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Communal living: Religion, class, and the politics of dwelling in small-town Gujarat

Sanderien Verstappen

India witnesses a proliferation of 'Muslim' and 'Hindu' residential areas, which reflect deepening segregation along religious lines. This article explores the production of such spaces through a case study of Anand in central Gujarat. It uses the lens of 'mobilities' to critically interrogate the 'Muslim ghetto', a notion that has come to figure prominently as a conceptual framework in discussions on residential segregation in contemporary India, and proposes to consider the residential spaces of Muslims instead as 'hubs' of urban and regional connectivity. Avoiding a false dichotomy between segregation-as-seclusion and cohabitation-as-connecting, the article demonstrates how new kinds of environments reflect and facilitate new sets of social relations, and generates a fresh perspective of a Muslim area as a hub of intersecting mobilities within a context of rural and urban transformation.

Keywords: segregation, 'ghettoisation', religion, class, rural–urban mobility

I

Introduction

'Muslim areas' in Indian cities and towns can be seen as centres of urban and rural–urban connectivity, but are usually portrayed as sites of isolation and 'ghettoisation'. This article uses the lens of 'mobilities' to critically interrogate a notion that has come to figure prominently as a conceptual framework in discussions on residential segregation in contemporary India: the Muslim 'ghetto'. Research on the rearrangement of residential spaces in the town of Anand in central Gujarat has led me to regard these Muslim areas as 'hubs' of distinct kinds of urban and regional connectivity instead.

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The scholarship on ‘ghettoisation’ has looked at the processes by which socially constructed and politically imposed divisions between ‘Hindus’ and ‘Muslims’ have become spatialised in Indian cities. It has drawn attention to the processes of marginalisation of Muslims in Indian cities and has shown how experiences of communal violence have led many Muslims to seek ‘safety in numbers’ in ‘neighbourhoods of exile’ (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012: 21). While this scholarship of ghettoisation has been of importance in bringing academic rigour into public debates on the notion of the ‘ghetto’, it has also received important critiques and questions (Gupta 2015; Jasani 2010; Susewind 2015).

In this article, I challenge one particular aspect of the concept of the ghetto as formulated by Gayer and Jaffrelot (2012: 22) described as the ‘sense of subjective closure’ of Muslims from the rest of the city. In contrast to this idea of ‘closure’, I suggest that it might be precisely because of their clustering in a Muslim-majority area that residents find certain kinds of access to the rest of the city while still cultivating links with the surrounding region. My research points at the significance of a set of wider connections and networks, both within the Muslim community and beyond, and shows how social relations are being maintained as well as reconfigured by residents of a ‘Muslim area’ in a small town in Gujarat. I highlight the existence of two sets of networks in the neighbourhood: first, the significance of Hindu–Muslim linkages for a provincial middle class that tries to seek upward mobility through education and urbanisation, so that residence in a ‘Muslim area’ also becomes a way of broadening their scope and even of seeking new entries into the wider society; and second, the rural–urban linkages that continue to link residents with the wider region while also being reworked as distinctions of class and religion within the Muslim community that are mapped onto the rural–urban continuum. Here, I challenge binary assumptions of segregation-as-separation and cohabitation-as-connection, often implicit in discussions about residential segregation, and instead propose to look at the ‘Muslim area’ as a centre of regional mobility.

II

The politics of dwelling and connectivity

If space is a social product, and if every society produces its own space (Lefebvre 1991: 25–33), then how might we understand the ways in which fluid and complex social realities become spatialised, and how might the

emergence of new spaces in turn contribute to shaping and reconfiguring social identities and experiences? Questions about social space have a long history in anthropology, sociology and urban studies, often involving ethnographic research to seek a deeper understanding of political, economic and social transformations that shape the experiences of city dwellers. One pertinent theme has been the question of the ‘divided city’ (Low 1996: 388–90), with scholarship in Indian cities aiming to understand spatial developments such as the formation of ‘gated communities’ (Falzon 2004), the relegation of slums to the outskirts (Ghertner 2012) and the (re)organisation of urban space along the lines of religion (Rajagopal 2010) or caste (Banerjee and Mehta 2017).

Much attention has been paid to the formation of Muslim ‘ghettos’ in Indian cities. This work builds on concepts from scholarship on residential segregation along the lines of class and race in American and European cities (Wacquant 2008: 25) to contribute a spatial angle to earlier discussions on the marginalisation of Muslims in India (Sachar et al. 2006). Attention has been drawn to the erection of physical and metaphorical boundaries between Hindu and Muslim areas in the city (Chaudhury 2007; Mahadevia 2007; Patel 2006a), and to the role of violence in the restructuring of spaces and social relationships (Ghassem-Fachandi 2008; Rajagopal 2010). In some Indian cities, emergent Muslim-majority neighbourhoods are shunned by middle- and upper-caste Hindus, or are referred to as ‘mini-Pakistans’, producing Partition memories in the neighbourhood (Mahadevia 2007: 379; Shaban 2012: 219–21).

The most influential book in this scholarship on the Muslim ‘ghetto’ has been *Muslims in Indian Cities* by the authors Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot. They observed that a discourse on the ‘ghettoisation’ of Muslims in Indian cities had become part of the ‘common sense’ in contemporary India and proposed to reconstruct the ‘Muslim ghetto’ as an analytical tool rather than a folk concept, pointing out five major characteristics of the ‘ghetto’: an element of social or political ‘constraint’ over residential options; the ‘class and caste diversity’ of these localities, as individuals of different backgrounds are regrouped on the basis of ascribed identities; the ‘neglect’ of these localities by state authorities; the ‘estrangement’ of the locality and its residents from the rest of the city; and a subjective ‘sense of closure’ of residents, related to patterns of estrangement from the rest of the city (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012: 22). This notion was developed through case studies in various Indian cities.

