ISCTE IUL
REPOSITÓRIO
INSTITUTO UNIVERSITÁRIO DE LISBOA

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:
2023-02-03

Deposited version:
Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:
Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:
Lazzaretti, V. (2022). "We know how to behave and that’s why we feel safe": Peace and insecurity in Banaras. In Vera Lazzaretti, Kathinka Frøystad (Ed.), Beyond courtrooms and street violence: Rethinking religious offence and its containment . (pp. 87-102).

Further information on publisher's website:
https://www.routledge.com/Beyond-Courtrooms-and-Street-Violence-Rethinking-Religious-Offence-and/Lazzaretti-Froystad/p/book/9781032252650?fbclid=IwAR0-qR7mU3SaVlu39YuVor_V88j62z5V-xqPlbiXs7n-7YjA5w_caXJBRzI

Publisher's copyright statement:
This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Lazzaretti, V. (2022). "We know how to behave and that’s why we feel safe": Peace and insecurity in Banaras. In Vera Lazzaretti, Kathinka Frøystad (Ed.), Beyond courtrooms and street violence: Rethinking religious offence and its containment . (pp. 87-102).. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with the Publisher's Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

Use policy

Creative Commons CC BY 4.0
The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in the Repository
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Serviços de Informação e Documentação, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL)
Av. das Forças Armadas, Edifício II, 1649-026 Lisboa Portugal
Phone: +(351) 217 903 024 | e-mail: administrador.repositorio@iscte-iul.pt
https://repositorio.iscte-iul.pt

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

OPEN ACCESS

'We know how to behave and that's why we feel safe': peace and insecurity in Banaras

Vera Lazzaretti

ABSTRACT
In the 1980s and 1990s, during the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, the Gyanvapi mosque in Banaras was identified by Hindu nationalists as the next place to be 'liberated' from Muslim presence. A security plan was then implemented by the government to prevent the occurrence of a 'religious offence' as specified in the Indian Penal Code, namely 'destroying, damaging or defiling a place of worship' (Section 295). Drawing on ethnographic research, this article explores religious offence within and beyond its legal definition and examines the contradictory impact that its containment through policing has on everyday life and interreligious relationships in the centre of Banaras.

Frisking the *mufti*

On 2 September 2005, just before Juma *namaaz* (Friday congregational prayers), a crowd of men began assembling to enter the Gyanvapi mosque in Banaras (or Varanasi) in Uttar Pradesh (UP), India. They walked together with Hindu pilgrims who were on their way to the Kashi Vishvanath temple, about fifty metres from the mosque. The compound comprising both temple and mosque is located at the heart of the old city of Banaras and has several entry checkpoints where body searches are conducted by the police. On that day, a couple of officers approached the Sunni religious head of the city (the *mufti-e-shahar*), Abdul Batin Nomani, who regularly conducts Juma *namaaz* at Gyanvapi, and did as they do with other people: they started frisking him. The police did not recognise Nomani, who is normally excluded from security checks as a sign of respect. According to the First Information Report (FIR) filed at the local police station,[1] the *mufti*'s companions reacted vociferously to what they

1. FIR no. 120 of 2005, filed in the Chowk Thana against Mohammed Ejaj and others under s.147, 148, 332, 336, 425, 427, 395 and 397 of the Indian Penal Code (henceforth, IPC).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

perceived as an outrage and began shouting slogans against the police and the administration, while Nomani withdrew to a shop and sat waiting for local authorities and more senior police to arrive and resolve the misunderstanding. *Namaaz* was then performed as normal and the *mufti* left, but the protest escalated. Several shopkeepers and residents of the almost entirely Hindu neighbourhood adjacent to the compound joined the crowd of mosque attendees and they proceeded to the main road together, shouting slogans and throwing stones at the police and breaking whatever objects they came across.

My fieldwork around the Kashi Vishvanath temple and Gyanvapi mosque compound (henceforth, the KVT-GVM) started almost a decade later, but this episode is a fragment of the everyday policing that residents and frequenters of the area remember clearly and recounted to me. For instance, Prakash,[2] a long-term acquaintance who runs a shop selling pilgrims souvenirs and *murtis* (divine images of Hindu gods) next to the Kashi Vishvanath temple and is a self-acknowledged Hindutva sympathiser who took an active part in the Ram Janmabhoomi movement[3] as a university student leader, one day proudly announced to me: 'I went to jail for the *mufti*!' It turned out that Prakash had been one of the protesters in the 2005 demonstration because, as he put it, 'We want to live in peace, while police create troubles and put tension in a peaceful city'.

