a result, features which are idiosyncratic to Israel, such as settler colonialism or the ethnic logic of capital are mis-specified as generic and fundamental features for all ethnocracies. Without entering into a detailed examination, one can point to the way that in many post-colonial countries, these two features operate in the opposite direction to the way they do in Israel. In Sri Lanka, as in Myanmar, or Malaysia, politics since independence has been marked by the ascendancy of an indigenous ethnic majority, which has used state power to dominate and disadvantage commercially oriented settler minorities who became influential in the colonial period. Unlike Israel, ethnicised state power was directed against settlers, and in ways that sought to defuse and disempower the ethnic logic of capital.

There are also fundamental differences in the historical formation of state-majority-minority relations between Sri Lanka and Israel that are worth recounting, because they indicate why it is important to be cautious in analytically equating their experiences under the same label. The foundation of the state of Israel in 1948 was the realization of the Zionist nationalist project, and this became central in framing the way in which the state related to the majority and minority. The state was founded and shaped as an explicitly Jewish state by committed Zionist activists in the context of centuries of persecution, pogrom, and genocide suffered by the Jewish people. Moreover, it was born on the basis of a partition plan that carved out an explicitly Jewish majority territorial homeland, with the stated purpose of protecting and promoting the interests of Jewish settlers in Palestine, as well as of the global Jewish diaspora (Lucas 1975, Laqueur 2003).

The surviving Palestinian-Arab population within these newly created borders was in essence, the remaining fragment of a recently conquered enemy population, the bulk of which had fled or been expelled. They were granted nominally equal citizenship status in Israel, but were clearly extraneous, and even hostile to the its founding rationale as a Jewish state (Ghanem 2001). As Yiftachel and Smootha contend, they were viewed with suspicion as

a security threat, and remained subject to various forms of discrimination that limited their equal citizenship in practice. It is in this context that the triangular relationship between majority, minority, and the state was forged, and it is this experience which has variously been characterised as ethnocracy or ethnic democracy.

Unlike Israel, the Sri Lankan state did not emerge out of the exertions of Sinhala nationalism, or indeed out of *any* nationalist project. The institutions of government were created by an alien imperial power, and then gradually handed over to a native elite over the course of several decades leading up to independence in 1948 (Mendis 1944, De Silva 1981). Although ethnic politics was present and significant (Russell 1982), the state was not explicitly created to protect or promote any single ethnic community in preference to the others. Moreover, the minorities - with the exception of upcountry Indian-origin Tamils - did not enter into their relationship with the state in an inherently disadvantaged or hostile position, as did the Palestinian-Arabs in Israel.

Sri Lanka's Muslim and north-east Tamil communities have viewed themselves as entirely indigenous, equal citizens, and have vigorously resisted inferior rights and status. Indeed, it is this refusal of the north-east Tamils to accept a collective inferior status that ultimately led to the demand for autonomy and a separate state. Even in the midst of a protracted and bitter civil war against Tamil separatists, the Sri Lankan state and its leading functionaries sustained a rhetorical facade of its founding logic and rationale; that is, of a multi-ethnic country with a state that observes and protects equal citizenship for members of all communities. On the contrary, it is commonplace and uncontroversial for leading Israeli statesmen, including the prime minister, to describe Israel as a Jewish state, to speak on behalf of the Jewish people rather than the Israeli people, to and to use the two interchangeably, even when speaking to an international audience.

These differences between the historical evolution of state-majority-minority relations in Israel and Sri Lanka are arguably irrelevant in that the outcomes they exhibit - ethnic domination by the majority, and the marginalisation of minority communities - are the same. But this is also an unremarkable and unexceptional finding, in the sense that ethnic domination is the pervasive norm around the world, and exists along a spectrum on several dimensions. This also means that there is no discrete, bounded set of countries which can neatly be categorised and labelled as an "ethnic democracy" or "ethnocracy" in the way that cross-country data sets of regime types seek to do. Virtually all liberal democratic states connect themselves to specific communities, religions, languages, and symbols, typically of historically dominant majorities. They do so in ways that implicitly or explicitly exclude and culturally disconnect themselves from other communities, and there is a continuum of the way they do so along different dimensions.

Under these circumstances, the bare diagnosis that Sri Lanka is an ethnocracy may have some rhetorical value in the public sphere as an accusation to fling, but has less value in diagnostic terms. What is much more important than this often misleading descriptive label is to understand its underlying source and dynamics, the forms of domination, the response of the minorities, the way in which it is sustained, the construction of legitimacy, and the relationship to other forms of hierarchy.