Some scholars have raised questions about this conceptual framework of the ‘ghetto’. One line of critique is directed at the reiteration of the Hindu–Muslim division in the literature, which may contribute to homogenising religious groups (Gupta 2015), and may conceal the interdependencies and mixtures between communities that continue to exist (Jasani 2010: 166–67). Others have raised questions about the causes of segregation, drawing attention to additional factors that may influence the rearrangement of residential spaces besides communal violence and the search for physical and social protection (Susewind 2015). My own research raises questions about the elements of ‘estrangement’ and ‘sense of closure’ from the rest of the city, the fourth and fifth elements of the definition above.

The conceptual underpinnings for my critique are derived from scholarship of ‘mobility’, which has contested ways of looking at societies as sedentary, immobile or bounded, and which has highlighted the significance of flows of people, goods and ideas to draw societies in relation with a variety of complex and historically dynamic social relations and social–economic exchanges. This perspective is commonly credited to the ‘mobility turn’ (Sheller and Urry 2006), but has a long history in anthropology (Clifford 1997; Wolf 1982), and it is in this spirit of mobile anthropology (Abram 2017; Elliot et al. 2017) that I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the town of Anand.¹ In central Gujarat, the anti-Muslim pogroms of 2002 had a significant impact on the rearrangement of residential areas, as many Muslims in this region left their villages and towns to move into Anand, settling in what has now become a large and still-growing ‘Muslim area’ in the north-eastern part of the town. In the period thereafter, the residential areas of the town have become increasingly segregated along religious lines, but social life is not entirely separated. Might it be possible to look at the politics of dwelling in Anand not as a process of isolation, but as paired with the cultivation of new forms of connectivity?

¹ Fieldwork in central Gujarat was conducted in the period 2011–12, with follow-up visits in 2014 and 2017. Interviews were conducted in English or Gujarati, and transcribed from field notes. I have also conducted research among Sunni Vohras from central Gujarat in the UK (in 2012, with a follow-up visit in 2016), and earlier among Hindu youth from the same region in the UK. The transnational aspects of the research are discussed elsewhere (e.g., Verstappen 2017; Verstappen and Rutten 2015).

III *Small-town Gujarat*

Scholarship on residential segregation along religious lines in India has so far focused mostly on the bigger and metropolitan cities. The focus on cities has been justified by the idea that the city occupies a central place in the history of Indian Muslims (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012: 13–18).² However, lost in these discussions is the fact that many urban residents of India live in small- and medium-sized towns (Scrace et al. 2015), where segregation may take somewhat different shapes than in the metropolis (Tidey 2012) and where connectivity to the wider region beyond the town might be an important feature of social life.³

In Gujarat, where a distinguishing feature of the 2002 violence in comparison with earlier communal violence was that attacks were widespread in rural parts of the state, affecting a total of 151 towns and 993 villages⁴ in 19 districts, it is pertinent to look at the situation of Muslims in towns and villages. So far, however, the case study that has captured most attention in Gujarat is the city of Ahmedabad, ‘the most emblematic’ case of ghettoisation in Indian cities (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012: 324), with discussions focusing on Juhapura, an urban locality on the outskirts of Ahmedabad (Thomas 2015). Here, affluent Muslims live alongside poor coreligionists; boundary walls have been erected to defend the locality, and residents cannot easily leave the area due to a lack of public transport and due to being socially barred from venturing into other parts of the city (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012: 324; Jaffrelot and

² Census records indicate that the majority of Indian Muslims are urban based. In Gujarat, where Muslims constitute a minority of 9 per cent of the total population, the proportion of Muslims in the urban population is significantly higher (14 per cent), while the proportion of Muslims in the rural population is significantly smaller (6 per cent). *Census of India 2001, C-1 Population by Religious Community, Gujarat* (24).

³ The connectivity of small towns was one of several themes of discussions during the panel ‘Beyond the Metropolis: Alternative Urban Asia’, convened by Gopa Samanta (University of Burdwan) and chaired by Valerie Clerc (IRD, French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development), at the International Conference of Asian Studies (ICAS 10), July 20, 2017, Chiang Mai.

⁴ These numbers are derived from a compilation of information available in the Global IDP Database of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Geneva, 2004. ‘Profile of Internal Displacement: India’, p. 44.

Thomas 2012). It has been suggested that the isolation of Muslims in Juhapura is characteristic of the situation of ‘many other Muslims of Gujarat’ (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012: 324).

Relatively little has been written about what happened post 2002 in the towns and villages of rural Gujarat, and what we know is contradictory. In the market town of Mahemdabad in central Gujarat, where several attacks occurred, Muslims and Hindus continue to live in shared neighbourhoods and actively cultivate a shared town-based ‘merchant’ identity, defying separation of social life (Heitmeyer 2009b). In Kutch, where little blood was shed, civic and social life did get differentiated along communal lines (Simpson 2013: 61), most obviously in the villages where divisive regimes of reconstruction in the aftermath of the 2001 earthquake led to the polarisation of interest groups and the division of settlements on the basis of caste (ibid.: 88–89). These differing findings suggest that the relation between violence and residential segregation is not self-evident, that additional factors might be significant and that situations develop differently in different local contexts.

I aim to develop further our understanding of the politics of dwelling in Gujarat by looking at the town of Anand. Here a process of residential segregation has occurred, but under conditions that contrast both with the existing descriptions of the city of Ahmedabad, where segregation has been most pronounced (Jaffrelot and Thomas 2012), and with the small town of Mahemdabad, which seems to have been immune to ghettoisation (Heitmeyer 2009a: 45–47). The case of Anand indicates that the trend of residential segregation is indeed taking place in small-town Gujarat too, but draws attention to the role of Anand town as a fast-growing urban centre in central Gujarat, an important regional centre of education and urbanisation closely connected to the rural hinterland and a hub of transport and interconnectivity. The presence of educational institutions in Anand is an important reason for Muslims from the surrounding villages to reorient themselves towards the town.