As detailed below, security forces at the KVT-GVM were reinforced in the early 1990s at the pinnacle of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement during which the Gyanvapi mosque was targeted by Hindutva outfits as one of the next places to be 'liberated' from Muslim presence. The security plan initially implemented for the protection of the mosque, though, progressively absorbed the entire compound. In the following decades, the presence of police in the neighbourhood became routine and, according to residents and visitors to the area, it ended up affecting liveability and disrupting peace: the episode recounted above and Prakash's narration testify to the general dissatisfaction and perceived violation.

I have witnessed this resentment against the police for years: in 2013, I began engaging with residents, shopkeepers, police, frequenters of the KVT-GVM of diverse caste backgrounds and the various religious authorities involved in the management of the temple or mosque while conducting research first about pilgrimage experts and later about the politics of heritage in Banaras. I too had to get used to life with the police in the neighbourhood when I observed and sometimes was part of the everyday—not especially tense—interactions between the police and others. Many of my interlocutors seemed to have resigned themselves to the intrusive police presence, and they often overlooked what at other times they identified as disruptions caused by the police to instead talk about the city's harmonious interreligious relationships. In a landscape of security paraphernalia, checkpoints, watchtowers and police uniforms, my interlocutors' narratives about peaceful coexistence seemed somewhat contradictory: because the city and the compound were peaceful, they seemed to be saying, the presence of

2. Names of all interlocutors (except public figures) are pseudonyms.
3. The Ram Janmabhoomi (Ram's birthplace) movement is a Hindu nationalist campaign for the construction of a Hindu temple at the supposed birthplace of the god Ram, on the site of the sixteenth-century Babri mosque in Ayodhya, a small town in eastern Uttar Pradesh (UP) less than 200 kilometres from Banaras. The movement was orchestrated by Hindu nationalist militant organisations and leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and led to the demolition of the Babri mosque in December 1992, after which communal riots broke out across the subcontinent.

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

the police was pointless and could even worsen interreligious relationships. On the other hand, they reported that Banaras had become more peaceful in recent decades—the period during which the security plan around the KVT-GVM had been in place—compared to the interreligious violence witnessed in the early 1990s.

This article attempts to make sense of these and other apparently contradictory outcomes of policing at the KVT-GVM and discusses ways in which this part of the city is experienced by residents and frequenters. It frames policing as a form of containment of a specific kind of religious offence. My material suggests that although security measures at the KVT-GVM can be seen as having been effective in preventing legally-defined religious offence and in contributing to the maintenance of peace 'in legal terms' (as one of the anonymous reviewers of a previous draft of this article nicely put it) since the violent riots of the early 1990s, they also foster resentment. More importantly, I show that these containment measures tended to reinforce over time the inequality between the local citizens of the majority and minority religious communities: for instance, while earlier the presence of the police was experienced (and expressed) as alienating and offensive by both Hindu and Muslim residents and frequenters of the area—as seen in my initial vignette—we will see below that in more recent times, the *possibility* of expressing dissatisfaction with the police presence is no longer shared equally. I suggest that policing has enhanced a sense of *insecurity* rather than security among local Muslims, thus becoming a paradoxical form of containment. Containment through policing, together with everyday violations barely mitigated by the police measures, has led local Muslims who frequent and live around the highly-sensitive compound to skilfully experiment with forms of self-containment and develop a 'know-how' that affords peaceful relationships with the police and the majority Hindu community. The renowned Banarasi interreligious peaceful coexistence, I argue, depends more and more on this 'know-how'.