In this respect, what is evident in the emphasis on the recognisable exterior features of a typology is that there is inadequate attention to the underlying dynamics that produce it. The same outcome classification of ethnic democracy or open ethnocracy can be the

product of three very different internal dynamics. Firstly, ethnic domination can emerge from a liberal democratic state that is well designed, but poorly operationalised. The underlying premise of this model follows what is often considered to be an idealised version of how the post-colonial state presents itself. That is, there exists a fundamental line of separation between state and society, so that the bureaucratic, legal-rational core of the state and its institutions stand guard over, and remain aloof from, the seething politics of ethno-nationalist passion in society. When it is properly managed, with its existing statutes implemented and upheld, ethnic conflicts are handled and defused. However, where well-designed institutions are poorly maintained or operated incompetently, the raw power of ethnic domination that emerges from society is unrestrained and spills over.

There is much about this diagnosis that is very recognisable. Governance institutions in Sri Lanka are often found to be in a state of moribund decay, characterised by a culture of inefficiency, under-funding, patronage, incompetence, and corruption. Significant improvements could be made simply by fully and properly operationalising and making functional what already exists and has been legislated. This has actually been the thrust of much public pressure and activism: for the full implementation of the 13th Amendment, the substantive provisions for language parity, the recommendations of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), or the prosecution of human rights abuses under existing domestic statutes. Improving capacity, management, and implementation would at a minimum, ensure that the liberal democratic state is strengthened to function as it should, to deliver equal rights to its citizens as promised.

Secondly, ethnic domination could arise from state institutions that are poorly designed, so that they would be incapable of regulating ethnic conflicts even if they were to function properly. By extension, this explanation implies that the state does not stand outside society to regulate and protect, but is itself deeply infused with ethnic politics, and can easily be captured by a dominant group to generate the features of an ethnocracy or ethnic democracy. It is with this reality in mind that conflict resolution in divided societies is not just about de-ethnicising the state and providing strict equality to all, but paradoxically also about carefully re-ethnicising it, pre-distributing institutionalised ethnic power in calibrated ways, and providing explicit protections and special powers for minorities such as asymmetric federalism.¹

This approach of re-designing state institutions to build in minority protections has, in fact, been the logic underlying the numerous pacts, agreements, accords and proposals since ethnic relations entered a period of crisis in Sri Lanka in the mid-1950s: the Bandaranaike – Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957, the Dudley Senanayake–Chelvanayakam Pact of 1965, the Thiruchelvam District Councils proposal of 1968, the District Development Councils proposal of 1979, the Annexure ‘C’ proposal of 1983, the All Party Conference of 1984, the Thimpu Talks of 1985, the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement of 1987, the Mangala Moonesinghe proposals of 1992, the Chandrika Kumaratunga Devolution proposals of 1995-2001, the Norwegian mediated negotiations of 2002-2003, the LTTE’s Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) of 2003, and the All Parties Representative Committee (APRC) of 2006-09 (DeVotta 2004).

¹ On this point, the distinction between liberal and corporate consociationalism, or self-determination versus pre-determination is relevant. Pls see McCulloch 2014, Lijphart 2007.

A third explanation available would be that ethnic domination is hard-wired. That is, the problem is not that the state is inefficient or poorly designed, but that it is inscribed and designed thus. The fundamental organising principle of state power is not ethnic equality, but ethnic domination through privileging one particular group, so that the failure to implement its liberal features, and its consequent capture by the majority is not accidental. The state is the vehicle that privileges a dominant ethnos, promotes its interests, and inscribes its historical memory, symbols, language, and religion as that of the country as a whole. Minorities thus see the state, state institutions and its officials not as a refuge or as a protector from everyday ethnic domination and discriminatory behaviour in society, but as the source of the problem in itself. The state is so deeply infused with this logic into its institutional fibre that it cannot be dislodged or reformed easily.

This view of the state as inherently “racist” or Sinhala-dominated is most readily found in the Tamil nationalist narrative, in which the key features of ethnic domination are the historical actions of the state such as discriminatory laws, constitutional provisions, or military repression (Navaratnam 1991, Wilson 1994, Gunasingham 1999, Rasaratnam 2016). The disenfranchisement of upcountry Tamils in 1948, the Sinhala-only law of 1956, the “foremost” position given to Buddhism in the 1972 constitution, the demographic engineering of the dry-zone with Sinhalese settlers, the standardisation of marks for university entrance in 1971, the complicity or strategic inaction of state actors in anti-Tamil riots, and the atrocities of the war are all part of a narrative in which it is not the actions of the Sinhalese people as such, but of the Sinhala-dominated state that is of relevance.