Anand does not figure as a particularly large or prominent town in older histories of the region, but it has become a main urban centre in central Gujarat over time. In the colonial period, the construction of railway tracks that passed through Anand connected the agricultural region with Mumbai and beyond. After independence, Vitthal Udhog Nagar was established as an industrial belt in an industrialising agricultural economy (Rutten 1995: 77), and the campus area of Vallabh Vidyanagar as a centre

of education. In 1997, Anand turned into a district capital after administrative reorganisation, drawing in government institutions and government jobs. In recent years, much infrastructural investment has taken place in the region, with an expressway and a new national highway connecting the town more closely to nearby cities and to Mumbai, and a local road network by which local buses and shared rickshaws connect the town to villages in the vicinity.

The population of Anand is diverse. In the 2001 Census, when the total population of the urban conglomerate Anand was projected as 156,050, the majority was Hindu (76 per cent), with a sizeable minority of Muslims (16 per cent) and Christians (6 per cent).⁵ The most prominent Hindu community in the town are Patidars (or Patels), a regionally based community of landowners and entrepreneurs, that has been described as the dominant caste in the region (Hardiman 1981; Rutten 1995; Tilche 2016). Another prominent Hindu community are the Sindhi shopkeepers in the urban centre, who came to Anand from the region of Sindh in what is now Pakistan during the Partition. Christians know Anand town as a historical centre of the mission—the Catholic Church began its mission in 1893 in Gamdi,⁶ a village now part of the urban conglomerate of Anand, establishing churches, convents and schools, and attracting the formerly Hindu caste of Vankars from nearby villages to the town.⁷

The Muslims of Anand are diverse in terms of class, religious practices and community/class backgrounds. Different surnames are heard of: Vohra, Diwan, Pathan, Malek, Sheikh, Memon and Saiyed, as well as Momin, Khoja and (Baruchi Muslim) Patel. Residents estimate at least 50 per cent of the Muslims in the town are Vohra, or ‘Charotar Sunni Vohra’,

⁵ Similar data on the relative size of religious groups was not published in the 2012 Census.

⁶ ‘History’ page of the website of St. Xavier’s Catholic Church, Gamdi-Anand. Available at <http://www.xavierchurchanand.com/#!about/cipy>. Accessed on 10 March 2017.

⁷ From this centre of Christianity, Jesuits travelled around the region to teach and to record local music to transcribe Biblical texts in indigenous music. *Gurjarvani, 50 Years of Communication in Gujarat*, a historical film produced by Gurjarvani, Xavier Centre for Culture and Communication, screened on 11 September 2011, at St. Xaviers College in Ahmedabad, during a honorary celebration for Father Lawrence, Father Devasia, Father Rappai, Father Ornellas, Father Thomas and Brother Paul, for having served in the Jesuit order for 50 years.

a community of Sunni Muslims with historical ties to the surrounding region (referred to as ‘Charotar’). This significant presence of Vohras was confirmed in a household survey I conducted.⁸ Elsewhere, I have written specifically about the histories and regional identity of the Vohra community (Verstappen 2017), but here I leave that discussion aside in order to highlight discussions of safety as well as class, drawing on a wider set of interviews with Muslims from different community backgrounds (including Vohra, Diwan, Pathan and Malek). I focus on the participation of Muslim youth in higher education to argue that, paradoxically, it is by moving into a ‘Muslim area’ that people seem to be able to reconfigure themselves as part of an urbanised Indian ‘middle class’, where moving to town is associated with education, upward class mobility and increased physical mobility.

IV

Rural–urban migration and residential segregation

That time [in 2002], this road was the division. Muslims live on this side, on the other side are Hindus. This road was totally empty. We were in our houses, awake all night. Sometimes we [the women of different families] would gather in one house together. One night we were all sitting on a rooftop with *marchi* water [water boiled with chilli] and stones, for protection. But nobody came. Afterwards, many new people moved in here. New houses were built. Hindus left.

This statement is an extract from a longer conversation with a middle-aged Muslim woman, Farhana Diwan,⁹ and her neighbour during an evening walk along 100 Feet Road in Anand. The story shows in a nutshell how long-term Muslim residents of the town remember the 2002 episode and its aftermath. They contrast the relative safety of

⁸ The survey was conducted in 147 households, in six housing societies within walking distance of each other. In 114 households, the surname was recorded: of these 75 were listed ‘Vohra’ and 40 had other surnames: Sheikh, Khan, Diwan, Pathan, Memon, Momin, Malek and Saiyed. All of the surveyed housing societies were occupied solely by Muslims, and they were occupied mainly by relatively well-to-do residents.

⁹ In this article, I have altered given names to ensure anonymity but have retained surnames to reflect the diversity of caste/community backgrounds in the neighbourhood.

Anand with the danger in nearby villages. They describe an influx of new people from surrounding villages and towns, and the departure of Hindus who had previously lived beside them. Some used the word 'partition' when they discussed these developments of immigration and residential segregation.

Muslim presence has been noted in Anand as early as the 1950s (Thakar 1954: 8–13).¹⁰ Some Muslims lived in the old town among Brahmins, Patidars, Kshatriyas, Rabaris and artisans, while others lived a little further away in a small area called Azad Chowk. From the 1960s, Muslim settlements in Anand started to increase. Two housing societies were established specifically for Muslims: Nutan Nagar (around 1960) and Ismail Nagar (after 1969).¹¹ Over time, the percentage of Muslims in the population rose (from 13 per cent in 1991 to 16 per cent in 2001, according to the Census of India). After 2002, the wider area surrounding the initial Muslim housing societies of Nutan Nagar and Ismail Nagar further developed into what is now known as a 'Muslim *vistar*' (Muslim area), also referred to by Muslims as 'our area'.¹² The immigration of Muslims from nearby villages into Anand continues today.

