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Multiple interfaces

Social media, religious politics, and national (un)belonging in India and the diaspora

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Abstract

In India and its diaspora in the UK, online activities of various sorts—tweeting, blogging, messaging, trolling, and tagging—have become central to tensions surrounding religion's presence in public life and the stakes of belonging to the nation. Three clusters of social media practices undergird these digital mediations: piety, surveillance, and fun. Such practices reveal how internet-enabled mediations reenergize religion as a political category of difference under majoritarian right-wing regimes and the transnational context of Islamophobia, while also offering distinct possibilities for imagining politics through the pleasures, visibilities, and reflections induced by digital circulations. Rather than approaching the internet as an abstract technological context or discrete channels for communication, this analysis theoretically positions it as an arena of "multiple interfaces." It signals contiguities and collisions that digital practice has opened up among the very real communities and structures of authority, under conditions shaped by longer colonial histories.

KEYWORDS

India, Indian diaspora, Islamophobia, majoritarian nationalism, religious politics, social media

My status is that of a refugee in my

own country

Without a UN refugee card

The pugnacious hostility of my countrymen

Meets with my stroppy

Consciousness

I subtly hold onto my pride

My rare possession

Having known by now that dignity is

Just a constitutional term.

The poignant lines came from Asad Ashraf, a social media–savvy Muslim journalist in India, on a WhatsApp group of Karvaan India, a Muslim cultural organization he runs in Delhi.[1] The elegiac tone flowed from the recent actions of the Indian government, which had undermined, with decisive force, the constitutional guarantees of belonging to minoritized Muslims, amid a charged, rambunctious discourse of Hindu nationalism. For Asad, such troubling events had relegated dignity to a mere formality, leaving him with the precarious comfort of pride. Five months before, in December 2019, the Indian government had amended the Citizenship Act of 1955, establishing religion, for the very first time, as a criterion for citizenship under the Indian law. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019, provides a legal path to citizenship for persecuted religious minorities, which include Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Parsis, and Christians who migrated to India from the neighboring countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan (before 2014). The act conspicuously leaves out Muslim minorities from the list. A related policy move has sought to enforce compulsory registration for all Indian citizens through the National Register of Citizenship (NRC), placing demands on Indian

residents to prove their citizenship with identity documents. Insufficient documentation entails the threat of deportation. The new legislations signal an "attenuation of religion-neutral laws of citizenship" in India, and a shift toward a regime where "the laws, rules and the jurisprudence of citizenship have come to be increasingly … inflected by religion" (Jayal, 2019, pp. 33–34).

Although the government at the time of writing had not framed the rules for CAA, which are necessary for its implementation, its announcement in 2019 sparked wide protests in India and the diaspora—driving students, women, children, nonresidential Indians, public intellectuals, and professionals onto the streets and social media, where they demanded immediate withdrawal of the controversial legislation. Protests against CAA and NRC represented the first large-scale digitally mobilized, yet locally organized resistance that directly challenged the religious majoritarian politics of the current regime led by the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Even as the streets and tweets were ablaze with indignation, many demonstrations that were held in support of the CAA and NRC, and harsh police actions against the protesters including alleged use of chemical sprays to maim protesting students in India, exposed how a fractured public life was bolstered by repressive apparatuses of the state.

Amid a swelling number of protest videos circulating on social media, images of protesting Muslim women at candlelight vigils, street assemblies, and "blockades," together with the camera grab of a group of hijab-wearing students daringly confronting police action on a university campus in Delhi, stood out strikingly. Images of restraint and desperation of protesting Muslim women holding vigils on the streets day after day starkly contrasted with the grainy mobile videos that captured—in live, unedited form of brutal candidness—the chaotic scenes from the university campuses in Delhi. Protesting students were seen still pressing on their forehead or arms to stop the bleeding, when they spoke directly to the camera to tell the world how they were physically attacked for joining the protest. In London, around the same time, the UK Indian Muslim Federation organized a series of demonstrations, connecting live with Muslim protesters in India on WhatsApp, and recirculating the videos of their address to the protesters on different social media channels to garner support and assure solidarity. "Muslim ladies in India, for the first time in history, came out in protest against these atrocities," said the octogenarian Shamsuddin Agha, the president of the federation, when our project filming crew met him at the federation office in London.[2] "We sent a video from here," he said. "We sent it three or four times saying, 'Look, ladies … we are very pleased of what you are doing and we are in support of you, in solidarity.'" Agha thought this video of support, which was also aired on a local television channel in Mumbai, offered the protesters "moral support" and "helped [them to appreciate] that people sitting in London are not just having a nice time, they are worried for us." Agha attributed some part of the campaign's success to digital circulations. "This is again, online charisma," he stated in his emphatic style, "it is so effective. Ten or 15 years ago, nobody would have known what we have done. By the time the video [got] there through the post [airmail], it [would all be] finished. Now [it is] on the spot. The ladies were saying, 'How wonderful you are doing this.'"

Even as the instantaneous communication technologies afforded by social media and the remediating effects of local television channels amplified such solidarities among the Muslim communities across India and the diaspora, Hindu majoritarian voices active on Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, and smaller social media platforms such as ShareChat as well as pro-government television channels and newspapers continued to position CAA and NRC as the right action to "clean up" India from "illegal Muslim migrants" and assert India's Hindu state as the locus of redressal for religious minorities persecuted by the neighboring Muslim majority states.

Situating our study on online politics and religion at this critical juncture in India's contemporary history, this article examines the valences of digital media in a fraught national and transnational context, and how diverse digital circulations (re)mediate conflicts that are based on a politics of religious difference and the stakes of national citizenship in a "post" colony and its diaspora in the West. We explore a range of social media practices—from hurling online abuses at religious minorities to galvanizing social media channels for long-distance support to drawing on religious edicts for online engagements in an aspirational claim to belong to the nation—as aspects of racialized religious politics. Such digital practices signal religious politics as two related phenomena. First, the mobilization of religious ethics, theology, and symbolic resources to imagine a desired polity distinct from the existing ones. Second, the mobilization of religious identities to claim and consolidate political power within nation-state structures. By approaching such phenomena as "religious politics," we do not suggest that the causes and aims of conflicts are specifically religious in nature. Rather, religion and politics are linked very differently by both Hindus and Muslims, and even within both groups. The dynamics we explore here point to "resonances" (Connolly, 2005, p. 869) and structured linkages between religion and politics that center the problem of religious difference as a condition for national belonging, and for how civic and political rights as well as imaginaries of polity are articulated within the nation-state structures and diasporic contexts. While some practices directly draw on religious imagery and symbolic resources, others operate at a reflexive level by drawing links between religion and politics, often in direct response to how religion and secular politics have coevolved in the postcolonial context (van der Veer, 2002).