Moreover, the conclusion of this narrative is that the state is unreformable. Neither the full implementation of existing statutes, nor their creative redesign would be of use. The attempts to pursue a reformist middle path are, in this narrative, not only futile, but are also suspect as a subversive tactic to sow false hope and preserve the status quo. If the two previous scenarios provided the possibility that ethnic domination could be addressed through better implementation or design, then this third one offers minorities only the bleak alternatives of complete capitulation or complete defiance.

Which one of these three explains ethnic domination in Sri Lanka? These are not irrelevant differences, because they imply different causes, consequences and pathways of intervention. Yet, the terminology of ethnic democracy or ethnocracy cannot distinguish between them because of their focus on outcomes, and also because of the rigidities inherent in the way that the model is constructed and operationalised. In both Yiftachel and Smootha, there is a tendency to articulate typologies of mature regimes as smooth finished products in which states, governments, legal frameworks, security policies, dominant groups and their ideologies interlock and work seamlessly to exert a coherent set of externally identifiable features of ethnic domination. The details of how it is produced, contested, and stabilised are either absent, or under-explained. Neither do we learn much about the role of the minority communities themselves for the emphasis is one sided, that is, on the top-down institutionalised modes of domination.

In considering these three possible processes, there is one further problem to highlight: they all explain ethnic domination from the top-down, in terms of the actions and inactions of the state. All problems are framed and analytically diagnosed in terms of the functionality, design and logic of the state, which is assumed to concentrate all power at its apex and radiate it outwards. All research and insights produced invariably reveal new facets and pathologies of the nature of the state, such as the ‘deep’ state, or the ‘shadow’ state. All solutions are

unsurprisingly about reforming the state or improving its functionality. The state is simultaneously seen by some as the site from which equality can be enforced, but by others as the locus from where hierarchy and domination is projected. It is the arena of all rules, procedure, and justice, but also the source of all failure, arbitrariness and impunity.

There are of course important reasons why the state needs to be brought into the analytical frame, particularly in Sri Lanka where it is such a vivid part of everyday life. From official language policy and state employment to ethnic outbidding and the 'black July' riots of 1983, the state is central to the internal narratives of the Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. But at the same time, there is also a tautological character to this analysis, and an echo-chamber effect in reinforcing, reproducing, and reifying the state (Abrams 1977) as both question and answer, cause and effect, problem and solution at every stage. The state becomes an omnipresent, inescapable galaxy that encapsulates society and politics to the extent that nothing exists outside it and that everything is explained through it.

This totalising presence of the state might be a necessary and useful fiction to maintain for policy-makers, constitutional lawyers, and campaigners who must frame the diagnosis within the limits of the available solutions at their disposal. But outside of that realm, there is no need to keep up this pretence, and to reverse engineer the analysis in terms of this edifice. This is not to suggest that the state is unimportant, or that ethnic relations exist outside the political arena, but as Foucault (1980: 122) describes very well,

I don't want to say that the State isn't important ... the State, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and ... can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations.

3. AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

The task of explaining ethnic domination thus requires an excavation of these 'already existing power relations'. It involves lifting up the lid on the macro-structures of what is superficially visible as the ethnocratic state to seek out its underlying foundations. This approach naturally resonates with, and draws on the growing body of literature that seeks to go beyond the de jure façade, normative discourse, and the reification of the state to understand how political order is actually composed (Foucault 1980, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940, Abrams 1977). The emphasis is on an empirical rather than a constitutional perspective, often using an anthropological bottom-up optic to seek out out de facto, mundane, or everyday forms of power from below (Fuller and Harriss 2009, Gupta 2012, Hansen and Stepputat 2001, Gilbert and Nugent 1994, Spencer 2007). It has given rise to a new vocabulary to describe the constitution of de facto authority in terms of "sovereigns beyond the state" (Hansen 2009), "hybrid political orders" (Boege et al, 2009), "negotiated states," (Hagman and Peclard (2010) "shadow states," (Reno 2009), or "twilight institutions." (Lund 2006).

Central to this approach in this paper is the idea that the infrastructure of ethnic domination is situated not in the solidity of concrete buildings, legal codes, uniformed functionaries, and the monopoly of violence, but in the way that it is collectively understood, rationalised, and acted upon. People frame their understanding and engagement with respect to ethnic society on the basis of a shared normative outlook of how things should be ordered. "Order" here is significant insofar as it implies both orderliness (as the antonym of

disorder), and also the ordering of society's constituent collective units into a ranked system. The idea of a subterranean doxa that governs and authorises such conduct is present in Asanga Welikala's description of the implicit "political constitution" that underlies the written one (Welikala 2017). It resembles the taken-for-granted "common sense" that Gramsci deploys (Hall 1986), in the sense that it is a framework so widespread and normalised that although everyone is aware of its presence, it remains implicit. In the words of Mary Douglas, it is a category of knowledge that is obscured, not because it is actively suppressed, but because it is "too true to warrant discussion" (Douglas 1989:3).

