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Urban Segregation and the Special Political Zone in Ahmedabad: An Emerging Paradigm for Religio-Political Violence

Arvind Rajagopal

Introduction

- 1 Typically the field of modern South Asia studies assumes a division between processes of British colonial state-formation across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, on the one hand, and the resistant activism of Indian anticolonialism on the other. This ideological divide has shaped the historiography of the field, with students of colonial knowledge formation and scholars of (colonial) underdevelopment ranged against those considered apologists for empire.
- 2 One of the failings of this scholarly bifurcation between studying the state versus studying society is that it has privileged the latter at the cost of the former, and thereby invested South Asian 'society' with a spurious reality of its own. A related result has been that the historiography of South Asia has suffered from working with a static account of the colonial state form. The colonial state transformed in the aftermath of the partial devolution of power to Indians beginning with Lord Ripon's Resolution of 1882 in favour of local self-government, and more importantly following the Indian Councils Acts, better known as the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909. Among the results were a growing demand for franchise, and the rise of representative politics, most keenly felt in urban areas, which were witness to the growth of various forms of caste, class and religious politics, including notably, of Hindu-Muslim violence. As such, assuming the universality of a mid nineteenth-century avatar of the colonial state, instead of exploring the important ways

in which it transformed and anticipated many features of the post-independent state, is misleading.

- 3 The consequences have impacted not only the study of cities, which have typically been subordinate to other spatial foci of study, principally region and nation, but also on the study of forms of politics that cut across the state and society divide such as Hindu nationalism, or to use the term prevalent in the literature until relatively recently, communalism. Thus communalism was understood mainly as a result of colonial divide-and-rule, and in the post-independence period, of competition between communities, and of party machinations (Chandra 1984, Akbar 1991). Hence it was regarded as aberrant rather than as reflecting the problem of sovereignty in modern and in postcolonial contexts (Schmitt 1985, Cohn 1987: 632-682, Lefort 1988: 148-187). And in cases where religious authority itself is dispersed rather than institutionalized, as for example in India, the ways in which sovereignty manifests can be revealing, as I will try to show. Political-economic and social policy decisions structure environments that ordinary people inhabit and participate in. Rather than assuming that politics, and by implication political violence, are contingencies external to these environments, I argue that they should be seen as due to the structural arrangement of built environments that themselves reflect and reinforce prevailing historical tensions.
- 4 In this paper I inquire into how the disposition of public spaces, and informal oral communication, can together create a common sense mobilizing support for spectacular events of violence. A key aspect of this process is by naming exceptions to the generality of circumstances viz., as Hindu and/or Muslim, as Gujarati and/or other, as belonging to one or other distinct space, and so on. While particularist nomenclature is unsurprising in modernizing contexts, the ways in which it can get embedded in modern built environments, and reproduced in popular perception, is noteworthy.
- 5 'The sovereign is he who defines the exception', Carl Schmitt has written (1985: 1). Schmitt pointed to the inability of a rule-bound liberal polity to respond adequately to singular events or to prevent extraordinary circumstances from telescoping into crises. The figure of the sovereign thus lurks beneath liberal democracies, despite the latter's conceit of having transcended older models of governance.
- 6 Now in formerly colonial countries, economic development is itself considered to be an emergency condition requiring extraordinary initiatives. State leaders seldom hesitate to justify invoking exceptions to prevailing rules, in the interests of the people as a whole. What distinguishes the 'Special Political Zone' is the extent of popular participation in the invocation of exception. Exceptionality may be invoked in religio-cultural, spatial and regional registers, with social, political and economic implications that then follow. For example, the widely prevalent notion in Ahmedabad, that Muslims are an unsanitary and criminal-minded population, for most Hindus explains Muslims' spatial segregation in ghettos, their economic marginalization, their political subordination to Hindus, and condones overt violence against Muslims as pedagogical or prophylactic.
- 7 In a preliminary way, my paper points to the ways in which the built form of the city, urban planning and resulting forms of social segregation, and popular linguistic practices, can combine to instantiate new political formations such as what I am calling a Special Political Zone, where the form of rule exercised is both modern and democratic, but undercut through exceptions which a majority of citizens participate in reproducing, wittingly or unwittingly (Rajagopal 2010: 529-556).