Our key argument is that three clusters of social media practices have been prominent in reconfiguring religious politics in the context of resurgent right-wing nationalism and diverse resistances to its exclusionary discourse. We identify them as piety, surveillance, and fun. Piety refers here to the circulation and production of subject-positions of pious selves and objects of pious behavior (e.g., norms for online chatting, citations of religious holy texts, avoiding extreme forms of speech, etc.), where actors imagine and practice a religious morality in relation to both digital media and the nation-state. To follow Mahmood (2011), it reveals a modality in which "the ethical and the political are indelibly linked." Surveillance in the context of digital mediation is usually framed

through questions of privacy (Schirrmacher, 2015) and behavioral surplus extraction (Zuboff, 2019). Departing from this culture-blind perspective, we shift the focus to examine how algorithmically mediated surveillance infrastructures intersect with religious majoritarian aggression as well as "structured visibility"—visibility conferred by media in relation to prevailing structures of authority—that underwrites online politics of religious minority groups (Udupa, 2015). Fun constitutes a distinct strand of digitally enabled transgression through speech and images, allowing majoritarian groups to consolidate power with banal forms of exclusions while raising hopes of transgressive subversion among minoritized groups.

Social media practices we analyze here reveal that digital media affordances have provided the conditions to challenge entrenched hierarchies through performative moments of transgression and reflection, but they are limited by the nation-state's oppressive structure of drawing a distinction between the minority and majority religious populations as well as by racialized Islamophobia that spans vastly divergent national scenarios in the post 9/11, post-Brexit context of anti-immigrant politics in the West. Digital mediations of religious politics therefore cannot be understood through the lens of "radicalism" as the "dangerously enchanting mix of religion and social media" (Jones & Slama, 2017), but as a composite space of aspirations and affects that encounters deepening racialized structures of religious majoritarian hegemony in the postcolonial context.

We advance these arguments by exploring online media practices among Hindu nationalists and Muslim political actors in India, and prominent Indian Muslim advocacy groups in the UK. Using the methodology of internet-related ethnography, characterized by "ethnography on the move" and theoretically guided framing of online networks (Wittel, 2000), we build on multiyear ethnographic research carried out since 2013 (ongoing until the time of writing). This fieldwork has involved interviews with online users who mobilize religious identities and religiously inflected tropes for political contestations as well as those who have pushed back against them in India and the Indian diaspora in the UK. We have coupled this with ethnographic observations inside major religious political organizations including Jamaat e Islami Hind (JIH) and the offices of the Hindu-nationalist BJP in India. Owing to the pandemic, we also relied on the generous support of our filming crew in the UK to carry out and record the interviews in 2020. We back these ethnographic forays with a critical reading of theoretically sampled online texts variously coproduced, shared, and reflected on by members of these groups. In selecting the extracts of staggeringly vast online discussions on WhatsApp, Twitter, and the official web pages of the organizations, we have followed the logic of how they illustrated and enmeshed with what we observed in the "physical" field. At times, our interlocutors alerted us to "watch out" for the unfolding debates online, guiding us on what to look for and how to do so.

The article begins by tracking continuities and discontinuities in the racialized nature of religious politics in India and the diaspora, and available scholarly perspectives on the role of internet-enabled media in reinforcing religion's significance in public life. The following sections will ethnographically explore piety, surveillance, and fun as constellations of digital practices that have refueled religion's efflorescence in the political sphere for communities living in India and for the diaspora. We conclude by discussing how digitally mediated discourses reenergize religion as a political category of difference under majoritarian right-wing regimes. Building on this analysis, we focus on the three clusters of digital practices that have ramped up confrontations among very real communities and authority structures. We thus theoretically position the internet as an arena of "multiple interfaces."

Rather than the abstraction of the internet as an encompassing technological context or an instrumental understanding of the internet as a conduit, it might be better seen as an arena of "multiple interfaces." This theoretical positioning departs from approaching interfaces only in terms of the materialities of internet technologies and their intrinsic properties in shaping behaviors (Couldry & Hepp, 2016). It instead highlights the structural aspects of practice that are not fully predefined but unlocked during ethnographic fieldwork. By exploring three clusters of practice (piety, surveillance, and fun) and reconstructing the connections they have stirred up under longer historical conditions and platform conditions of algorithmic structuring (Krafft & Donovan, 2020), we suggest that the internet's mediation—as "multiple interfaces"—lies in bringing distinct actors, levels of authority, institutions, ideologies, and motivations in close confrontation: the nation-state, capitalist market, diaspora, homeland publics, and divergent religious communities. These interfaces occur along interrelated spatial fields instantiated by online networks within and beyond the national boundaries, creating new mediated spaces of contiguities and confrontations. Within these spaces, emergent groups of (nonlegacy) political actors confront established power, whether of the nation-state or organized religion, just as different groups of lay online users (including members of divergent religious communities) confront each other, while the homeland publics and the diaspora collaborate in ways to augment desired voices and disrupt those who dissent. We discuss below the changing contours of mediated religious politics in India and the diaspora to substantiate this theoretical point.

POLITICS, RELIGION, AND DIGITAL MEDIA EXPANSION IN INDIA

India is home to 966 million Hindus (79.8 percent of the population) and 172 million Muslims (14.2 percent of the population), the world's third-largest Muslim population.[3] There is little dispute among scholars that religion constitutes one of the "defining elements in the politics of belonging and identity" in India (Jaffrelot 1996; van der Veer, 2002, p. 184), although the category of "religion" itself has been inextricably imbricated in colonial governmentality (Chatterjee, 1993). The significance of religion—as forms of moral discourse, structures of community, and categories for statecraft—is shaped in part by colonial modernization and Orientalist knowledge production that universalized the category of religion by bringing heterogeneous traditions under the rubric of "Hinduism" (Dube, 1998; Lorenzen, 1999; van der Veer, 2002) and "Islam" in South Asia (Ahmad, 2009; Asad, 1993; Islam, 2015). Census and other modern practices of the colonial state further expanded religion

as a political identity and deepened its stakes in defining what we might call "national belonging"—as conditions of political participation, legal-constitutional guarantees of protection, as well as affective attachments to the nation-state (Brosius, 2004; Mankekar, 2015).