But there are times when it is actually spoken of quite openly and matter-of-factly, as did Sri Lanka's former army commander, General Sarath Fonseka, in an interview during the last months of the civil war:

I strongly believe that this country belongs to the Sinhalese but there are minority communities and we treat them like our people..... We being the majority of the country, 75%, we will never give in and we have the right to protect this country ... They can live in this country with us. But they must not try to, under the pretext of being a minority, demand undue things.²

Fonseka deserves to be taken seriously, not just because of his position of authority, but because he succinctly articulates the way millions of people understand the normative arrangements that organise ethnic society. It is in short, the view of majority-minority relations that is contained in Sinhala nationalism, the predominant political ideology among the majority community (Rambukwella 2018).

Sinhala nationalism takes as its axiomatic starting point the idea that Sri Lanka – as a country, a territory, or a political community, is the patrimony of the indigenous Sinhala-Buddhist majority. This gives the community a hierarchically superior and proprietary relationship to the state, the land, and its resources in precedence to that of other ethnic and religious communities, including Tamils, Muslims, and Christians. When projected out beyond the inner cognitive sphere onto society through manifest action, Sinhala nationalism becomes transformed into the above ground project of ethnic domination described as "Sinhalisation". Sinhalisation is firstly about the cultural and linguistic capture of the public sphere, for example through the promotion of Sinhala Buddhist symbols within the state's majestic presence such as the national flag, and the national emblem. It involves enshrining the formality of official status for the Sinhala language, or according the "foremost" place for the Buddhist religion - while resisting such recognition or status for other groups. The most consequential and emblematic episode of the cultural and symbolic agenda of Sinhalisation was the Official Language Act of 1956 (Kearney 1967, Wriggins 1960). In its sparse wording, it declared simply and devastatingly: "The Sinhala language shall be the one official language of Ceylon".³

Secondly, Sinhalisation is an agenda of economic advancement, that is, the prioritisation of the material interests of Sinhala Buddhists. This involves employment opportunities, economic development projects, and commercial enterprises that benefit the majority community (Gunawardena 1979, Tennekoon 1988, Venugopal 2018). The political economy of Sinhalisation is also inflected by the association of peasant agriculture with a quintessential

² National Post, September 23 2008.

³ Official Language Act (No. 33 of 1956) - Sect 2.

Sinhala Buddhist authenticity (Moore 1989). By way of contrast, the urban professions, commerce, and plantation agriculture were all associated with, and dominated by minorities and foreigners, whether Tamils, Muslims, Christians, Indians, or Europeans.

Thirdly, Sinhalisation is a territorial agenda of expanding the spatial presence and control of the dominant community, and of containing the minorities. Since the 1940s, this agenda has gone hand-in-hand with development projects that have sought to irrigate and settle the sparsely populated state-owned lands of the dry zone. The Gal Oya project in the Eastern province in the late-1940s, the various Mahaweli systems in the 1980s, and the militarised resettlement of border areas such as Weli Oya in the 1980s have all served to expand the Sinhalese ethnic frontier, and as in the case of the Eastern province, have even altered the electoral demography of those areas (Peebles 1990, Korf 2009, Klem 2014, Muggah 2008, Klem and Kelegama 2020).

Importantly, the inner social imaginary that contains the blueprint of Sinhalisation does not see itself as an ideology of domination and violence in the raw sense. Rather, it is conceived as an ethic of community that connects the individual to the well-being of the collective. Contemporary Sinhala nationalism emerged in close connection with the growth of electoral democracy and politics as a vocation. It operates as a moral outlook to govern and regulate the chaotic and venal public world of politics by identifying what is righteous and legitimate from that which is not. Regulation in this sense refers on the one hand to technologies of the self, that is, self-control, and the exercise of conscience, based on an individual code of ethical self-conduct. On the other hand, it refers to the governance of public behaviour - how those in positions of authority ought to behave, and what Sinhala Buddhist people can rightfully expect from them. Fonseka's elaboration of the Sinhala nationalist outlook thus provides insights not just to the customary ethnic order of precedence, but also to the existence of a more elaborate system of obligations, rights, thresholds, and critical stress points that bind it together.

For this reason, the operation of this potent source of political authority is not adequately captured within the rubric of 'sovereignty', which the political anthropology literature has engaged with at length to describe subterranean power configurations beyond the state. As Hansen (2009:170) describes, sovereignty is 'the right to kill, punish and discipline with impunity.' In contrast, the ordering of ethnic society, and the exercise of ethnic domination, including the instances where it involves coercion, is rarely about despotic, unauthorised, or unaccountable violence. What may seem to the legal-normative eye as killing with impunity is on closer inspection, governed and regulated within the relatively stable parameters of codes of conduct.