- 8 The violence in Gujarat in 2002 represented the first attacks when a government led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), both at state and at central levels, was in power. Previous episodes of violence occurred mainly under the Congress-led governments that sought to localize the effects of the violence and downplay its significance. The BJP, by contrast, tried to nationalize the violence, endorsing the idea that the killings of Muslims were spontaneous, popular and righteous, although violence attributed to Muslims was supposedly anti-national and of Pakistani origin (Roy 2002: 3-17).
- 9 What resulted therefore was a paradoxical phenomenon, namely, a spectacle of violence ostensibly enacted by non-state forces, covertly and overtly sanctioned by the state. Federalism, instead of being a way to limit centralized state authority, became a means to make human rights violations into an internal matter for state governments, something already witnessed in the Ayodhya case.²
- 10 Similarly, if ironically, Gujarat under the chief ministership of Narendra Modi has become a favoured site of corporate investment and a model of efficient pro-business government, and Modi himself a prime ministerial candidate. The commanding heights of economic policy are now being used for targeted and strategic purposes, such as the creation of Special Economic Zones where businesses could be allowed to enclose agricultural land, banking it for commercial use and increasing its value in the process, while being relieved of the burden of labour and environmental laws, and indeed of most revenue demands, in the hope that exports would grow and world-class infrastructures would be created there.³
- 11 With the SEZ, the state makes exceptions to its rules not for reasons of national security, or due to claims of a political emergency, but to enhance the material welfare of the society as a whole. While the process is routine, the linguistic register claims sanction for it (it is 'special'), encoded in a form of speech that crowds everyday life, namely the abbreviation, that like VIP, MOU or RTI becomes a common noun, and an artefact of state power that citizens have to negotiate.⁴
- 12 Where the application of select laws is formally suspended (e.g. 'A Special Economic Zone shall [. . .] be deemed to be a territory outside the customs territory of India for the purposes of undertaking the authorized operations'),⁵ what results is an amorphous and fluid landscape in which words such as SEZ offer lexical purchase, denoting singular spaces where events are explained not so much by reference to the existing juridical regime as through the name itself.⁶
- 13 Just as the laws of the land are exercised selectively for harnessing business initiatives in national development, the selective enforcement of criminal laws in this Indian interpretation of federalism may reflect the existence of special political zones that indicate not a uniform juridical regime but a mode of sovereignty, and a differentiated set of relations between the sovereign and its subjects. What such historical circumstances make possible therefore, although they do not guarantee it, is a strong leader who brooks no opposition, and who transcends his or her party status; it is the leader who defines the party in a given state rather than vice versa.
- 14 In bringing the existence of the special political zone into visibility, and rendering it into a viable mechanism for neoliberal development, Gujarat can be considered not so much a culmination of Hindutva as inaugurating a new phase of politics. Here, regionalism and globalism can mesh together while avoiding the dead ends of erstwhile forms of cultural

nationalism—that hold the literal-minded view that de facto Hindu supremacy should achieve de jure status. In Gujarat, we witness the shrinkage of political process and regulatory oversight alongside claims of enlarged popular consent and administrative efficacy. The capacity to transfer capital accrued in one domain to void penalties that are technically non-negotiable and punishable by law may be due to a provisional success in presenting private interests as universal in character. But it might also signal an emergent and regionally-specific logic of identity formation even while Gujarati capital is undergoing greater globalization. A reinforced local identity is thus here not the premise for capital accumulation so much as its result, one that is mediated by anti-Muslim violence.

- 15 A special political zone sanctions the treatment of the space within it as highly differentiated rather than as continuous or homogeneous space, the variations within it able to be reconciled only by the constant invocation of exceptionality, anchored through the perceptual mechanisms through which it is apprehended and claimed. In this article I discuss the spatial as well as the spoken order of the city of Ahmedabad through which the materiality of the city takes shape and acquires perceptual form, and indicate how the city could become the enabling ground, the visible artefact as well, to some extent, as the instrument of political violence (Rajagopal 2010: 529-556).

A riot-prone city

The impact [of the 2002 violence] on trade and
industry was negligible and transitory.
Gujarat State Industries Minister Suresh Mehta (
Times of India 2002)

- 16 The statement from Gujarat State Industries Minister Suresh Mehta made a few weeks after the most intense phase of the violence in 2002, that the impact of the violence was negligible and transitory, contrasted with other statements frequently encountered, that Ahmedabad was a riot-prone city, the milestones of whose recent history itself were all too often related through a sequence of earlier riots—1941, 1969, 1985 and 1992—so that to ask why this had occurred was to display a lack of perspicacity. Where riots had occurred so often before, why would they not occur again?
- 17 Doing fieldwork in Gujarat not long after the violence of 2002, I was struck by how quickly people seemed to accommodate the fact of violence and explain it with ready-made accounts, often centering on the immiscible presence of Muslims, whose concentration in ghettos seemed a reflection not on the city or the state but on Muslims themselves, and the disharmony they allegedly generated. Many Muslims live in the old and formerly walled part of the city, but over time they have become metonyms for each other, symptoms of a problem that is neither exclusively spatial nor political.
- 18 The old walled city was seen as congested and dilapidated from at least the early 20th century, and that was the focus of Patrick Geddes' attention when he wrote his report on Ahmedabad following his visit in 1915. The ramparts of the old city had been restored in 1832; the question before him as Geddes saw it was whether to follow the method of John Ruskin and William Morris, which would demand restoration at any cost, or that chosen by Baron Haussmann and his disciples, which would call for the summary removal of the walls. Geddes urged that no effective city planning could be done unless a comprehensive survey of all existing aspects of the city were assembled and studied. He recommended

preserving the monumental beauty of the 500-year-old fortifications wherever it was practicable to do so, keeping in mind the living needs of residents and pedestrians. Geddes was mindful of what he called 'the intensifying deterioration and squalor of the [. . .] industrial age.' In some places he argued for the retention of the wall where the availability of funds (while Britain was fighting a war) might not permit its repair or removal, noting, '[E]ast ends in India are apt to crowd and deteriorate, like east ends elsewhere; it is thus not the mere presence of the wall which causes slum conditions or overcrowding, and there is as little reason to hope that its removal would abate these evils' (Geddes 1915a).⁷