A direct consequence of colonial modernization, precolonial factional politics, and the partition of British India in 1947 has been the growing importance of the distinction between Hindus as the majority population and Muslims as the minority (Saberwal, 2006). Inspired by the spirit of secular modernization, postcolonial India embraced a variant of the liberal model to articulate secularism as tolerance and equality for multiple religions rather than a complete separation of the state from religion. Despite this professedly secular-liberal model and partly as a result of this, the ideology of religious difference continued as a prominent factor to define political power and social privilege. Van der Veer (2002) adds that the secular project in India draws on religion as moral sources of citizenship and national belonging, and that Hindu majoritarian ideas of nationalism have gained ground through this very historical articulation of secularism. The further consolidation of Hindu-nationalist political power in contemporary India has destabilized protections of citizenship for religious minorities, as the CAA/NRC controversy bears out. The distinction between minority and majority populations in the context of a nation-state polity and recent repressive actions have stemmed from and deepened the racialization of Muslims in terms of "quasi-biological, immutable bodily characteristics" such as "proclivity for producing children as a calculated strategy for outnumbering the Hindus demographically" (Baber, 2004, p. 707).[4] The process of racialization predated colonial rule, but it was during the colonial occupation that conceptions of Hindus as a "race"—one that was under threat of extinction because of their effeminacy, as opposed to the virile and lustful Muslim male—gained roots within the emergent frame of a modern nation-state. Racialization of religious identities was shaped by colonialism as a global process. Colonialism reproduced hierarchy and difference contained within the modern nation-state, and this process was global in scope (Treitler, 2013). Such processes are accentuated in the contemporary moment by the invoked figure of the "Muslim other" in the transnational "global war on terror" that has produced a "terrorist enemy" outside of the traditional sovereignty of the nation-state and linked to the so-called Muslim problem (Ponsford, 2017). This racialization has involved the trope of "terrorist monster" beyond the human and the "Muslim other" as killable and outside of law (Puar & Rai, 2002). Far from suggesting that there is a unified Muslim subject, the above analysis shows how divergent actors within the Muslim community—some of whom we feature in this article—are drawn into the collective reality of reckoning with majoritarian and racialized politics.

Set against this fraught national and transnational politics, the expansion of digital media represents a significant phenomenon. India's 700 million internet users compose the world's second-largest user base.[5] Although almost a third of the world's population that is not connected to the internet is in India (Iyengar, 2018), affordable data plans and mobile phone expansion have led to tremendous uptake for global social media platforms such as Facebook (with 329 million users in India),[6] WhatsApp (487 million users),[7] and Twitter (23.6 million users),[8] as well as social media and messenger tools such as ShareChat and video-sharing platform TikTok (until it was banned in 2020). Recent studies have documented the strong online presence of Hindu-nationalist volunteers and the role of the BJP as the front-runner of social media political campaigning (Neyazi et al., 2016; Udupa, 2017). At the same time, Islamic voices and Indian Muslim political positions are not uncommon online (Riaz et al., 2009). This is evident in the expansion of Muslim websites and blogs with diverse agendas linked to television and other media (peacetv.in; dawatonline.com; radianceweekly.com), and the adoption of internet channels by older organizations such as JIH and newer groups such as online comedians who often explicitly discuss religious identities in their comedic commentaries on public life and politics.

Such trends confirm what critical scholarship on Western liberalism has recognized as the failed "liberal dream" of removing religion as a feature of the sovereign space of politics—a dream founded on a philosophy of history that posited secularization as a universal process of human development (Asad, 1993; Casanova, 1994; Turner, 2011; van der Veer, 2002). Religion as a category is "both necessary to and generated by modern secular governance" (Hirschkind & Larkin, 2008, p. 2). Following this leading critique of Western liberal normative assumptions, several studies have shown how the technological features, cultural practices, and social organization of media, including the burgeoning online media, have become a condition for religion's salience in politics (Campbell, 2010; Dawson & Cowan, 2004; Hojsgaard & Warburg, 2005).

For the purposes of this article, two observations advanced in this scholarship are pertinent. Among other things, the internet has made religious networks and religious politics more transnational by allowing solidarities and contestations to circulate beyond the territorial boundaries of the nation. At the same time, these very transnational circulations have enabled nationalist affect to gain deeper roots, allowing the nation to operate as a "network" (Bernal, 2014). The new virtualization has produced transformation in some of the most central concepts of political modernity—religious/secular and national/international in particular. In the postcolonial context, these circulations have further cemented the transnational processes of racialization of religious identities in relation to nation-states as authoritative containers of difference and hierarchy. At the same time, these online participations have introduced agentic possibilities in the offline spaces where emergent groups have become political actors in their own right. The struggles around the quest for belonging and attacks against the demands for inclusion are animated by at least three clusters of digital practice: piety, surveillance, and fun. In what follows, we examine how these practices shape the frictions, threats, contestations, and aspirations that surround religious politics.

PIETY

There needs to be a "clear purpose [maqsad]" for any online activity, urges the amir (president) of JIH, "since Muslims need to portray exemplary behavior" (Husaini 2018, p. 27). The JIH

is arguably the most politically visible da'wat (proselytizing and preaching) organization for Muslims in India.[9] Sadatullah Husaini, the amir, has authored a booklet titled *Cyberistan* in Urdu as a reference text on online behavior for Jamaat members. In this book, Husaini offers elaborate moral advice to social media users. There is a division between reality and image, he cautions. "People often seek refuge from the bitterness of life in the valleys of beautiful dreams," and in the "image realm of Cyberistan," which "is filled with artificial desires" (Husaini 2018, p. 7). This escapade can have implications for organized social struggle (samaji jihadkari), he points out. There is a fundamental difference between slacktivism and the struggle on the ground, he goes on to state. The offline encounter between two human beings is phenomenologically fuller, involving individuals' "aura" and a propensity to experience emotional warmth and empathy. This is why social media should "serve the offline life instead of taking its place" (p. 26). He repeatedly reminds his readers that people should not waste their own and others' time by engaging in nonserious activities. His guidance includes suggestions such as "draft your monthly and yearly goals for social media use and limit your activities to the achievement of those" (p. 29). He urges Jamaat members to remember the hadith [sayings and behaviors of the Prophet] that "for man to become a liar it is enough to relate a story to others without having done any inquiry" (p. 30). Social media is a powerful tool to spread information and therefore dangerous if used for misinformation. Husaini reminds his readers that "we have to give an answer in God's presence for every uttered word." Da'wat should be conducted with wisdom (hikmat) and by way of excellence of debate. The da'wat work is to pass on the message, it is not to force it on people. If the other person is not convinced even after all arguments have been presented, one should put the conversation to rest, keeping emotions under control (p. 31).