There are several reasons for this immigration into Anand, one of which is the anti-Muslim violence in 2002 that caused widespread displacement of Muslims in Gujarat. Anand district was among the eight districts in Gujarat where violence was most intense,¹³ with a recorded total of 19 violent events in the district and 40 people killed.¹⁴ An event in the area that was widely reported in newspapers, in a village half an hour away from Anand, was the massacre of Ode. On 1 March 2002, a large mob, of an estimated 2,000 people, attacked about 20 Muslim homes. When some from the afflicted families took refuge in a three-storeyed house, the mob locked the doors from the outside and threw burning rags, kerosene and

¹⁰ Translation of this section from the Gujarati book *Charotar Sarvasangra* to English by Minaz Pathan, Anand, 11 March 2012.

¹¹ The years of establishment are an indication. Different years of establishment were given by different informants.

¹² In Anand the word *vistar* along with English words such as 'area' or 'society', are preferred to Gujarati words such as *galli*, *challi* or *sheri*, which are associated with spaces in the village. The word 'ghetto' is not in use among the residents.

¹³ See footnote 4.

¹⁴ Raheel Dhattiwala acquired a dataset of news reports in *The Times of India* as part of her doctoral research project (Dhattiwala 2013; Dhattiwala and Biggs 2012).

petrol inside. A total of 23 people died in the fire, including 9 women and 9 children, with 6 people escaping by jumping off the roof.¹⁵

In the midst of this violence, the town of Anand remained relatively quiet, with the exception of one stabbing.¹⁶ Residents indicate that ‘nothing happened in Anand’, an idea that is juxtaposed with the memories of attacks in nearby villages in the surrounding region. When probed, they do memorise how some violence in Anand took place, but they feel this was relatively limited, confined mainly to the looting of Muslim shops and buildings in Hindu-majority areas and the throwing of stones on places perceived to be boundaries between Muslim and Hindu areas.

What residents remember vividly is the massive influx of refugees camping on the local community grounds, and the arrival of relatives from nearby villages, some of whom stayed over for weeks to seek safety among other Muslims. In Gujarat as a whole, the violence displaced more than 200,000 people.¹⁷ In Anand, the refugees, who came from 46 different villages in that period,¹⁸ were accommodated in three refugee camps, and in mosques and community halls. Local leaders say that there were hundreds, possibly thousands of refugees. When the violence died down, rehabilitation plans were started by several NGOs in collaboration with local leaders, which aimed to rebuild and repair damaged houses in the villages of origin, to help people (re)start their businesses, to facilitate return and reclaim the villages as a shared space.¹⁹

However, not everyone was ‘rehabilitated’. When the government closed the relief camps in Gujarat (between July and October 2002),²⁰

¹⁵ Of the 47 accused, 23 were found guilty by the district court in Anand (on 9 April 2012). ‘Gujarat riots: 18 get life term for Ode village massacre,’ *NDTV*, 12 April 2012. Available at <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/gujarat-riots-18-get-life-term-for-ode-village-massacre-196598>. Accessed on 3 March 2017.

¹⁶ On 27 March, recorded in *The Times of India* dataset acquired by Raheel Dhattiwala, see footnote 14.

¹⁷ A research report on the long-term consequences for the displaced was published by the organisation Jan Vikas in Ahmedabad (Jan Vikas 2012).

¹⁸ This number is derived from an interview with a resident of Anand who had been actively involved in the organisation of relief after the riots.

¹⁹ In the aforementioned village of Ode, houses were built for people who had lost their homes. According to an Anand-based member of an informal group that helped to arrange this, 63 houses were built in Ode, 62 for Muslim families and 1 for a Hindu family.

²⁰ ‘Compounding Injustice: The Government’s Failure to Redress Massacres in Gujarat.’ *Human Rights Watch* 15 (4 C), July 2002.

many refugees stayed on in the now-closed camps. To accommodate the refugees who remained, 8 relief societies were built in Anand town, housing 1,049 people in a total number of 205 houses.²¹ In the years thereafter, Anand remained a popular immigration destination for Muslims from the surrounding villages. Anand's north-eastern outskirts, where these immigrants settled, expanded rapidly in these years, land prices rose and a flurry of real estate developers arrived to develop new housing societies on former agricultural lands. Following is the story of a Vohra family who came to Anand from a nearby village after 2002, told by a young woman who was a teenager at the time of the riots:

At the time of the riots, there were about 60 Muslim houses in our village. Hindu people came and they looted everything. They took away valuable items: gold and money. All houses got damaged. ... Other people had their business in the village so they were worse off; we only lost valuable items in the house. My father's business was already in Anand at the time. He is a money changer; he has an office in Anand ... After the riots we sold the house and came to Anand.

In this story, told from a living room in Anand town, almost the entire Muslim population left the village and moved to Anand in the years after the riots. Other memories are more diverse, but migration is a recurrent theme. In one village, where an estimated 30 out of 60 Muslim families had moved to Anand since 2002, I spoke to a remaining family (in 2017), who did not yet have the means to follow the others, but desired to move to Anand too in the near future. There were several reasons for their desire to leave the house, one of which was its location, in a narrow village lane, surrounded by Hindus, with one narrow exit that would be the only escape route if a mob would ever come.