- 19 Ahmedabad indeed did adopt a third way for the walled city, neither that of Ruskin nor that of Haussmann, although it was far from that which Geddes had envisioned. There was neither architectural romanticism, nor demolition followed by grandiose reconstruction, but instead, demolition followed by preservation. Local elites, led by Vallabhbhai Patel, took over the Ahmedabad Municipality by 1919, and managed to mediate colonial intervention in city planning on their own terms. Old elites whose power was based on local networks and were opposed to opening up the old city came together with newer elites, including Vallabhbhai Patel and Kasturbhai Lalbhai, who saw an opportunity for popular mobilization that would win them a constituency in Ahmedabad, as well as gain a measure of national prominence due to their anti-government stance (Raychaudhuri 2001: 687-703).
- 20 The walls were eventually removed in 1940, but otherwise conditions in the old city were left largely unchanged. Over time, the old city grew into a symbol of dysfunctionality in Ahmedabad and at the same time provided a rationale for new developments that strangely left the problem untouched. It was as if the old city enclosed a form of moral pollution that had to be preserved as a way of underlining the relative purity of the remainder of the city.
- 21 The walled city became a political symbol, and indexed not only a problem but a way of thinking that became more entrenched as Ahmedabad grew. If invoking it was meant to disparage the slum-like conditions of the poor, over time, references to the walled city increasingly signalled Muslim habitations and the problems they allegedly brought in their wake for Hindus, so that life in Ahmedabad was a defence against the threat it represented. However, city surveys tended to ignore the distinction between Muslim and Hindu settlements, because municipal authorities were supposed to be indifferent to the distinction; successive city plans made no mention of it.⁸ Ward level census data was of course in the government's possession, which could show the relative concentrations of Hindus and Muslims in each neighbourhood across the city, and the ways these had grown and moved over time, but this was at best obliquely alluded to in city plan documents.⁹
- 22 Earlier a major centre of the textile industry, Ahmedabad's economy is today dominated by tertiary and informal sectors. The shift in the state away from textiles to chemical, petrochemical and engineering industries since the 1980s has led to massive informalization of the labour force on the one hand, and a shift of industries away from Ahmedabad to South Gujarat on the other.¹⁰ This has disproportionately affected Muslims and reinforced an ongoing trend of ghettoization.¹¹
- 23 Relevant here is the influence of Gandhi on caste reform and on working class movements. Gandhi's emphasis on ethical awareness, and fiduciary rather than conflictual relations amongst Indians, resulted in the absence of lower caste political

consciousness, and a union, the Textile Labour Association, that despite being the oldest in the country, bore the distinction of never having called an industry-wide strike (All India Trade Union Congress 1969: 7 and *passim*). As long as the business elite of the city retained the ability to informally adjudicate political disputes, a measure of cohesion prevailed.

- 24 Interestingly, each of the major movements in the state after independence was middle-class led, and none of them highlighted issues of lower caste rights, unless they actually opposed such rights. In this connection it should be noted that the Mahagujarat Andolan (movement) for independent statehood (1956-60), referred to by many activists and intellectuals as an inaugural political moment, led to a provincialization of state politics, since the more cosmopolitan classes and the financial elite remained in Bombay. The 1969 anti-Muslim riots were sparked by the rumour of an attack on Ahmedabad's Jagannath temple, and led to the gravest Hindu communal violence after 1947, until that time. The Nav Nirman (or Reconstruction) Movement which began in 1974, was led by college students; it agitated against inflation and political corruption, and led to the resignation of then Chief Minister Chimanbhai Patel. Middle classes led the 1981 and 1985 agitations against caste-based reservations since they feared they would lose their chance of secure government jobs. The 1992 communal riots were led by upper caste Hindus, as were the 2002 violence against Muslims (A. Shah 1985: 29-37, Baxi 1985, G. Shah 1996: 165-170). Taken together with the resolve of the organized labour union to avoid confrontational politics, the public spaces of Ahmedabad were effectively dominated by Hindu upper castes.
- 25 Over time, in the words of a Hindu photo journalist referring to the relationship between growing hostility and the growing physical separation of Hindus and Muslims in Ahmedabad, 'Dividation ho raha hai'—dividation began to occur.¹² I heard the term more than once. Preserving the verb ('divide') while making it into a noun connoted the active process behind the Latinate construction. Since at least 1969, each major episode of violence, in 1985, 1992 and 2002, has led to further separation of Hindu and Muslim populations in the city, and increasing ghettoization of Muslims in a smaller number of localities.
- 26 Michel de Certeau has observed that those who move through the spaces of a city—he was referring to pedestrians, but we might extend the observation to others too—operate in spaces that they cannot visualize; they are within built spaces that they use but, typically, neither design nor choose (Patel, Padgaonkar & Verghese 2002: 6-7). In this sense, de Certeau suggests, they 'write' the urban 'text' without being able to read it, much as if the practices organizing a city were characterized by a certain blindness (de Certeau 1984: Chapter 7). And similarly different bodies of people in their movement through the city make different parts of the city vanish while enlarging and amplifying others; in this way parallel urban texts can coexist for periods of time without explicit reference to each other.
- 27 Space has its homogeneous aspects, which correspond to systematic logics and deliberate strategies, such as, for example, those of class or communal stratification. On the other hand, interferences between different spatial strata if not accommodated can grow over time, building a pent-up force that periodically gets released, sometimes through benevolent forms of city planning, or otherwise through destructive and explosive forms that may either alter, reinforce or elaborate existing arrangements and patterns.