On a strikingly similar vein of moral advice for social media users and public figures more generally, but in relation to a narrower definition of decorum in political speech, Dattatreya Hosabale, the leader of Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), the parent Hindu-nationalist organization in India, invokes the figure of Lord Rama, a Hindu deity. "Lord Rama is remembered as Maryada Purushottam [the supreme being of modesty]," he reminds his audience at a public event, "because he maintained modesty even in the language he used." "Lord Rama maintained maryada [civility] in language too. His message in today's context is that one should not speak whatever comes to mind … rather one should be careful in language" (Singh, 2020). In public statements on the topic of social media, Mohan Bhagwat, the chief of the organization, has been more scathing about social media. In March 2018, he declared that he would not have a personal Facebook or Twitter account because of "social media's potential to make users egotistical and self-centric" (Kaushika, 2018). "Facebook, by its name itself, represents our face as an individual and, therefore, tends to make you more self-centric," he continued in an interview in the organization's mouthpiece, Panchajanya. "A sense of being in a society is lost after prolonged use of social media. Excessive use of social media makes a person self-centered and arrogant." RSS has drawn a list of do's and don'ts for its members: "Nobody can use any unparliamentary language; posting or promoting fake news is prohibited; and the authenticity of all materials must be checked before they are posted online" (Kaushika, 2018). Although skeptical about social media's dangers, especially eroding a "sense of community," RSS nonetheless acknowledges its usefulness for political discussions in contemporary times, and to this effect, regularly organizes "social media enclaves" to train its members in social media use.[10] Similarly, it has been alert enough to counter what it sees as "fake news" about the organization and its leaders. For instance, after a series of what the leadership saw as online sling campaigns, top leaders of the organization shunned their dislike for social media and started their individual Twitter handles in early 2020 (Telegraph, 2019).

Jamaat's moral advice represents a self-consciously and intellectually elaborated pious practice concerning no less than the soul of the political activist and a sensitivity toward digital phenomena such as highly emotional forms of speech that could harm the health of the soul and its ultimate relation to God. RSS' invocation of modesty through the figure of Lord Rama, on the other hand, is set as a practical guide oriented more toward sustaining a moral relation between the individual and the nation as a community. Across both the discourses runs the imagination of a pious self—rid of arrogance and ego and filled with virtues and duties. The similarity, however, stops at this level of formal comparison. Opposed to its sister organizations in Pakistan and Bangladesh (Iqtidar, 2011; Islam, 2015), the JIH does not participate directly in electoral politics. Rather, it operates in the field of education and as a political pressure group. For this purpose, the organization runs several media teams in different Indian states and its headquarters in New Delhi. The cadre-based organizations of JIH focus on the long-term transformation of the polity through education and advocacy and align polity with their own Islamic conceptions of a morally good society. The context of a minority organization has driven JIH in India to accept state-secularism as the framework within which claims and demands to Muslim participation could be put forward (Ahmad, 2009; Kramer, 2021). While the Jamaat is overtly critical of the current Hindu-nationalist government (calling it "fascist"), its leaders are careful not to challenge secular nationalism. Jamaat's pious self fits within the framework of minority politics related to piety and moderation qua legalist constitutional discourse—a feature common among any politically active Muslim group in India (Ahmed, 2019).

The RSS' imagination of a pious self that is rid of arrogance, ego, and self-centeredness is arguably the official public presentation of a vastly layered Hindu-nationalist movement. This movement is shaped by political claims of Hindus-as-the-majority anchored as such by a minority of upper-caste groups of Brahmins and trading castes (and increasingly enlisting intermediary castes). The RSS' formal declaration of modest social media behavior navigates a volatile field of what their own top brass sometimes derides as "inflammatory speech" among its supporters and political leaders. Hosabale's moral invective, for instance, was provoked by a series of public rallies where the BJP leaders, including its parliamentarians, had openly goaded the party supporters to chant slogans such as "go and kill the 'traitors'" (Desh ke gaddaron ko goli maro salon ko;

Mathew & Rajput, 2020). Such provocative statements reflected a decade of further consolidation of Islamophobic majoritarian politics practiced by the BJP, which pioneered, among other measures, propagandistic use of digital social media to ramp up hypernationalism. The digital campaign of the party combined top-down efforts of persuasion with strategic use of social media voluntary work characterized by daily online activities of a large number of Hindu-nationalist sympathizers. Together, they raised the drumbeat around the nation by invoking themes of rhetorical patriotism; emotional reference to the sacrifice of the Indian army; territorial attachment to the sacred land of India; minority Muslim community as threats to the security of the nation; the symbolism of the sacral cow; global conspiracy around Christian proselytization; the glory of ancient, undivided Hindu India; and the flawed history of India built by the left-liberal intelligentsia. Historically, these have been the key tropes of the Hindu-nationalist movement in postcolonial India (van der Veer, 1994). A key characteristic of online Hindutva is the gaali (abuse) culture of brazen and confrontational exchange on social media common among Hindu-nationalist supporters (and also different ideological groups; Udupa, 2017). The RSS' formal appeal to modesty in social media language has thus emerged from the overwhelming reality of incompatible behaviors by its own supporters. Moreover, its call for a desired moral relationship with the nation and racialized distinctions between religious groups has offered the background against which such seemingly contradictory militant behaviors find force and legitimacy. Calling for *maryada* as pious patriotism is thus more in the manner of social media decorum rather than its intrinsic content.

In the Indian diasporic context, however, piety is also the language of moral critique and political resistance. Lamyah, a member of the British Indian Muslim advocacy organization "Strive UK," spends about "two to three hours" daily on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, and YouTube. A civil engineer who moved to the UK from the southern Indian state of Kerala after marriage, Lamyah is clear about her motivations for engaging social media platforms. "It is mainly to raise voice against injustice," she says with candor and conviction, invoking the copious moral imagination of "being human" as the driving force for her purposeful action online. The moral charge of her social media engagement draws directly from the Quran, which she absorbs in daily prayers. "There is a hadith, saying of the Prophet," she says, then elaborates:

> [It says] if you see any injustice or evil happening around you, you should stop it. You should change it with your hands. If it's not possible, you should change it with your tongue. Again, if that's not possible, you should at least change it with your heart. That is the weakest part of the faith. The minimum a person should do, I would say is hate it with heart. At least hate the evil that's going around the world. Based on this teaching, I would say, isn't it mandatory, isn't it necessary we should feel it's a must to raise our voice against the evils and injustice happening around the world? That's what I am using the social media platforms for.