As a framework of righteousness, Sinhala nationalism does not understand itself or base its actions on the idea of imposing the will of the majority with impunity, but on the notion that it is legitimate and just. That is, the projection of a Sinhala-Buddhist agenda onto the public sphere, and its claims to primacy flow from the notion of *dhamma-dweepa*, which relates the Sinhala-Buddhist people to a unique historical-religious-territorial destiny and responsibility to protect the Buddhist religion and its heritage in the island of Lanka. Moreover, it draws legitimacy from the idea that the Sinhala Buddhists are the indigenous, native community in the island; that the Sinhalese once occupied the entire island; and that the democratic principle of majority rule means that the largest community naturally and rightly has a larger share of power. Sinhala nationalism is also based on the idea of redressing a grave historical injustice done to the indigenous community by centuries of European-Christian colonial

rule, cultural-religious persecution, and economic dispossession. Related to this last point is the redressal of the undue historical advantages that are considered to have accrued to minority groups such as Tamils under colonialism. In other words, what the minorities experience as Sinhalisation is seen by the majority as legitimate, and as the exercise of restorative justice.

All this does not imply that the minorities have no place in this order, for the presumption of ownership also carries with it the obligation of the owner of the country to be gracious and generous to its guests and tenants. As Fonseka explains, minorities are allowed to “live in the country with us”. Doing so, however, requires that they respect a code of appropriate conduct. The minorities will be tolerated, and be accorded their due share, as long as they accept their subordinate position and behave in an appropriately deferential and demure manner. A failure to do so by overstepping the red lines of appropriate conduct, and by asking for too much is a challenge to the dominance hierarchy and to the stability that it generates. It invites a response, deemed legitimate, to re-establish stability and dominance through punishment and coercion.

4. STABILISING DOMINATION

This leads on to a second, and more complicated problem - how is this hierarchical order stabilised? Stability requires the acceptance and participation of its various components, even by those who are its evident victims and who find themselves disadvantaged and subordinated by it. Why do they defer and accept their inferior position? The majority community has an ideological apparatus for governing ethnic relations that finds legitimacy for its claims and its use of coercion against the minorities. But how do the minorities view this? How is their subordinate position internally rationalised and tolerated? More importantly, what are the limits of this toleration?

Political order has historically been stabilised at the confluence of three sources of power and authority: economic wealth, coercive violence, and subjective attachment. In other circumstances, this represents the authority of the merchant, the feudal lord, and the priest respectively. The first of these is the most widespread explanation at hand. O’Leary and McGarry (1994) describe how control is hegemonic if it makes an overtly violent ethnic or national contest for power “unthinkable” or “unworkable”. Smootha (2002) explains that ethnic democracies are stabilised through four conditions: continued demographic dominance, an ongoing sense of threat to the majority, the non-interference of minority-friendly outside powers, and lack of international pressure.

This argument has currency in places like post-war Sri Lanka, and particularly in the formerly war-affected northern and eastern provinces, where a violent challenge to the ethnic political order was defeated through the assertion of military superiority. The continued and pervasive presence of the military in that region since then can lead to the impression that control is maintained through force. But a purely force-based power structure can only be sustained for short periods of time, and will become unstable. Coercion, or even the latent threat of violence, is expensive, can have unpredictable consequences, and will lose self-legitimacy after a point. The stability of something as complex as an ethnic hierarchy requires the far less intense and expensive forms of compliance that emerge from voluntary, un-coerced self-restraint and self-regulation over a long period of time. How is this achieved?

From Gramsci, one could draw on the idea that stable social hierarchies are achieved when the ruling ideology is accepted and internalised by those who are subjugated by it.⁴ However, for this to happen, it requires that the rulers and ruled must be bound together into a shared ideological structure of authority such as religious faith or ethno-nationalism. This, for example, is the way that caste domination is organised under the ideology of Brahminism, or male domination under patriarchy. In theory, if not in practice, the oppressed are enjoined to accept and normalise their hierarchically inferior position.