The walled city and the production of ungovernability

- 28 Ahmedabad was founded by Sultan Ahmed Shah in 1411. Some of its most spectacular monuments, such as the Jama Masjid built in 1423, are indubitably Muslim. Its largest Muslim neighbourhood is in Juhapura (formerly Gyaspur), to the southwest and technically outside city limits, but across the road from what is colloquially called Vejalpur (itself technically within Juhapura), which is understood to be within the city. Few, if any, city services are provided to Juhapura, however, unlike Vejalpur. Neither the mosque nor Juhapura appears on many maps of the city, moreover. A visitor to the Masjid, which stands opposite Mahatma Gandhi Road, and east of Teen Darwaza, will find no signboard and none of the usual commemorative marks of a major historical landmark. The mosque is in fact surrounded by a row of insignificant shops selling cheap knick-knacks, creating the impression of a small town bazaar and offering no hint of what lies behind. Seeking to go there, I passed it by a few times myself, before I located the entrance. Nearly invisible to passers-by, the mosque has a doorway that is undistinguished and devoid of any noticeable sign. Its collapsible steel gate is itself painted saffron, the hue of Hindutva in the city that adorns numerous signboards placed by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Ahmedabad. One mounts the steps through saffron portals that look back at the visitor, bearing the impress of Hindu town-planners and municipal corporators who make the entry into the mosque possible, and seek to mark this fact. Entering the structure, no visitor could fail to contrast the grandeur within and the squalor without (Figures 1-3).

Figure 1. Street frontage bordering the fifteenth-century Jama Masjid in the old city



(photo by author)

Figure 2. Street frontage bordering the fifteenth-century Jama Masjid in the old city



(photo by author)

Figure 3. Inside the Jama Masjid



(photo by author)

- 29 Through a series of adjustments over time, a separate sense of space has come to characterize the old walled city as a whole; once it was the better part of the city (Figure 4) and today it has come to be treated as pathogenic, as a predictable place of violence, and as an explanation for violence which may actually occur elsewhere, as was the case in 2002. In the old city, Ahmedabad has maze-like lanes and tightly woven residential neighbourhoods that are introvert with respect to the city but extrovert with respect to the neighbourhood, allowing for internal policing by neighbours but rendering surveillance difficult if not impossible for city authorities as was noted by the Justice Reddy Inquiry Commission Report on the riots in Ahmedabad in 1969¹³ (Figure 5).

- 30 Successive urban plans in fact retained the unsurveillable design of the old city, that favoured residents' property interests at the expense of municipal agencies' own professed needs. Although in 2002, the main sites of the violence in the city were in fact no longer within the walled city, but in settlements outside it such as Naroda Patia, it was the walled city that continued to dominate the Hindu imagination as a source of inexhaustible danger, requiring repeated 'combing operations' by the police that seldom failed to discover AK-47s and explosives, according to news reports in the Gujarati press (Patel, Padgaonkar & Verghese, 2002: 6-7). This seemingly ineradicable sense of intrigue and indeed ungovernability in the city provided the alibi during the 2002 pogrom for continuing violence, and for selective law enforcement that targeted victims rather than perpetrators.
- 31 The structured marginalization of Muslims acquires a natural character given the character of the urban design at work. This relates to the geographic specificity of the violence in Ahmedabad: violence was mainly confined to the Muslim localities, suggesting that Hindus were spectators, not participants.¹⁴ As the city grew, residential and industrial development separated from each other spatially, as in many other cities. Although town planning legislation in the region began in 1915, 'the concept of over-all growth was totally absent in phasing various town planning schemes' for decades, according to the 1975 Ahmedabad Draft Development Plan (Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation 1985: 9).¹⁵ By 1965, when the first municipal development plan was sanctioned by the State Government, following the formation of the state of Gujarat in 1960, elites were able to resist the efforts of town planning authorities to acquire land for public housing and other public purposes, and to uphold their own uses of their property even where these did not conform to town planning schemes.
- 32 Now as we know, colonial urban planning in India reproduced in spatial terms the prevalent racial distinction between rulers and ruled, maintaining well-manicured and policed 'cantonment' or 'civil lines' where whites lived, while the 'black town' inhabited by natives was crowded and unsanitary by comparison. The British cantonment (dating from 1850) had itself been on the east bank, north from the walled city. As bridges were built across the Sabarmati, beginning in 1870 with Ellis Bridge, Indian elites as well as whites moved across the river, and residence on the western bank became a clear marker of class status. Characteristics attributed to the 'black town' continued to be applied to the walled city even after independence. It became the place to escape from, as residents acquired the means to move. Over time, the spatial separation on either side of the river acquired a Hindu-Muslim definition, with Muslims acquiring a disadvantaged and deprived status vis-à-vis Hindus.
- 33 As the city grew, elites moved out first from the walled city, going north towards the British cantonment, and by the 1930s to the west of the river to Ellis Bridge and beyond. The east remained the site of industries and of the lower classes, and movement to the west signalled upward mobility. Private, residential construction dominated development on the western side of the river for decades. When institutions took root there, these were predominantly higher education institutes serving the local population, encouraging further middle and upper class residential settlement in the area, and all of these were situated on the western banks of the Sabarmati river, including S.L.D. Arts College in 1931, H.L. College of Commerce in 1936, M.G. Science Institute in 1936, L.M. Pharmacy College in 1947, Gujarat University in 1949 and several thereafter (Sompura 1973: 68). Middle and upper classes in Ahmedabad, who were mainly upper

caste Hindus, managed to steer the course of urban development to make the western side of the city effectively an upper caste Hindu enclave, albeit without walls. With the exception of Juhapura, Paldi and Navrangpura Muslim Society, the western section became almost entirely Hindu. Muslim ownership or rental of property became scarce in the newer part of the city. Working and lower middle classes, including concentrations of Muslims, dominated the eastern side of the city.