In Lamyah's social media practice, religious piety and political resistance are intricately interwoven—a reflection of her engagements in the larger world. Aside from Strive UK, she is part of a "Quran group" that meets online every week to "discuss the current relevant topics, to discuss the Quran and the hadith." By placing "current relevant topics" and "the Quran" in uninterrupted succession, she signals how the religious flows into the political, almost intuitively. Orienting the self piously toward worldly justice, she has been active on several online campaigns, including online mobilizations against the CAA and NRC. She has tweeted, forwarded, and shared materials about the controversial regulations and protests against them to call out the Indian government's repressive actions. "On Twitter, there are trending hashtags," she informs energetically, "and we are doing campaigns like, 'release the political prisoners.' What they are [Indian government] doing behind this pandemic [is that] they are just arresting the students, whoever was peacefully protesting against the CAA-NRC." By sharing and linking the voices, her digital practices have sought to raise a voice against enforcing a carceral state on Muslim minorities back in her homeland.

Much in the same vein of pious political practice of fighting injustice, she had teamed up to organize webinars on Black Lives Matter (BLM) and against Islamophobia in Britain by gathering "prominent activists back home and across the UK and other like-minded groups." "I try to be on top of news," she says spiritedly, describing her daily online activities that keep track of ongoing developments around controversies targeting Muslims. Each online activity, for her, is to practice the hadith and fight the evil:

> We can't sleep a good sleep with all these happening around the world. […] What our Prophet taught us—if you see an evil, you have to react to it in whichever possible way you have. […] The anti-CAA struggle or Black Lives Matter, we're not physically there. The best platform we've got is the online social media platform where we can raise our voice.

As BLM, CAA, and Islamophobia coarticulate one another in the diasporic context, they reveal how Indian Muslim diaspora's political opinions unfold in the transnational racialized space and in relation to Islamophobia as a particular racial formation that hinges on, among other things, identities associated with being "visibly Muslim." Lamyah perceives the racialized Islamophobic space as the "problem of being accepted when you have a Muslim name or wear a hijab."

Against this background, the Indian Muslim diaspora's experiences and protests, as those earnestly mobilized on digital platforms by hijab-wearing diaspora actors like Lamyah, have had reverberations back in India. During the CAA protests, the veiled woman, as a sign of resistance, drew on diaspora articulations of resistance (Garner & Selod, 2014). Digital mediations in this instance connected "home politics" and "diaspora politics" through the cultural grammar of the assertive veiled Muslim woman, and the pious self as both a symbol and weapon for struggle.

While subversive in some contexts, the manifold interlocks between religious piety and political claims have sparked a panoply of digital practices in India and the diaspora that are shaped by and that amplify Islamophobic and Hindu majoritarian aggression. We pry open the lens of "surveillance" in the next section to examine this phenomenon.

SURVEILLANCE

In April 2018, Swathi Vadlamudi, a cartoonist for India's major national daily the Hindu, was hounded by trolls for her alleged anti-Hindu cartoons. On April 10, 2018, Vadlamudi published a cartoon on her Twitter and Facebook accounts as a commentary on incidents of rape and kidnapping of minor Muslim girls in Jammu and Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh. Vadlamudi's cartoon depicted Hindu god Ram and his wife, Sita, discussing the tragic cases, with Sita remarking, "I was so glad I was kidnapped by Ravan [the demon king] and not your bhakts!" (lit. "devotees," but also internet slang for supporters of Indian prime minister Narendra Modi). In the Ramayana—a mythological narrative and sacred Hindu text important to the Hindu-nationalist project—Ravan, the demon king of Lanka, kidnapped Sita. The cartoon had satirically stated that Ravan might have behaved better with Sita than the present-day bhakts. The president of the Hindu Sanghatan, a Hindu-nationalist organization, filed a police complaint against Vadlamudi under Section 295(a) of the Indian Penal Code for "deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs," following which a First Information Report (FIR) was lodged. Online threats against the journalist mounted, including threats that she would face the same fate as the murdered cartoonist of the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine in France. Relentless online intimidation forced the journalist to withdraw from social media for some time. The severe case of death and rape threats against the journalist is not a singular incident, but it inhabits a wider online culture of gaali (abuse) in which female online users critical of nationalist projects are subject to various forms of harassment, foremost of ad hominem attacks and accusations of sexual promiscuity based on masculinist ideologies of sexual modesty. This feeds on surveillance practices of online vigilantes who track down dissenting voices by shadowing known and new critics online. In 2020, Udupa met Varun (name changed), a young software engineer in Bangalore, who appeared to be knee deep in the work of "banal" surveillance. Realizing that he was unable to convince her of his political position during the face-to-face conversation, he quietly started to send messages to her on WhatsApp the following day—on how Muslims in Belgium had begun to demand an Islamic state in the country and that it was not surprising because as a jati (here, "race"), Muslims would behave the same everywhere. It took just one click to find that fact-checking agencies had exposed the story as "fake news." She promptly sent the link on WhatsApp as a response. "The year might be incorrect," he admitted, "They have not made this demand now, but surely they had raised this demand before." In the next second, he had sent one more weblink about "the Muslim problem." For him, such exchanges had become a routine practice of shadowing "hypocritical" journalists and public intellectuals on Twitter or people he personally knew on WhatsApp, by commenting, tagging, and sending the "correct weblinks" so they changed "for good." On the point of Muslims-as-a-threat to the nation and the world, he appeared to be fundamentally immutable.

Engaging social media channels to follow and harass assertive political actors has also been a feature of the Indian diaspora in the UK. Such practices have tied diaspora members firmly to the cadences of homeland politics. The "banal surveillance bind"—if one might describe this phenomenon—unfolds foremost as the chilling effects of self-censorship, self-doubt, and anticipations of danger. For Lamyah, our interlocutor in the UK, abusive attacks on Indian journalists by right-wing trolls on Twitter have been deeply disconcerting:

> The biggest challenge in terms of online visibility [is that] I have seen many news [stories] where extreme right groups have commented with rape and death threats to female activists in India who speak for the minorities and [about the] atrocities they face. […] The more an individual becomes visible, they will come across such mentally stressful challenges.

As Lamyah describes to us, the harassment of Muslim journalists in India resonates with her own experiences of being "visibly Muslim" in the UK. She feels relatively protected in the context of British multiculturalism but also vulnerable when she ties the threads and begins to suspect religious discrimination in digital monitoring. She vacillates between fear and freedom as she ruminates aloud before our recording camera:

> As of now, I don't fear it. Anything can happen. I know that even in the UK there are Islamophobic things going on. They are targeting people with Muslim names. We are not free from digital surveillance, but I don't know when it's going to come to me.

As Lamyah's gaze draws down contemplatively, we notice that she continues to talk enthusiastically about her online engagements while being alert on "attacks" that could strike her and the uncertainty of when and how that might happen.