The process of migration of Muslims from the surrounding villages to Anand has been paired with a process of increasing residential segregation along religious lines. In the parts of the town where Muslims moved in,

²¹ A total of 83 colonies were surveyed in the report *Gujarat's Internally Displaced: Ten Years Later: The 2012 Survey of Gujarat's IDP Colonies* (2012), of which 17 are located in Anand district. The report breaks down all data on district level, but the researchers at Jan Vikas in Ahmedabad provided me with the specific data on Anand town.

others moved out. In the case of the Vohra woman quoted above: her family bought a house in a formerly Jain housing society, where many of the houses have now been sold to Vohras and other Muslims. Another housing society, an estate housing workers of a government hospital at the time, was left by all of its residents within a few years after 2002, most of them Hindus, who abandoned their government-provided housing to instead buy a house of their own in a part of town where other well-to-do Hindus lived. Christians are also gradually moving out to resettle in a newer suburb a few kilometres further off, away from the still-arriving Muslims and the sound of the *azan* (call to prayer) that can now be heard five times a day from all directions in the neighbourhood. Some Christian housing societies remain; the Catholic schools and colleges now provide education to many Muslim children. A few Hindus remain too: one of them is an elderly Sindhi woman, whose house has become a favourite hangout for local Muslim women who like to buy the Gujarati *bandhini* (tie-dyed) dresses she sells from her small living room. She maintains a happy camaraderie with her customers, but confided after their departure that her residence being located in a Muslim area was the outcome of compulsion, not choice. She seemed to feel left behind, unable to follow those who had moved out.

There is ambiguity in how Muslims reflect on this local history of migration and residential segregation. There is a regret for lost trust and cohabitation even while the ‘Muslim area’ is also seen as a zone of safety—a safety that is unambiguously derived from numerical strength in the neighbourhood. One of Anand’s residents, a retired university professor, explained:

This is a Muslim area. Over there—Vidyanagar—it is a Hindu area.²²
It is hard to live in a Hindu area.

Why is it hard to live in a Hindu area?

Well, we have riots you see. For a long time everything can be fine, but when election time comes, riots can happen, and at that time we are not safe in a Hindu area.

²² According to the 2001 Census (table C0101, Gujarat State), 95 per cent of the population of Vallabh Vidyanagar (M) was Hindu: 28,026 out of 29,378, and 2 per cent was Muslim. The presence of Muslim residents in Vidyanagar is likely to have decreased since then.

In central Gujarat, decades of religious politics have been paired with a rearrangement of rural and urban spaces along religious lines. The exodus of Muslims from the villages into Anand town marks a ‘Muslim’ urban space as a sanctuary within a potentially volatile rural environment. Within the town, residents can easily point out which the ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ spaces are; discussing this question is considered normal chit-chat, not controversial. The ‘Muslim area’ of Anand houses residents of various social–economic backgrounds, but is almost homogeneously composed of Muslims, and this is the result of a residential regrouping of people on the basis of ascribed religious identities that has occurred because of social and political constraints. Elements of the notion of the ‘ghetto’ (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012) thus apply, but as I show next, additional factors should be taken into account to understand the migration of Muslims into Anand. The process of residential segregation does not result in a sense of ‘closure’ here; on the contrary, for some of the residents, it is linked with an experience of increased mobility.

V

Education, travel and class

Zakiya Vohra is a resident of the ‘Muslim area’ of Anand town, whose family migrated into Anand from a nearby village in 2002. She is an 18-year-old woman, a college student. One day, I asked her to show me her favourite places in Anand. ‘My favourite places are cafes’, she said, and ‘my favourite food is fast food’. Both of these are not available nearby her house, so she took me on the back of her *Activa* scooty (a term for a two-wheeler), driving out of the ‘Muslim area’ via Anand–Vidyanagar road towards the locality of Vallabh Vidyanagar. The first stop was a popular small street stall in Nana Bajar. Then we went to a park, a green oasis in a quiet residential area where we took off our shoes before we walked on the freshly mowed grass. Finally she took me to a rather posh and air-conditioned ice cream parlour. These are the places where Zakiya likes to come if she has a break in her busy schedule of classes and exams, to hang out with friends from college. The places are all located in what is considered to be a ‘Hindu area’. Most of her college friends are also Hindu. Another day, when we visit the college itself and meet these friends, we find ourselves in a flock of scootys to visit a place they call ‘the village’, where they take pictures of each other posing in a rice field—to be posted on Instagram.

Some residents of the ‘Muslim area’ travel to other parts of the town every day. Among these commuters are the young people who participate in the ‘Hindu areas’ of the town as students. Zakiya’s education is an experience of inclusion in a shared culture of youth and consumption, although, as I explain below, there are various layers of ambiguity to be taken into account. In this section, I describe how class dynamics contribute to the forging of social relations beyond the ‘Muslim area’ of Anand, as many Muslim families have moved to Anand not only for safety but also to transform themselves and their families through education and urbanisation. This class perspective then also enables a closer look at social and spatial distinctions within the Muslim area.

Anand was developed as the regional centre of education for rural youth in central Gujarat, with the establishment of Sardar Patel University in 1955, and the subsequent development of the university township of Vallabh Vidyanagar.²³ Many private educational institutions can be found here, as are related services such as student canteens and a well-developed network of local buses that transport students from surrounding villages to the university. The story of Vallabh Vidyanagar’s development as a centre of education in a rural region is an important aspect of how many residents of Anand perceive the town. Both Hindus and Muslims in Anand can recount the stories of Bhaikaka, the visionary planner whose statue stands as a reminder of the foundation of Vallabh Vidyanagar,²⁴ and of the Patidar farmers of Karamsad village, who donated the land on which the university campus was built.²⁵

Desires for education might hold special appeal in a town that is also a district capital with a wide range of government institutions that enable young people to imagine themselves in the future in white-collar professions or in a ‘government job’. Other potential affordances of higher education are international migration on student visas, self-improvement, status and the improvement of one’s desirability in the marriage market. Studies of the middle classes in other places in Gujarat describe strategies of upward mobility through education, (sub)urbanisation and reforms of

²³ For a comparative analysis of what Anand means to Muslims and Hindus, and in international perspective, see Verstappen and Rutten (2015).