- 34 Muslims therefore faced the prospect of economic ghettoization as a consequence of their spatial segregation. The Central Business District remained in the old city, where the industrial area grew in proximity to the railway station. But following the completion of the infrastructure for the new capital city of Gandhinagar in 1970, commercial establishments increasingly began to be located in the west, along the Sarkhej-Gandhinagar or S.G. Road. Since around this time, C.G. Road (named after Chimanlal Gandadal, an Ahmedabad businessman) also began to draw businesses away from Ashram, Gandhi and Relief roads in the east. Although seven bridges were built across the Sabarmati in the last century and a half, the resulting ease of movement did not result in a uniform diffusion of people across the river. Rather, class and community loyalties expanded and fortified in the more ample region west of the river.
- 35 Housing regulations that favoured group rather than individual investment, offering loans and insurance policies to 'societies' rather than persons, helped to reproduce caste networks as people moved out of the old city into the new. When these groups moved across the river to more spacious homes, they reproduced their spatial proximity, obtaining loans for plots in new housing societies contiguous with each other. The Ahmedabad Guide of 1940 lists the Maharashtra Society, the Brahmakshatriya Society, the Jain Society, the Saurashtra Society, the Patel Society, the Brahman Society and so on (Sompura 1973: 69). More recent housing society names are unlikely to be so explicit but their caste identity is seldom a secret.
- 36 If on the one hand, urban development improved transport and communication, unequal access to the means of mobility ensured that existing social stratifications were not only reproduced but acquired a stronger spatial definition. In the old city, the rich and the poor lived in close proximity, whereas as the city expanded west of the Sabarmati, greater distinctions could be produced across middle and upper classes. At the same time, the percentage of the city's population living in slums has grown over time, that is, while the well-to-do achieved greater spatial separation not only from the poor but also with respect to each other, for those who fell on the other side of the dividing line, there was a blurring effect as poverty forced them together.¹⁶ Although the Gujarat State Housing Board's welfare initiatives were among the more effective ones in the country, they effectively subsidized the better-off at the expense of the poorer classes, financing the latter's homes at lower rates, and demanding higher rates of return on their hire-purchase schemes (Paul 1985: 90).
- 37 Rigorous spatial division became a means of anchoring a form of antipathy that was diffused throughout the city. Muslims were spatially confined to a specific part of the city, to its most crowded and poorest quarters. One Muslim told me: 'Shahpur, Bapunagar, Juhapura, Jamalpur—Muslims cannot live anywhere else in the city'.¹⁷
- 38 The latest phase of 'dividation' began with the 1969 riots, with Muslims moving out of Khadia and other areas in the walled city, and after the 1985 riots, there was a further efflux from places like Teen Darwaza, whereas Hindus moved out of areas such as Shahpur. By 2002 most middle and upper classes could spend extended periods of time

without ever seeing a Muslim, or knowing that they did, which amounted to the same thing.¹⁸ Amidst the rarity of contact, antagonism towards Muslims led to curious stories circulating without corroboration. The young daughter of a couple I knew reported one day that the mother of a friend said that Muslims made rotis (flat bread) by kneading dough with their feet. Coming from such a source, their daughter believed what she heard.¹⁹ There were other stories and incidents, not all fantastical, but like the above, emerging to conjure a peculiar form of sociality in the absence of much real interaction.

- 39 A young friend working in the publicity office of a hospital laughingly told me about a Muslim classmate, Irfan Syed, who lived in Gontipur: 'he was such a good guy, we told him he was not a Muslim, or else he was a stain on the reputation of his community'. Since he assumed that Muslims were all alike, and bad, Irfan's being an exception was something funny.²⁰ The same friend told me why it was that a mob had gathered around the former MP Ehsan Jafri's home on 11 March 2002: 'Jafri was a bad character, involved in all kinds of crimes. The newspapers cannot report these things'.²¹ To know the truth it was necessary to draw on informal knowledge; the news by itself could be misleading, he was telling me. This was not always the case, however; at times newspapers themselves purveyed rumours, which I heard from informants, as with a young chartered accountant, who once took me aside and said very earnestly, 'If we had not attacked, they would have finished us off, I am telling you.' It was a rare acknowledgement of participation, but defended as a response to an imminent 'Pakistani terrorist attack,' rumours reported as news in Sandesh and other Gujarati papers.²²
- 40 A retired city planner, while lucidly explaining the shifts over time in the growth of the city, remarked: 'Once a single Muslim comes he will start misbehaving. He will eat 'non-veg' food, employ abusive language, adopt improper clothing, bring in his relations and other visitors—naturally Hindu community will be affected. But Hindus let go; they are liberal'.
- 41 A single Muslim, in this account, was a contagion of bad etiquette and vice, requiring defences that Hindus, in their innocence, lacked. But although I did not question him on his views, he himself proceeded to caution me: 'Don't tell the students in the UK (sic) that there is a rift between Hindus and Muslims. There is no rift. Only one percent are creating [it]' (Fieldnotes 2004). He saw me as an emissary to the west and sought to project a harmonious image; the divisive behaviour of Muslims ought to be private knowledge. He made this remark not long after televised massacres of Muslims by Hindus. If this was an older, Congress narrative about communal concord, it contrasted with his own common sense about Muslims as bad citizens. It suggested how antagonism signalled not only a stratified social discourse but could lead to a multiplication of historical voice without an ability to manage its internal disparateness.
- 42 The relationship between stratified social space and antipathy to Muslims is hardly one-to-one, as if spatial distance made Hindus vulnerable to supporting violence against Muslims. The proliferation of rumour indicates both the withdrawal of agency from violence and an attempt to reconstitute it in language. This suggests membership in a collective without acknowledging the initiative of joining it. Increasing reliance on rumour follows from the eroding credibility of official systems of mass communication, but in conveying the sense of a society that can univocally be spoken for, it reproduces the splintering of social discourse. Here, rumour and violence each confirms the inability of society to cohere, and in this respect they mirror each other (Feldman 1995: 230-32).