But how far can this be applied to ethnic groups? Can Sri Lanka's ethnic hierarchy be legitimised in this way, and can one speak of a Gramscian version of ethnic hegemony at work? There are some fragments of evidence available to suggest that Tamils buy into the ruling ideology. For example, the retired cricket player Muthiah Muralitharan, who is of an up-country Tamil background, infamously declared in a radio interview "About 80% in this country are Sinhala Buddhists. They are the owners of this country."⁵ But this is not a widespread view at all among Tamils. Unlike India's oppressed castes, Sri Lanka's Tamils, and in particular, the north-east Tamils, have not internalised Sinhala nationalism, its claims to ownership, and its ethnic ranking. They are instead collectively bound by a different political consciousness, which explicitly rejects these claims, and that stands in hostile contradiction to it. Tamil nationalism does not inspire submission, but resistance to the ruling ethnic order.

In the absence of any such affective legitimacy that derives from a shared ideology, could economic wealth be the instrument of winning consent and exerting control? This is actually the approach that many countries have taken to addressing their troubled relations with minority groups. Where political incorporation is problematic and where the affected population resists the ethnic hierarchy, the alternative has been to establish control on the basis of forging economic links of dependence between the rulers and ruled. In Tibet and the north-east of India, as in eastern Sri Lanka, this has involved economic development schemes that physically and materially integrate these contested territories into the core (Yeh 2013, Thakur & Venugopal 2019). There is also a related idea in post-conflict state-building of generating contractarian links between state and society, or what is sometimes described as "performance legitimacy" based on the provision of public services (McLoughlin 2015).

In liberal democratic frameworks, such as in Sri Lanka, the use of economic incentives to exert control over alienated minority populations involves the additional task of winning electoral support. In such circumstances, the use of economic resources to generate control has required it to be routed through local proxy elites to generate clientelist webs of power from the allocation of jobs and contracts in exchange for votes. This has been the role of former Tamil paramilitaries such as Douglas Devananda in the north, or Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan (Karuna) or Sivanesanathurai Chandrakanthan (Pillaiyan) in the east (Sanchez-Meertens 2013, Goodhand et al 2016). The piecing together of an electoral arrangement in this way can be successful in generating stability in some senses. But in addition to being expensive, fragile, and prone to disruption, the successful configuration of a particular clientelist arrangement has the life span equal to a single election cycle. Power at the apex needs to be re-negotiated and assembled afresh on the basis of legislative strength and

⁴ I am aware that this is a thin reading of hegemony, and that others have persuasively argued that it is more profitably used as a tool to understand struggle rather than consent (Roseberry 1994: 360–1). For the limited purpose here, the thin reading makes the point.

⁵ BBC Sinhala interview. Tuesday 6 November 2018.

material reward every few years. In other words, the exchange of lucre for loyalty can provide explanations for the stability of a government. It is less successful at explaining the stability of the deeper edifice of ethnic domination and political order.

How then does the minority community respond to a dominant and expansive ethnic majority under conditions of a formal liberal democratic framework? The starting point of an explanation would be that in Sri Lanka, Tamils are acutely aware of their weak position. They accept this reality not because of their submission to a supremacist ideology, or their entrapment within a clientelist web of sustenance, but because of the prerogatives of collective self-preservation from the latent threat of violence. But even here, what they offer is not an unconditional surrender, but what can better be described as a conditional compliance that rests on the reciprocal observance of certain rules.

The point is that unequal and exploitative relations of domination, expropriation, and immiseration, disturbing as they are, are not in themselves volatile or unstable, but have historically supported functioning systems of stable order because they are governed under an implicit institutional system of mutually observed norms. In his influential work on the moral economy of the peasant in south-east Asia, James Scott (1977) describes how hierarchical agrarian relations are sustained by a normative framework based on the observance of a set of customary rights that are due to the poor by the rich. Even under a dominance hierarchy, there is a quid pro quo of such residual rights that form the normative contours of what is agreed as inviolable. The existence of such rights does not mean that they are in any measure adequate: they are indeed often threadbare and far less than what the subordinated group would aspire towards.

The larger proposition that I am advancing here is that minorities are incorporated into this system of political order under the terms of an implicit bargain in which they limit their vulnerability and insecurity by accepting subordinate status in a predictable and regulated ethnic hierarchy. This means that there is a quotidian level of “acceptable” ethnic domination, racism, and privilege that is mundane and unremarkable. It “goes without saying” because it “comes without saying” (Bourdieu 1977, 166-167). It is never noticed, its contingent realities remain implicit, and are never acted upon as long as the norms that govern it are not transgressed and triggered. The structure of orderly life and the conditional nature of compliance that undergirds it thus remain largely obscured, unless there is a breach that brings the terms of this bargain into view.