²⁴ See, for example, the booklet *Fruits of Perseverance and Hard Work: The Establishment of Vallabh Vidyanagar*, by Amrapali M. Merchant (1999), Sardar Patel University (title translated from Gujarati).

²⁵ See, for example, ‘Karamsad’. Available at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karamsad>. Accessed on 21 January 2017.

morality (van Wessel 2001: 34–61), and for Muslims in India, it has been noted that participation in higher education can be a way to attain self-worth in contexts of marginalisation (Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery 2004). The case of Anand illustrates these patterns described elsewhere. Zakiya's family for example has no personal memories of communal violence, instead they moved to Anand for better access to higher education.

The notion of being or becoming 'middle class' (Dickey 2012) seems crucial to understanding the experience of Muslims families like Zakiya's. In the housing society where she lives, people refer to themselves as 'middle-class people'. Other women living in the vicinity, see their everyday problems and challenges as well-reflected in TV drama series about (Hindu) middle-class families. They describe their move into Anand as enabling new opportunities for education and mobility. Many families send their sons and daughters for higher education. Zakiya's father is a lawyer, her siblings are studying and even her mother had started studying English after moving into Anand, travelling to the Sardar Patel University independently on a scooter—she hopes to be an 'example in the community', encouraging other older women to study too. While this drive for education among Muslims seeking upward class mobility and status has been noted by scholars elsewhere in India too, I am interested here in the practices of mobility this might involve, which connect these middle-class Muslims to the wider town while distinguishing themselves from the 'uneducated' among Muslims.

In Anand, those who consider themselves 'middle class' prefer to send their children to English-medium schools, almost all of which are managed by Hindus and Christians. These schools are considered more prestigious than the schools managed by Muslims in Anand, which are mostly Gujarati-medium schools and aim at primary education of (mostly poor) children. Thus, in many cases, participation in education entails a daily commute to nearby Christian schools in Gamdi, to established Patel schools in the old town of Anand, or to the colleges and institutes associated with the Sardar Patel University in and around Vallabh Vidyanagar. This mobility occasionally causes anxiety over safety, as was explained by a grandfather, who said he felt relieved every time his granddaughters returned from their coaching classes in Vallabh Vidyanagar: 'You never know when a riot will break out.' Zakiya however, when directly asked if she ever has safety concerns when leaving her residential area, shrugged and said: 'Sure I feel safe in Vidyanagar, I go there all the time.' Overall, this kind of travel is considered a normal and everyday affair.

Going to a school or college where the majority of the students are Hindu generates an ambiguous experience of both inclusion and exclusion. The stories of students like Zakiya point at experiences of participation in a shared youth culture of studying, friendship, and, if time allows, for relaxation and consumption. Students clearly enjoy spending time in Vallabh Vidyanagar, where they go with friends window-shopping, venturing out to the fun fair or visiting cafes, restaurants or cinema halls. Nevertheless, they also talk about experiences of being ‘othered’. Inside the school, students are confronted with mainstream ideas about Muslims among peers, which leads to them feeling different by virtue of being ‘Muslim’, sometimes for the first time in their lives. At school, Muslim children learn that others refer to their neighbourhood as ‘mini Pakistan’, which is quickly understood to be a ‘bad name’. Even Zakiya has her own stories of fellow students who say ‘bad things about us’, that ‘Muslims are not good’. She tries to ignore this: ‘I don’t want to think about it too much.’

For parents, the experience of discrimination starts when they seek access for their children into ‘good schools’: many schools are openly discriminatory towards Muslims. Parents know that these policies exist and often talk about them. Stories of rejection are discouraging, but schools known to discriminate are still considered desirable places to send one’s child to, partly because enrolment here is felt to indicate acceptance by the majority community. The reasoning among Muslims is that if a student was accepted by such and such school, he/she must be extraordinarily brilliant, or perhaps his/her family is well connected, or have paid a large ‘donation’ to secure entrance.

While the experiences of middle-class families point at a strong orientation towards the wider town, thus linking ‘Muslim’ and ‘Hindu’ parts of the town, they also point at internal distinctions within the Muslim community. The view of the town presented here is a view from an advantaged class of relatively wealthy families, owning their own two-wheelers while the poorer families living in other housing societies of Anand have to rely on the nearest shared auto-rickshaw or bus stand, generating quite a different experience of mobility. These class distinctions also have spatial connotations, which became clear when a middle-class family planning to break up the joint family had considerable difficulties finding a suitable second house: the Hindu areas were not suitable for safety reasons, but some parts of the Muslim area were also not considered suitable, since,

according to this family, the residents are not 'educated' and do not provide a beneficial social context for their growing-up children.

In summary, the quest for education is an important reason for the immigration into Anand, in addition to the particular history of violence and displacement. Zakiya's family exemplifies this. Her parents already wanted to move to Anand before 2002, from a village 35 kilometres away, in order to be closer to educational institutes to provide their four children with English-medium and higher education. Shortly after the violence of 2002, they bought their house in Anand from a Patel family wishing to sell their house as it was located on the wrong side of the road, in the 'Muslim area'. The family considers the move into this neighbourhood 'very lucky' because 'most of the people here are doing well', living in spacious multi-storey bungalows, owning a scooty, sometimes several scootys or a car and because 'people are more educated here' both in comparison with some other parts of the 'Muslim area' and in comparison to their relatives in the village.