- 43 The sparsely filled space of actual contact with Muslims was thus compensated for by a sociality produced by rumour. Not all of it was hostile, but in each case my informants distinguished between what was known and what ought to be known, between misleading public facts, and informal or secret theories required to complement and correct those facts. Individual judgment could not rely on the evidence of one's senses, by such accounts.
- 44 It was on empirical grounds that Muslims criticized Hindu rumours. During one public occasion, I encountered an elderly bearded Muslim remarking:
- You can go to mosques and see what they are doing there. There are no underground cells where they are conducting terrorist or anti-national activities. Anyone can come into a mosque—no one will stop you. There was a swami—what is his name?—Swami Sachchidanand! He used to say the idols in a temple are made of gold and silver, and are hence likely to be stolen. In a mosque nothing can be stolen because there is nothing of value there!²³
- 45 The bare austerity of the mosque corresponded, for this person, to the pure piety of what went on there, in contrast to the Hindu need for expensive idols for worship. Just as Hindus were not independent in prayer, and placed a false value on worldly wealth, they placed a false value on the authority of others for their information, he seemed to imply. His complaint pointed to his conviction that Hindu hostility was resistant to evidence, perhaps for peculiarly Hindu reasons, placing Muslims on the side of reason and rationality in a typical gesture of defiance.

Conclusion

- 46 In what ways does the violence of Gujarat in 2002 mark a departure from previous episodes of violence in India? Upendra Baxi has argued that it signalled the formal onset of what he called 'holocaustian politics', politics that rendered the state into a mechanism for subordinating the minority to the majority, and ensuring that submission became the only mode of existence for the former. Communalized governance had become the object of the state, rendering minorities into permanently endangered subjects, Baxi argued, distinguishing such governance in terms of three key components. First, the state was to champion the principle of collective guilt and responsibility, negating the idea of individual rights. Second, the right of the majority to commit violence against the minority was to be upheld and encouraged, for reasons of revenge, and self-defence as well as future deterrence, rendering the majority community into a de facto force of law, and thereby educating minorities into the form of citizenship available to them. This indicated a third crucial fact, namely that the rule of law in India had come to constitute a reign of terror, signalling a broad consensus legitimating organized political violence. Analysts of Indian politics needed to confront the difficult and unpalatable task of theorizing these new realities, Baxi urged (2002).
- 47 What Baxi did not discuss was the broader political-economic conjuncture that enabled the anti-Muslim pogroms, which succeeded in simultaneously regionalizing the violence of 2002, and accommodating it to a global neoliberal context.
- 48 Although the BJP government was replaced at the Centre after Baxi wrote his essay, the Chief Minister of Gujarat accused of masterminding the violence came to be lauded by corporate India and touted as the answer to India's apparent ungovernability. Court proceedings and inquiry commissions have been initiated, but like other juridical

processes that followed previous acts of mass violence in India, served to delay and perhaps deny justice, while simulating due process. Federalism, from being a guarantee of limiting centralization of state authority, becomes a means to make human rights violations into an internal matter for state governments. Popular elections, instead of expressing democratic rights against established elite power, can become a way of overwriting existing laws and absolving crimes against humanity; this is clearly what the BJP sought to accomplish in Gujarat, at any rate. State institutions designed to serve the people regardless of their community or creed were turned into means for ensuring that the rights of a minority were negated, while activist groups and news media that challenged such discrimination themselves become targets of vilification, as anti-people or anti-national (Baxi 2002).