One such moment in which the veil was briefly lifted in post-war Sri Lanka was the ‘grease devil’ crisis. In July-September 2011, an extraordinary wave of mass tension and anxiety had taken hold of large parts of Sri Lanka because of reports that widespread attacks on women were taking place by a mysterious and supernatural predator (Venugopal 2015). At its peak, there were hundreds of daily reports of grease devil attacks, and it caused many parts of rural and small-town Sri Lanka to be paralysed with fear. Although the authorities insisted that the grease devil did not exist and was an irrational mass panic, most Tamils and Muslims of the north and east were convinced that it was indeed real. There was widespread conviction that that this was an orchestrated attack against them by the Sinhala-dominated state, and that the grease devils were a specially trained group within the omnipresent, and overwhelmingly Sinhalese security forces. Tamils viewed the grease devil as an extension of the many forms of harassment and violence that the community had been forced to endure during and after the war. The Muslim community felt particularly pained that this was an

organised provocation the authorities were using to target them during the holy month of Ramadan.

The grease devil kept the north and east in an elevated state of anxiety and fear for several weeks, and it soon catalysed into a wave of anger, unrest and disorder against the administration. Such disorder would be unusual at any time, but it was extraordinary given that these events occurred just two years after the end of a protracted and brutal civil war. Normal civilian public life had come to an end in the early years of the war, and the population had been governed by a heavily militarised, authoritarian system of surveillance and control since then. Despite these circumstances, the public outrage that the grease devil crisis provoked led to a series of highly charged demonstrations and rallies, with police stations being attacked, and the naval base in Trincomalee surrounded and blockaded by demonstrators. The extent of disorder was so widespread that several towns in the east were rendered ungovernable and beyond the control of the administration for several days.

While there remains much speculation over whether the grease devil was real or not, the more important point to note is that this was a moment of profound social crisis when the underlying ontology of power was briefly rendered visible. Tamils and Muslims withdrew their compliance, and in doing so, momentarily destabilised the basis of ethnic order. They did so despite the prevalent atmosphere of fear and repression, because they felt that their rulers had finally crossed all bounds of propriety and acceptable behaviour. An organised and widespread attack on women, and on religious sensibilities was the proverbial final straw. The Sri Lankan government, which had only recently re-asserted the monopoly of violence over this population through a bitterly fought war, was for a short while, shown to be helpless and impotent when confronted with the reality of a hostile population that refused to submit and cooperate.

The question that is left to address is thus: what constitutes the breaking point? How are these norms set and what is the quantum of acceptable ethnic domination? For the 18th century English crowd, E.P. Thompson finds that there was a widespread conviction that it was wrong to profit from times of shortage and that the price of bread needed to remain at a customarily determined level (Thompson 1971). The moral economy of the peasant in south-east Asia determined the limit to be based on two features: the norm of reciprocity, and a subsistence ethic. "It is the right to subsistence that defines the key reciprocal duty of elites, the minimal obligation that they owe to those from whom they claim labour and grain" (Scott 1977: 184). Peasants are entirely denied political or civil rights, but in lieu, are offered the social insurance of a minimum subsistence level of living. Elites have strongly held obligations to provide for their tenants at times of need, and the history of peasant rebellions has often traced their origins to a breach of these rights.

Can this be translated to the way ethnic relations are structured? What can be said about the red lines that a vulnerable ethnic minority will deem to be sacrosanct? In Sri Lanka, as elsewhere, this often relates to the sanctity of the inner courtyard of private property, the family, religion, language, and other matters of the community's own inner life. It is a pared down version of what Arend Lijphard (2007) describes as "segmental autonomy". In the logic of the ghetto, vulnerable ethnic communities accept a protected subordinate status. In return for loyal compliance and submission to the larger ruling order, they are in theory allowed to live in peace within the enclave. Within its bounds, they have a degree of autonomous existence to police their population, preserve their customs, and promote their parochial forms of authority such as caste and patriarchy. The precise location and

height of the outer walls of this ghetto, both physical and symbolic, are the subject of constant negotiation, and are zealously protected against intrusion and interference.

But at another level, the entitlements that minorities will deem as their minimum due, and that regulate their domination are not customary at all - they are the constitutionally inscribed citizenship rights extended by the state. This is what distinguishes ethnic domination in general, from its specific form under liberal democracy. Notwithstanding the majoritarian capture of many state institutions, Sri Lanka's Tamils and Muslims are very conscious that they have recourse to equal rights, and that this offers a valuable and far-reaching form of protection in the world outside the community. It is equal citizenship which moderates and governs the sharp edge of majoritarian domination outside the inner courtyard, to the extent that it regulates it in the public sphere. It is this which minorities will consequently seek to zealously protect as inviolable alongside their customary norms of internal autonomy.