VI

Rural–urban connections

Samina Pathan is a student of English in Sardar Patel University. She already works as an English teacher in a primary school, but as this is a private school where the salary is low, she hopes to eventually acquire a job in a government school, where the salary will be ten times as much as what she earns now. This plan requires her to finish her university degree and then to pass a number of highly competitive exams.

After school, Samina can always be found studying on the square in front of the small house where she lives with her parents and siblings. There she sits, staring intently at her books, trying to decipher the meaning of the absurd English theatre play 'Waiting for Godot'. One day I arrive to find her surrounded by vegetables, spread out on sheets on the ground to dry in the sun. Another day there is a bunch of people chatting, introduced as visitors from 'our village'.

After a few months of studying together, Samina invites me to her village on the occasion of her cousin's wedding. We spend a day there, a group of young women roaming around. It turns out that she spends at least a few weeks of her holidays there each year. Besides, Samina's father (a lower-rung government bureaucrat) owns agricultural land

in the village, maintains a farm with the help of relatives and shares responsibility for the maintenance of an old family mansion in the village with other relatives.

The story of Samina shows how a seemingly urban family continues to be deeply entrenched in the village of origin. In this last section, I show how diverse economic and social networks encapsulate key relationships for some of the town's residents. Looking at these connections with the wider region reveals the continued links between a town where Muslims reside and a rural region where the town's residents continue to hold viable assets, but also shows how the class distinctions described earlier are mapped onto rural–urban imaginaries.

In many towns and cities in India, as elsewhere in the world, 'the linkages between urban centres and the countryside, including movement of people, goods, capital and other social transactions, play an important role in processes of rural and urban change' (Tacoli 1998: 147). In Gujarat too, urban–rural connectedness has been important, as illustrated by historian Howard Spodek in *Saurashtra* (1976: 60–91). The Charotar tract of central Gujarat, where Anand is located, has been described in historical accounts as a richly vegetated and populous region with a string of towns along important trade routes between north India and the coast (Sheikh 2010: 28). Here, towns have had an important role as market centres for the agricultural produce of this region, and as regional centres of banking, trade, manufacture, administration and secondary education (Hardiman 1981: 263–64). The town of Anand in particular has been described as intimately connected to the surrounding region (Patel 2006b: 26).

While some Muslim families in Anand have sold their land or property in the village, others have retained (part of) the property in the village of origin after moving to Anand, with relatives, acquaintances or other dependents staying back in the village and maintaining these assets. This cultivation of relations and economic activities beyond Anand can be important as an economic strategy that helps families maintain their status as 'middle-class' people in town. Some townspeople maintain farmland, a factory, a shop or other types of business; some maintain a house in the village. In Zakiya's family (in the previous section), her father still commutes four days a week to the village of origin to maintain his lawyer's office there. While he has opened a new office in Anand, his client base in the village remains his primary concern.

The village holds different meanings for the townspeople: on the one hand, it is a source of wealth and power for a privileged group of families in the town, on the other hand, it is devalued as a remnant of a rural past. The rural–urban exchanges are entrenched in inequalities, which might be expressed in relations of dependency, in townspeople’s concern for the dire circumstances in which some of their rural relatives supposedly live, or in a disdain for the lack of development in the villages. When comparing herself to her relatives in the villages, Samina describes herself as more privileged. In this context she tells a story of her father, who, she narrates, used to commute from the village to college in Anand on a bicycle, a long and strenuous daily journey, moving to town later to enable his daughters to study more easily. Zakiya and her mother portray their former neighbours in the village as conservative, as having a ‘village mentality’; driving a scooty for example is not possible for a woman in the village as their (Muslim) neighbours would find it hard to understand.

Illustrative of how class distinctions are mapped onto the rural–urban continuum are the discussions about religious reform. Scholars in India have observed a desire for religious reform among the middle classes, both among Hindus and Muslims, who seek a modern approach to religion that fits their educated outlook and urban lifestyle so that a desire for secular education might be paired with religious reform (Säävälä 2001) or a desire to distinguish oneself from the ‘rural ignorant’ through a modern religious outlook (Osella and Osella 2008b: 322–23). The complexities and dynamics of religious reform among Gujarati Muslims have been the subject of various studies (Jasani 2008; Simpson 2006), but not much attention has been paid to how these developments might be related to rural–urban connectivity. A hint can be found in a study on Mahemdabad, a small town where manifestations of piety are associated with a more ‘Islamised middle-class urban lifestyle’ (Heitmeyer 2009a: 174). When residents of Mahemdabad visit their relatives in Anand, they become rather conscious about their conduct, dress and behaviour, as they feel that Muslims in Anand observe purdah and Islamic tenets such as the five daily prayers more strictly than they themselves do.

My neighbours in Anand, along similar lines, think that there are more opportunities for religious education in the town than elsewhere in the region. They observe that new arrivals change their religious behaviour after settling in town. It was said that they fall ‘under the influence’ of the religious atmosphere in Anand, and then gradually

reform their religious practices. Anand's residents see this as a normal part of the process of adaption from a rural to a more urban and modern lifestyle. An example of such a discussion took place within the context of a religious meeting of women, a monthly gathering of neighbours from the same housing society, where women read aloud passages from the book *Faizal-e-Amal (talim)*. When after the readings some women lingered to talk, we discussed the rural–urban migration of Muslims in relation with religion, some of them had recently migrated into Anand themselves. They explained that migration influences religious practices, suggesting that ‘in the village, there is no knowledge about Islam. It is hard to get the knowledge.’ One woman critiqued the suggested rural–urban dichotomy, however, she did so by elaborating on initiatives to ‘bring this knowledge to the villages’, confirming the idea that such knowledge is centred in the town.