- 49 The mimicking of anti-colonial politics for very different purposes by the postcolonial state suggests the inadequacy of the conventional repertoire of liberal and activist forms of politics, with their reliance on putative state impartiality combined with public protest to appeal to wider sympathies. In this case neither the one nor the other was available in very great measure, at least domestically—as a result of which appeals to international audiences and organizations were made, which then could be used to reinforce claims of anti-nationalism by the state.
- 50 I argued above that Gujarat's exceptional 'success' as the poster child of neoliberal development was complemented by the manner in which it had normalized an exceptional social order predicated on accelerated practices of social segregation, which in turn enabled anti-Muslim violence (and its rhetorical justification). Urban growth, economic development and ghettoization operated in tandem in Ahmedabad, with patterns of spatial expansion and capital accumulation together working to force Muslims more closely together into spatial proximity and social intimacy, while rendering the rest of the city as a canvas for Hindu aspirations. These aspirations can be clarified by considering spatial arrangements as they impact on urban perception. Various forms of structural and phenomenal violence in Ahmedabad became naturalized to the point where their results were seen as attributes of Muslims themselves or as the results of their behaviour, rather than as a consequence of conditions imposed on them. The form of public communication in which these conditions were reproduced relied not on transparency but on a structure of secrecy and surveillance, dividing the population into surveilled and surveilling sections, with the former understood to be different and the latter believing itself to be normal. Violence is not external to the reproduction of this system of communication, but one of its constitutive components.
- 51 My argument about the relay between the special economic and political zones as both a symptom and a form for understanding the specificity of Indian globalization, can be understood at two levels. First, it asks us to view 'Gujarat' as signalling the possible consolidation of a set of relationships between political violence and economic globalization, between an accelerated emphasis on regional identity, or Gujarati asmita, on the one hand, and the globalization of Gujarati business classes on the other as a circuit secured by the performance of anti-Muslim violence. The forms of spatial segregation, economic marginalization, and ultimately, of Muslim ghettoization have taken over the Gujarati public sphere even as they have rendered the English sphere suspect and non-authentic, thus aiding in remaking political common sense. Second, my argument regarding the special political zone points to a broader politics of vision and of visibility; it is an integral, if inadequate element in the production of a perceptual field

where Muslim vulnerability and spatial segregation are mutually entailed in the remaking of political common sense. It is this longer-term production of vulnerability that I have addressed here, in order to clarify the place of anti-Muslim violence in a neoliberal order where the logic of economic and of political exception interlace with each other.

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NOTES

2. The campaign to demolish the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya culminated under a BJP-led government in Uttar Pradesh, in 1992. Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao at the time argued that since law and order was a state subject, the central government could not intervene despite the threat to public safety in Uttar Pradesh. Hence the demolition went unhindered, albeit under the watch of tens of thousands of security personnel from the Central Reserve Police Force, the Border Security Force, the Railway Protection Force and other armed units. See Citizens' Tribunal on Ayodhya, 1993. For a brilliant critical assessment of the implications of the events in Gujarat soon after the violence, see Baxi (2002). Baxi sets out some of the terms of the theoretical and political challenges before critics posed by the Gujarat violence, and concludes with some (understandably) modest proposals for policy intervention. While he describes the 'holocaustian'

turn of political outcomes, my own essay seeks to uncover infrastructural conditions and perceptual practices that assist in the conduct of, as well as the denial of violence.

3. Declared to be public utilities under the Industrial Disputes Act, strikes are illegal in SEZs. The precursor to the SEZ, the Export Processing Zone or EPZ, was first established in Kandla, Gujarat, in 1965, to replace the deepwater port facilities lost in Karachi, following Partition. The port of Kandla itself was inaugurated about a decade earlier. By the 1990s, the provision came to be treated mainly as a regulatory loophole to be exploited by businesses. What mainly resulted then were schemes to acquire real estate, and often, windfall profits, while avoiding taxation, and relying on existing public infrastructure without contributing to it in any way. See Rajagopalan (2010: 6). A special report on the state of Gujarat's economy in one of the business papers reports that exports from Gujarat's SEZs accounted for over rupees 1 trillion—of the total exports of rupees 2 trillion from all of India's SEZs in 2009-10 (Pathak & Damor 2010: 3).

4. State-led economic development itself is conducted like an emergency, to be sure. Here what I am pointing to is the regularization of governmental discourse in this respect. The abbreviations cited are VIP: Very Important Person, for whom exceptions of all kinds are routinely made; MOU: Memorandum of Understanding, for example, between the government and a company, outlining the terms on which rights may be granted to the company in return for its anticipated contribution to the exchequer; RTI: the Right to Information (Act), used by citizens applying to have specific items of information released by petitioning the PIO or Public Information Officer of any government department. RTI can be seen as an indirect example of my point: in a context where few demands for information can be made of the government without provoking suspicion or in fact, being rejected, the RTI Act of 2005 made available a limited right, namely the right to obtain a response about whether a precisely designated piece of information could be provided, and if not, to disclose that such information could in fact not be disclosed.

5. Article 53, SEZ Act, 2005.

6. My discussion here draws on Agamben's work, but seeks to extend his discussion from sites that he mainly focuses on such as the concentration camp to the domain of political economy as such. See Agamben (1998, 2001).

7. See Geddes (1915a). See also the note by the Consulting Surveyor to the Government A.E. Mirams, dated August 25, 1915, expressing his reservation about identifying Geddes's views as those of the government. Mirams himself, in his 'Report on the Ahmedabad City Wall Improvement Scheme of 1919', later proposed the demolition of the walls altogether (Government of Bombay, Revenue Department ('28' Series), File n° 1086/28 I, pp. 323-35; File n° 1086/28 III, pp. 301-5; AMR, n° 143, 1st quarter, 1921-2, pp. 109-11, 121. Cited in Raychaudhuri (2001: 694)). Geddes' arguments were themselves in line with the City and Town Planning Exhibitions that had become an influential vehicle for inculcating urban planning as a governmental activity. Geddes visited India after Lord Pentland, the Governor of Madras, invited him to visit and enlighten municipal authorities on the subject of town planning, in 1914. The Town and City Planning Act of 1909 had been an outcome of efforts Geddes was involved in, and his City and Town Planning Exhibitions, which he designed as an educational tool, had begun to gain popularity. See Geddes (1915b). For a discussion of Geddes' work in relation to recent debates see Welter (2002).