Online surveillance—in explicit forms of monitoring as well as simmering fears—has entrenched the space of political engagement for Muslim community actors in India. These actors have therefore come to articulate new practices and concepts of religious piety to guard against surveillance and at the same time to effectively mobilize online visibility. Umair, our journalist interlocutor in Jamia Nagar, New Delhi, was involved in the anti-CAA/NRC protests, the epicenter of which was just in front of his doorstep. Active as he is, Umair has nonetheless been on the edge of anxiety about how their actions will be surveilled or punished. In an interview with Kramer, he elaborated:

> There have been issues such as flagging. Of course, these social media platforms work under a certain purview of state regulation but I think direct state regulation [intervention] has not been there … [we] have been asked to remove something from Facebook as it violates community standards. But I think those standards are … a very double-faced approach of social media sites. [I say this] because people from a certain background and communities have been asked too often to put off their status and remove their status as it violates community standards. But again, people who belong to a certain section of the population are given a free hand to spread hate on social media … I do not understand why Facebook does not comply with state regulation [in this case].

Umair hesitates to name these "certain communities," even though he implies that religious majoritarian actors are better positioned to rally their hate on social networking sites, in contrast to minority groups who feel more vulnerable. Furthermore, his guarded response places the onus on Facebook and Twitter rather than the nation-state. In his contemplative responses, he refers to surveillance practices of majoritarian political actors who use social networking sites to silence people like him online or otherwise threaten them with litigations (as was also evident in the FIR lodged against cartoonist Vadlamudi). In conversations with Kramer, online Muslim activists frequently expressed the fear of being surveilled and punished because of the network effects of being "exposed."

Majoritarian surveillance has extended from rumormongering mobile phone videos that have led to mob lynching (Citizens against Hate, 2017) to organized practices of weaponized snooping, as evidenced by the controversy in 2019 over Pegasus, a malicious spyware manufactured by an Israeli company, which was used to surveil civil society activists and journalists critical of the government (Chishti, 2019). While surveillance has not decimated participation among Indian Muslims, it has led to visibilities that strive to push against growing restrictions—a phenomenon that might be understood as "structured visibilities" where media opens up fields of visibility for groups and individuals but along the paths marked by structures beyond their control (Udupa, 2015).

FUN

Surveillance via digital infrastructure and state institutions raises grave issues around vulnerabilities of religious minority groups vis-à-vis the nation-state both within the homeland and the diaspora. But much of online aggression and vigilante practices converge around experiences of digital culture that appear at first sight to be incongruent with the seriousness of ideological propaganda. Visceral aspects of fun and enjoyment illustrate the paradoxical overlaps between grave implications of religious politics and the experiential efflorescence of digital practice.

From composing hilarious memes to the joy of trending hashtags, fun is at the heart of digital content and practices among Hindu nationalists. Fun lies also in the sense of prominence that tweets and posts suddenly bestow on the user. In 2019, for instance, the Indian government called Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey to appear before a parliamentary committee to provide his "views on safeguarding citizen rights on social/online news media platforms" (Choudhury, 2019). Media reports speculated that the notice was issued after a group of right-leaning online users complained that Twitter was unfairly removing right-wing accounts from its platform. Dorsey didn't appear before the committee, citing reasons of short notice. There was considerable outrage among Hindu-nationalist volunteers. "Twitter insults India," cried the hashtag #CheaterTwitter that galvanized the mini revolt against the platform. Hindu-nationalist sympathizers pledged to route Twitter out of "democratic India" for not respecting its highest legislative body. Their resolve to trend the hashtag and consequent success in gaining attention of the Twitterati, as they saw it, came with several self-congratulatory messages. One user exclaimed, "Lol poor @Twitter is threatened by a Bhakt's tweets so they resort to petty ways by reducing RTs [retweets]. Keep playing games, yo! I'm enjoying the attention 😎."[11] The fun of taking on a mighty company with one's own online labor reveals the visceral pleasures of gaming, trending, and winning in online power games. This practice sits with another striking feature of online Hindu-nationalist fun: the word game of "putting carnivalesque twists on familiar expressions" (Doostdar, 2004, p. 659). Libtards are thus "liberal retards," "commies" refer to "communists," or the globally circulating expression, "presstitues" to deride the (liberal) press. For thousands of volunteers, being "funny" is a tactical way to enter and rise to prominence within online debates as well as draw on the collective pleasures of identity. To feed and benefit from this volunteer-driven "fun," the BJP's social media machinery has put to use online media's colloquial language styles by using professional groups to compose "funny" online posts, memes, and images. Large teams of paid digital marketers are employed for the purpose. These teams complement the party's strategy to keep the Hindu-nationalist volunteers motivated enough to engage in brash and fun-laden bickering online. This strategy has now become common among other political parties who are increasingly hiring digital campaign consultants. In the exemplary case of the BJP, not only do digital marketers flood social media platforms with "funny messages" of derisive humor—coining an ever-increasing list of online jargons and derogatory witticisms—but they also design online games where users could play the role of a "scamster" [representing the opposition party] and gain an immersive experience in a gaming environment to develop disdain for the opposition party framed as corrupt and scandal ridden. The virtual reality of online gaming, digital marketers believe, would entice the users to experience the BJP's election message through fun-filled pleasure cultures online.

If fun is key to new online political mobilizations online for Hindu nationalists, it is also widespread among Indian Muslims but with vastly different implications. Fun in the Indian Muslim context promises to bestow a sense of pride by transgressing officially sanctioned political decorum that has sought to undermine their claims of representation and participation. Online and offline practices of All India

Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (All India Council of Muslims, AIMIM), which recently entered national politics with astonishing success offers an illustrative case. The success of the party is partly credited to online visibility that remediates the enjoyments of earlier forms of mobilization such as political speeches, and rallies, now amplified by nationwide circulation of Facebook fan pages, TikTok videos, and WhatsApp groups. Watching the widely circulated videos of speeches of AIMIM leaders, many Indian Muslims, like Umair, take pride in and enjoy the rhetorical wit of the party head, Asaduddin Owaisi as well as the carnivalesque performances of his younger brother, Akbaruddin Owaisi. Akbaruddin's speeches contain many comical moments that push the boundaries of political decorum that is expected of Indian Muslims in the public domain. Some of these unsaid strictures are that Indian Muslims should not sound too proud to be a Muslim when they appear in public. Such strictures go hand in hand with election time codes that forbid political leaders from mentioning other religions in a negative manner.