Religious practices are as contested here as they are among Muslims elsewhere in India (Osella and Osella 2008a). In Anand, discussions about religion are framed in terms of a distinction between ‘Sunnis’, the followers of saints, and ‘Tablighis’, those who identify with the reform movement of the Tablighi Jamaat. There is a strong emphasis on religious reform among the Muslim middle class in Anand, who tend to see it as a modern approach to religion that fits their educated outlook and urban lifestyle, because of the possibility to develop a more direct relation with God through study of Islamic texts, prayer and sobriety (comparable with observations in Simpson 2006, 108–09, also Jasani 2008, 453). But there is much diversity. Zakiya's family is associated with the Tablighi Jamaat, while Samina's family considers itself Sunni.

In 2012, 51 mosques were found in Anand, 34 of which associated with the reform movement of the Tablighi Jamaat, the others as Sunni.²⁶ The number of mosques in Anand had doubled after 2002; a stark increase was found for mosques of both traditions. This strong presence of religious institutions in Anand should not be seen as a break with tradition (Osella and Osella 2008a: 251), on the contrary, it can be seen as part of a long-standing history in which Anand has been a centre of religious education in the wider region. This history is cherished in the

²⁶ This was the number reported by a local research assistant, who went around Anand town on a motorcycle to all the mosques he knew of. In addition to the mosques, two *dargahs* (shrine of a saint) were visited (not included within this count). Shia mosques were not taken into account.

impressive white madrasa towering over the main road, which is the new residence of the older educational institute founded around 1920, offering complete religious education from kindergarten to postgraduate studies, and a government-supported school with a secular curriculum. It also has 124 small madrassas that offer primary religious education to the rural youth in the surrounding villages.

These descriptions demonstrate the significance of rural–urban connections, as well as the ways in which distinctions within the Muslim community might be shaped by the experiences of rural–urban migration. Looking at these processes as interconnected is pertinent, as residential choices and experiences are influenced not only by communal violence but also by other developments that foster social–economic, cultural and spatial transformations. A transcribed fragment from a group interview with three elderly Vohra men, long-term residents of Anand town, illustrates that a variety of meanings are attached to the history of Muslim settlement in the town. The question I had posed was: ‘Why did Muslims come to Anand?’ The discussion reveals ambiguity. Was the move to Anand related to the 2002 riots? Was it motivated by education? Or both?

A: Education. That’s what Anand was selected for. Education and business purpose, no other. And, for our religion. How are you going to get religious education in the village? That way they also chose Anand.

B: The main reason why people came to Anand is that they suffered lots in riots. That’s why the people can’t live in villages. So they transferred here to Anand.

C: They came [here] because they can easily go to work, easily travel, and easily get religious education. Then in 2002, BJP came.²⁷ They divided Hindus and Muslims ... So, they left their village and came to Anand.

VII

Conclusion: The Muslim area as a ‘hub’

This article confirms the proliferation of distinct ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ residential areas in Gujarat: it shows that this development is not only occurring in cities but also in the rural region of central Gujarat. However,

²⁷ The Bharatiya Janata Party, the political party in power during the 2002 violence.

it suggests that the reconfigurations of spaces can only partly be explained by the quest for safety as there is another quest entwined with this: the search for socially upward class mobility, which is related with processes of rural–urban migration in a changing regional economy. From the perspectives of middle-class Muslims in Anand, the quest for a secular and religious education, and for upward class mobility through urbanisation and a different (sub)urban lifestyle, are additional reasons for the immigration into Anand, in addition to the particular history of violence and displacement. Moving to town enables them to maintain older social and economic practices in the rural context while also exploring new kinds of opportunities in the urban context.

These findings contrast with a particular aspect of the concept of the ghetto as formulated by Gayer and Jaffrelot (2012: 22), the ‘sense of subjective closure’ of Muslims from the rest of the city. In contrast to the finding of estrangement and enclosure, I have found that regular travelling beyond the direct neighbourhood is a common feature of everyday life for many Muslim residents of Anand. Paradoxically, it is by moving into a ‘Muslim area’ that people seem to be able to reconfigure themselves as part of an urbanised and educated Indian ‘middle class’. While moving into the ‘Muslim area’ may in one sense separate Muslims from Hindus, in another sense it enables them to access and avail facilities in nearby Hindu spaces within the town as students, consumers and potentially as workers or businessmen. The move thus not only contributes to the making of a Hindu–Muslim binary but also potentially enables the reworking of such prevalent categorisations.

While desires of class distinction connect the Muslim residents with spaces of education and consumption associated with ‘Hindus’, they also mark the ‘middle class’ among Muslims as distinct from other Muslims, both within the town, by distinguishing their own housing societies from the housing societies of the ‘uneducated’, and in relation to the rural surroundings in nearby villages. A significant set of relations I have described are the rural–urban linkages that continue to link residents with the wider region, through the maintenance of property and occupation, kinship affiliations, and various relations of interdependency. The town’s connectedness with the wider region enables the residents to maintain economic assets and social relations in other towns and villages, sustaining old networks and producing distinct modalities of rural–urban connectedness. These linkages also enable the urban middle class to express class distinctions

in terms of rural–urban distinctions, for example, through statements about the level of secular and religious education in the village and town.

The developments I have described here might be a distinctive feature of small cities and towns, where social segmentation might be less rigid than in the metropolis (Tidey 2012: 304) and where urban spaces might develop in close connection with developments in the wider region. Nevertheless, they raise questions about the potential significance of such connections in other cases of residential segregation in rural and urban India. Might a conceptual framework in which segregation is explored through the lens of estrangement and closure not blind us to these wider connections, making the ‘Muslim area’ appear more isolated than it really is? Might it be possible to conceptualise residential segregation as a rearrangement of mobilities and social relations, and to think of the Muslim area as a ‘hub’ of intersecting trajectories of mobility?

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