8. My reference here is however only to two city plan documents, cited elsewhere in this article.

9. This data is theoretically available to the public, but in practice can prove hard to obtain. Meanwhile, the population density of the walled city area is said to have reached saturation levels, and the number of persons per hectare has reduced from 716 in 1971, 599 in 1981 and 560 in 1991, the most recent year for which figures are available. Over the same period, the number of persons per hectare in the western AUDA (or Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority) area has increased from 13 in 1971, 28 in 1981 and 43 in 1991, and the corresponding figures for eastern Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) have grown from 79 in 1971, 134 in 1981 and

78 in 1991. Both of these areas have concentrations of Muslim populations (Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology/Gujarat Infrastructure Development Board 2005/ Ahmedabad Bus Rapid Transit System, Report n°1, cited in City Development Plan, 13).

10. Thus, for example, the number of registered workers in Ahmedabad has remained unchanged for four decades, while the population has more than doubled, and the area measured as Ahmedabad has itself grown. See in this context Breman (2003).

11. The official picture is upbeat, however. In this connection it may be relevant that, according to the Census of India, Ahmedabad's slum population as a percentage of its total population was 13.5 in 2001, while the corresponding all-India figure was 24.1%.

12. Fieldnotes 2008.

13. See Reddy 1969.

14. In 2002 however, the newer settlements outside the old city became targets of violence. In these areas, recent migrants to the city were more numerous, and presumably presented softer targets than older and more well-entrenched residents.

15. The basic concept of town planning involved, on this account, 'pulling together all the ownership of the area and redistributing it in a proper reconstituted form after acquiring the lands for social infrastructure and super-imposing a road network in the area'. Housing and public uses of urban space (in addition to roads) were to be regulated by action against non-conforming users by acquiring their lands. However, courts ruled that the Municipal Corporation had no power to force 'non-conforming' owners to obey its injunctions. This was the case of Municipal Corporation of Ahmedabad filed Criminal Appeal n° 382/1968 against Asarwa Bobin Works, in a case decided by the Gujarat High Court on 9 March 1970, for non-conforming uses of its property, for which it had not sought permission from the AMC. In addition, the 1975 Plan proposed the acquisition of 400 acres for public housing, while acquiring other lands for 'various public purposes' (1985: 10-11) but the Revenue Department of the state government issued a circular (n° LAQ/2269/LA/IV/20-6-1970) ordering all acquisition proceedings to cease. In Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (Town Development Department) *Draft: Revised Development Plan 1975-1985*. Sanctioned by Administrator under Resolution n° 1535, dated 26-12-1985.

16. In this respect the experience of Muslims was akin to that of the poor as a whole, though it was laden with additional layers of social stigma, to say nothing of the campaign for economic boycott against them. In 1961, 17.67% of households lived in slums. By 1971 this grew to 24.7%, by 1981, 31.82%, and by 1996-1997, to 41.1%. Sompura (1983: 83) except for the 1996-1997 figure, which is from Dutta & Batley (1999: 39). The figures from Dutta & Batley for 1981 do not agree with those in Sompura, however.

17. Fieldnotes 2004.

18. For example, some Muslims I encountered had taken Hindu names, and avoided any visible markers of their religious identity, while working in Hindu-owned businesses in the western part of the city. Traveling from Naroda Patia to the Satellite area once by rickshaw, my rickshaw driver, who guessed that I had never been to his area before, disclosed that similarly he had never been to mine. All along the way, he stopped at provisions stores, auto-mechanic stands, and other businesses to inquire how to proceed, and in each case he approached an establishment he believed was Muslim-owned, judging by discreet signs indicating the owners' identity, such as a few letters written with chalk on a board, or painted on a sign. A parallel circuit lay across the city that an enterprising person could utilize, that Hindus would not necessarily know about (Fieldnotes, Ahmedabad, March-April 2004).

19. Fieldnotes 2004.

20. This young man, whom I will call Pravin, went on to tell me that this Muslim friend and his brothers were hauled off to police custody for several days, and badly beaten there, for no fault of theirs. The family moved to Hyderabad thereafter, Pravin said. The injustice done to his friend and his friend's family, who were the only Muslims he knew, were incidental in relation to what

in Pravin's mind was the essential fact, namely that Muslims as a whole were criminal (Fieldnotes, Ahmedabad, June 2004).

21. Fieldnotes 2004.

22. Fieldnotes 2004.

23. Fieldnotes 2004.

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ABSTRACTS

In this paper I inquire into how the disposition of public spaces and informal oral communication, can together create a commonsense mobilizing support for spectacular events of violence. The built form of the city, urban planning and resulting forms of social segregation, and popular linguistic practices, can combine to instantiate new political formations such as what I am calling a Special Political Zone, where the form of rule exercised is both modern and democratic, but undercut through exceptions which a majority of citizens participate in reproducing, wittingly or unwittingly.¹

INDEX

Keywords: Special Political Zone, Special Economic Zone, Hindu nationalism, communal violence, urban segregation, ghetto, structural violence, liberalization, Gujarati identity

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