To summarise, the explanation developed thus far is that minorities comply with subordinate position in a dependable and regulated system of ethnic domination. The regulatory registers that this depends on are customary rights of communal self-governance on the one hand, and formal rights of equal citizenship on the other. It should come as no surprise that these map closely onto the two main founding pillars of all minority politics in contemporary Sri Lanka, both Muslim and Tamil, conciliatory and radical. This dichotomy is famously present in the Thimpu declaration of 1985, the principles set out by the Tamil militant-separatist movement. In addition to the first three demands that relate to autonomy - that the Sri Lankan government recognise Tamil nationhood, homeland and self-determination, there is a fourth demand, apparently inconsistent with the previous three, that asks for the "recognition of the right to citizenship and the fundamental rights of all Tamils of Ceylon".⁶ In Sri Lanka and beyond, the politics of a minority confronting a dominant majority takes on this Janus-faced position of demanding full and equal integration in the public sphere, but communal seclusion in the private sphere. It is the basis of a familiar majoritarian complaint directed against Sri Lanka's Tamils, that there is a hypocrisy in demanding inclusion and equality in the south, while also demanding an exclusive ethnic enclave in the north (Peiris 1985, De Silva 1987).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The explanation of ethnic domination under liberal democracy takes place under three problematic premises. Firstly, it is located in a normative liberal constitutional perspective. Secondly, in analytical terms, it is encompassed within the institutional framework of the state. Thirdly, it presents the problem as a one-sided, coherent apparatus of domination of an oppressive majority ethnic group. Instead, I suggest that there is a need to reconsider the ontology of ethnic domination at a different level. It requires, as Hagmann and Peclard (2010:546) describe, a "more grounded approach to statehood whose starting point is empirical and not judicial". Ethnic domination must be understood not just in terms of its visible external manifestations but in terms of its inner dynamics. Thirdly, these internal dynamics cannot be adequately captured by a rigid model in which the constituent parts are harmonised within a singular consistent logic. Any account of domination must involve not

⁶ Retrieved from https://tamilnation.org/conflictresolution/tamileelam/85thimpu/850713thimpu_declaration.htm, 04.01.2022.

just the coercive power of the stronger party, but should also explain how it is legitimised, contested, and how the consent of the weaker party is achieved.

The implicit liberal normative approach to this problem might start by looking at ethnic domination as a violation of constitutional rights, diagnose the sources of institutional weakness, and then provide an account of how this can be addressed through advocacy, policy, law, or institutions. An empirical approach is different, and echoes the point that Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) make of political philosophy, i.e., it does not frame the problem in terms of a constitutionalist fiction of the world as it should be, but instead starts in a more open-ended way with the real world of ethnic domination as it is.

Ethnic domination cannot be organised, legitimised, implemented, and sustained without a set of institutions and norms that it is embedded within. For the most part, this is understood to start and end with the state. I suggest instead, following Philip Abrams (1977) that “the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is.”. The analysis of ethnic domination has to go beyond and below the superstructure of the liberal democratic state to the underlying foundational infrastructure, made of contending norms, morality, and ideology. This infrastructure contains the engine that provides it with momentum, direction and validity on the one hand, but that also regulates it, keeping it within limits.

These norms and ideological frameworks are also heterogenous and unsynchronised, so that they do not necessarily interlock or harmonise with one another to produce predictable outcomes. Society is organised and governed on the basis of several distinct, even contradictory principles, impulses, and regulatory forces that operate at different levels. It is this that provides contingency, agency, and an ebb and flow to ethnic politics, including the entirely idiosyncratic outbreak of crises such as the grease devil.

To recapitulate and summarise the edifice of the model, there are two distinct components that need to be understood in the context of what is superficially visible as the leaden hand of ethnic domination wrought through the state – or alternately as the ‘sovereign’ power of a majority community to inflict violence with impunity. On the one hand, the majority community’s actions take place within a legitimising framework that establishes its primacy, and the righteousness of its claim to ownership of the country. This also includes provisions for the indulgence of the minorities as guests, as long as they behave as such. The counterpart to this is that minorities offer conditional compliance to the majority’s domination, but do so subject to their own set of criteria and red lines on preserving autonomy at home, and equality outside. The real world of ethnic political order is fundamentally shaped in the way these contending sets of norms interlock, in the juxtaposition of the red-lines vis-a-vis one another, and in way they either trigger or contain manifest political action such as violence.

It implies that the significant parameters of stability are formed out of the way that the majority and minority morally interpret and respond to each other’s actions. It signifies the importance of understanding these normative red lines, and theorising how they are formed and evolve. It requires an analytical sensibility and theoretical outlook that goes beyond the “iceberg” view of political order that limits the frame of explanation to only that which is superficially visible – the juridical formality of the state – and leaves out the more substantial, resonant sources of authority that actually structure society and influence human behaviour.

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