One example of Akbaruddin's transgressive humor is his comment on "love jihad." This term has been popularized by some agents of the Hindu-right who claim that Muslim fundamentalists are systematically converting Hindu and Christian women into Islam by way of marrying them. Such unions are not seen as "real love" but rather as an Islamist conspiracy to change the demography of the country. "Love jihad" is supposedly financed by "foreign forces" to draw Hindu women into Islam with material enticements such as designer clothes and consumer vehicles like cars (Gupta, 2009). Akbaruddin Owaisi voiced his reaction to the issue of "love jihad" (Waghmode, 2014) at the beginning of Narendra Modi's first term as prime minister in 2014 at a community jalsa (all-male public rally) in Mumbai:

> You tell me, what is this "love" in love jihad after all [are kay ka love]? Jihad is a sacred [makhadas] matter, love is different. What connects jihad with love? All right then, Yogi Adityanath, Narendra Modi, and Pravin Togadia [three Hindu-nationalist politicians who commented on love jihad]: You are living in the era of this Akbar [himself, the name literally means "the great"; tu is Akbar ed aur meinm hai]. If you would have lived during the reign of Akbar the Great [Moghul emperor of the 16th century], then Jodhaabai, the beloved gem of the Rajput kings [a Hindu dynasty], would never have become Queen of India [his audience is laughing and cheering, he smiles with his hand on his chest]. Don't we have secularism? Please tell me, what kind of secularism is this? Make her Queen of India! Still this accusation … What is this? … I could say many things … but I will only say so much for now: remember BJP, RSS, and all you Sangh Parivar people! You will not be able to challenge my fiery speeches! [Tu meri alfaz ki aatishnawai ka mukabla nahim kar sakoge; translation by Kramer]

In this utterance rich with intertextual references, Akbaruddin Owaisi dons the role of a street-smart leader by using linguistic indices that point to a popular southern Indian Hyderabadi slang (kay ka love) and by evoking popular cinematic representations of a neighborly ruffian hero (Kramer, 2014). At the same time, he includes a few chaste Urdu terms such as aatishnawai (fiery) and makhadas (sacred). The Urdu register is enmeshed with intertextual connotations ranging from popular narratives of Mughal India to the 2008 Bollywood film *Jodhaa Akbar*, which featured epic love between Mughal emperor Akbar and Hindu princess Jodhaa.

Do our interlocutors from the Muslim community in India experience these transgressive speeches as fun? In the field, many conversation partners pointed out to Kramer that they find the "hate speeches" of Akbaruddin "outrageous." Often, these statements are accompanied by a smile or a giggle. They are not really "outraged," at least not in a moral sense. Rather, they entail transgressive enjoyments around the fact that this way of speaking flies in the face of popular assumptions about how a Muslim might be allowed to speak in India. Their smiles and playful postures conveyed a sense that "if majoritarian politicians can transgress, so can we."

These ludic transgressions are gendered and to some extent similar to the Hindu-nationalist discourse, as they appeal to the anxieties of receding to "effeminate" politics. Not only do the speeches emerge from male-only night rallies (jalsa) conducted in the streets of old-town Hyderabad (Jha, 2017), but they are also sprinkled with jokes that boast Muslim masculinity in the face of anti-Muslim politics and sentiments. Videos of live jalsa circulate on TikTok and other video-sharing platforms where young Muslim youth are seen uploading videos of their own that mimic and celebrate Owaisi's spirited speeches.

In stark contrast to the highly masculinist political discourse of ludic transgression both among Hindu nationalists and a section of Indian Muslim politicians, fun has emerged as an enabling element in the digital practices of online actors of Muslim origin in the UK.

Online stand-up comedy is an illustrative case for direct engagements with subversive fun as a modality to articulate questions of citizenship and belonging. Many stand-up British comedians of South Asian descent have thematized issues of citizenship and identity politics in their distant homelands (or of their parents) through a variety of comic tropes, often by centering the realities of racialized Islamophobia in the West. For our Indian diasporic interlocutors in the UK, British comedians of South Asian origin are a ready reference point for the transgressive potential of online circulations, and of comedy in particular. They often cite, share, or themselves employ humor while confronting regressive abuses and disinformation of right-wing actors online. "There are two types," explains Naeem, an online activist of Indian Muslim origin living in London:

> The way to address the emotional part is to be sarcastic … come at it with a little sarcasm. There's a bit of humor, bit of good banter push. The rational bit is fact-check. Show a credible

> source with photographic evidence and also reference photographic evidence, and in some cases, you would also see right-wing personalities taking umair opposite views.

Naeem cites online comedians as significant actors in the first type of resistance he identifies as the "sarcastic bit" and "good banter push." He elaborates:

> Because humor is so powerful, I think it is also one of the reasons why I am becoming a fan of stand-up comedians making statements on social and political issues. […] Comedians actually [are] becoming people whom we trust more than journalists.

It is precisely this nebulous yet captivating space of online fun that our interlocutor Lamyah indexes when she offers an intriguing description of "trolling." We were interested in our interlocutors' understanding of this commonly invoked term. We did not provide any definitions of trolling, and our interlocutors thematized it in surprisingly diverse ways. Responding to our question, Lamyah remarked:

> Regarding trolls, I do not make any trolls but I do share trolls, if it is intelligently created. Trolls are sometimes the best way to express an opinion rather than what hours of conversations can create [in terms of] impact. So, trolls create an impact effortlessly. I do share trolls if it's good but I'm not a big fan of trolls … the thing is, today we can see trolls with personal attacks and abusive languages.

Lamyah's comments could come across as contradictory if not read within the larger context of the importance of online fun. Drawing a distinction between "good" trolls versus "indecent" trolls hints at the importance of appropriating the affective potential of comedic practices that sustain many online interactions. Piety often runs up against fun, but most of our interlocutors concur that some forms of online comedy, sarcasm, and "big banter push" as moments of high-intensity online interactions are important and necessary, even while sharing a certain discomfort with its transgressive content.

CONCLUSIONS

The ethnographic narratives we have sketched—of Lamyah, Swathi, and Agha to Umair, Naeem, and Varun—reveal the stakes of belonging and religious politics that internet-enabled digital practices have refueled and reconfigured in contemporary India and its diaspora in the UK. Across practices of piety, surveillance, and fun, digital mediations have altered the conditions for religious politics, first by transforming homeland and diaspora locations into interconnected networks, drawing ordinary users as well as organized groups. Second, at a phenomenological level, these practices have recomposed relations of national belonging and religious identities by enabling new ways of asserting, aspiring, and imagining politics through the pleasures, visibilities, and reflections induced by digital circulations.

These processes prompt some revisions in the theoretical approaches to the internet's role in shaping religion's presence in political life. Within scholarship on internet and political cultures of religion, a significant volume of studies has highlighted the internet as a strategic means of communication that legacy religious organizations as well as emergent religious (sub)groups and cults utilize for intended purposes of propaganda, proselytization, or violent agendas of terrorism. Despite the differences in the normative approaches they adopt and the range of religious groups they examine—from ultra-orthodox fundamentalist groups (Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2005) and newly revived religious movements such as Paganism (Cowan, 2005) to organizations that promote humanistic spirituality (Kale, 2004) and traditional religions (Bunt, 2000; Kluver & Cheong, 2007)—these studies nonetheless rely on understanding the internet as distinct technologies of communication that actors channelize to coordinate their deliberate efforts toward intended goals. The second stream takes the other end of the theoretical spectrum to posit techno-affordances as forces that encourage and even impel unsuspecting online users into specific religious experiences, while reconfiguring existing religious traditions as well as technological imaginations (Davis, 1998), and consequently, allowing religion to fold into the political sphere through such technomediations. For instance, on the specific aspect of religious experiences, de Vries (2001) understands the technological aspects of new media as such a radical force as to lead to a wholesale remaking of religion in which media technologies embody, no less, the very experiential realm of religious transcendence and the numinous.

Digital practices we have analyzed in this article highlight the limits of understanding the internet either as discrete channels of communication or as an abstract technological context based on a neat division between public and private morality (Casanova, 1994) or between secular civic action and religious life (van der Veer, 1994). Recognizing that religion's resonances even in the transatlantic world have gone well beyond the bounds of "pastoral care to individual souls" into the political sphere proper (Casanova, 1994), our analysis has highlighted digital mediations that animate civic action and religious lives in close conjunction, enabling concrete communities and authorities to cohere around digital practices that are at once deliberate and affective.

The specific mediations of the internet are set within a polymedia environment in which television, print media, and digital social media intertwine and remediate discourses (Cody, 2019). While deepening the role of media infrastructures that have long been critical to religion's salience in politics (Eisenlohr, 2011; Meyer, 2009), the internet has uniquely shaped this mediatic context through what we have described as multiple interfaces animated by three clusters of practices crossing different religious groups.

In the postcolonial and diasporic contexts, such interfaces have allowed politically active social media users and social

media–savvy politicians to negotiate and collaborate through digital practices in unprecedented ways. Whether in Lamyah's Twitter practice or the Owaisi brothers' rapturous speeches or online Hindu nationalists' efforts to "set the narrative," digital practices are entrenched by and constitute arenas of collisions and contiguities. The generative capacity of such mediated interfaces has opened up new locations, modulations, and means of practice for the political stakes of religion and national belonging. These practices have evolved with strikingly similar tropes such as modesty (common in the RSS and JIH discourses) and practices such as fun among the AIMIM leaders, British Muslim comedians, and online Hindu nationalists. These overlaps, however, cannot be overstated, or worse still, interpreted as mere mirroring practices. Modernist political-religious formations such as the BJP and JIH, members of Strive UK, and AIMIM are differentially situated based on the majoritarian and minoritarian positions they inhabit, their organizational thrust as political parties (BJP, AIMIM), an advocacy group (Strive UK), as a dawat organization that mobilizes through moral-political repertoires without forming a political party (the JIH in northern India), or as individual actors adept at using digital media through humor and journalism. The three clusters of practices that cross these divergent actors illustrate the effects and modalities of multiple interfaces as highly uneven and historically fraught. The surveillance of Hindu nationalists, for instance, exerts powerful influence in the current climate of majoritarian nationalist politics that has tapped and controlled digital media to great effect. The extent and effects of such surveillance contrasts online-offline practices among different actors in the Muslim community. In contrast to Hindu-nationalist surveillance, which can have tangible consequences for political rights and even physical safety of minoritized publics, divergent online actors in the Muslim community often embrace the moral language of piety or the civic discourse of constitutional rights to articulate dissent and develop defense. The colonial structural conditions of the minority-majority distinction enforced within the nation-state framework and global racialization of religious distinctions thus significantly influence what the overlaps or divergences in digital practices could mean to members of different religious groups, and how they ultimately shape the unfolding of the digital condition as a broader emancipatory possibility.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The real names of our research partners are retained where explicit consent has been expressed. We have inserted a note on pseudonymization in parenthesis for one research partner who did not wish to be identified. Kramer conducted the interviews in Hindi and English, and Udupa conducted the interviews in English, Hindi, and Kannada. All translations are by the authors.

[2] The filming crew contributed to our multimodal project, which is linked to the multiyear ethnographic study of social media and religious politics in India and the diaspora. Interviews in the UK were carried out by our filming crew in 2020, who generously covered for us because our travel during this time was severely restricted following the COVID regulations. The questions and the general orientation for the interviews resulted from our long-term fieldwork, which we discussed with our interlocutors before the film crew met them. The film will soon be available under the title *Nationalism 2.0*.

[3] Religion Census 2011, accessed June 23, 2021, https://www.census2011.co.in/religion.php.

[4] Although we follow Baber's (2004) emphasis on the racialization of religious distinctions in India, we disagree that religious scriptures and moral economies can be subsumed under what he defines as "cultural racism."

[5] "Number of Internet Users in India from 2010 to 2020, with Estimates until 2040 (in Millions)," Statista, accessed June 21, 2021, https://www.statista.com/statistics/255146/number-of-internet-users-in-india/.

[6] "Leading Countries Based on Facebook Audience Size as of January 2022 (in Millions)," Statista, accessed December 16, 2022, https://www.statista.com/statistics/268136/top-15-countries-based-on-number-of-facebook-users/.

[7] "Number of WhatsApp Users in Selected Countries Worldwide as of June 2021 (in Millions)," Statista, accessed June 21, 2021, https://www.statista.com/statistics/289778/countries-with-the-most-facebook-users/.

[8] "Leading Countries Based on Twitter Users as of January 2022 (in Millions)," Statista, accessed December 16, 2022, https://www.statista.com/statistics/242606/number-of-active-twitter-users-in-selected-countries/.

[9] *Da'wat* is an Urdu term derived from the Arabic *da'wa*, which literally means "invitation" to religion, in the sense of proselytizing, preaching, and propagating Islam. *Da'wat* as the Urdu term is more commonly used by Jamaat e Islami, whereas the British Muslims use *dawah*, the Arabic form. We have followed the spellings used by our respondents in each context, though both words refer to the same phenomenon.

[10] For instance, in the 2019 annual organizational report, the RSS (2019) stated that social media conclaves were arranged in different Indian cities and that "leading 1100 activists of social media participated in the events."

[11] This tweet is taken from a sample of tweets posted from February 9, 2019, to February 18, 2019, for the hashtag "#CheaterTwitter," which were gathered using the Twitter API.

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