Containment through policing as offence

In analysing my ethnographic material, I draw on and bridge two bodies of scholarship. First, I look at Banaras' interreligious landscape in the light of recent scholarship on shared and contested religious sites. I am particularly informed by a critical understanding of narratives that depict outside forces as disruptive to a supposedly peaceful and harmonious locality, as well as debates about the everyday dimensions of interreligious violence. Second, I draw on critical reflections that have emerged within the anthropology of security about the mechanisms and effects of 'securitisation'—a term first used by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies.[4]

As far as the first body of scholarship is concerned, I find some results of the Antagonistic Tolerance research project useful. Led by anthropologist Hayden between 2008 and 2012, this project developed a model to study 'competitive sharing of religious sites' comparatively by investigating long-term trajectories of sharing and contesting at multireligious sites in various geographical settings and through a

4. Barry Buzan *et al.*, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienne Publishers, 1998).

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

combination of historical, archaeological and ethnographic methods.[5] Notwithstanding the challenges of applying a single theoretical model to varied contexts, one important finding of this project is that narratives depicting mixed localities as peaceful and harmonious—what Williams calls 'peace talk'[6]—are found at many shared and contested sites, but they do not necessarily indicate unproblematic coexistence.[7] In fact, as confirmed by other works on similar settings,[8] friction consistently erupts *alongside* the rhetoric of peace, and even at times of apparent harmonious coexistence. It thus makes little sense to insist on a binary of conflict or coexistence and, as Varshney put it, peace and conflict cannot be understood if not conjointly.[9]

Banaras is a case in point. The city has been long projected as a stronghold of Hinduism and, since 2014, it has been the constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi; thus it is both a laboratory and a showcase for the government's Hindu nationalist agenda. It has a large Muslim population (28.82 percent according to the 2011 census) and is often praised as an example of Hindu–Muslim brotherhood and an exception in a region prone to communalism.[10] Accounts that depict a peaceful locality disrupted by outsiders—by police and politicians in Prakash and other interlocutors' accounts—are widespread and, in the past, they have been promoted by, and contributed to, the long-term economic interdependence of the predominantly Muslim weavers and predominantly Hindu businessmen in the city's famous textile industry. The work of Williams on the weavers of Banaras, however, calls for a critical engagement with 'peace' narratives and suggests that although they do promote the economic interests of both communities, they also distract from and normalise the profoundly unequal power relationships between Hindus and Muslims that she observed during her fieldwork between 2006 and 2008.[11]

Eastern Uttar Pradesh emerged as the main 'experimental laboratory of "communalization of everyday life"' in the first decade of the 2000s.[12] Since 2017, however, with the coming to power of the muscular Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in UP, the region has increasingly been the setting for institutionalised 'everyday communalism'—a novel form of interreligious

5. For more information, see the Antagonistic Tolerance Project web page [https://www.ucis.pitt.edu/antagonistictolerance/AT_Main_Page.html, accessed 25 Mar. 2020]. A major outcome is Robert Hayden *et al.*, *Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites and Spaces* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).
6. Philippa Williams, *Everyday Peace? Politics, Citizenship and Muslim Lives in India* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015).
7. Robert Hayden, 'Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans', in *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 43, no. 2 (April 2002), pp. 205–31. Narratives of peaceful coexistence are found broadly in the history of contested sites in India, and a certain nostalgia for an imagined harmonious past has been widespread recently—possibly as a reaction to the increasingly polarised regime of the BJP since 2014, as suggested in Kathinka Frøystad, 'Democratic Trajectories III: Ritual Inclusivity in Turbulent Times', in Alf Gunvald Nilsen *et al.* (eds), *Indian Democracy: Origins, Trajectories, Contestations* (London: Pluto Press, 2019), pp. 114–26.
8. Elazar Barkan and Karen Barkary, 'Introduction', in Elazar Barkan and Karen Barkary (eds), *Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 9.
9. Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 2002).
10. Philippa Williams, 'Hindu–Muslim Brotherhood: Exploring the Dynamics of Communal Relations in Varanasi, North India', in *Journal of South Asian Development*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (July 2007), pp. 153–76. For an overview of the region's communal history, see Sudha Pai and Sajjan Kumar, *Everyday Communalism: Riots in Contemporary Uttar Pradesh* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 28–34.
11. Philippa Williams, 'Reproducing Everyday Peace in North India: Process, Politics, and Power', in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 103, no. 1 (Feb. 2012), pp. 230–50; and Williams, *Everyday Peace?*
12. Pai and Kumar, *Everyday Communalism*, p. 3.

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

violence characterised by 'constant, low-key communal tension' that, 'together with frequent, small, low-intensity incidents [arising] out of petty everyday issues that institutionalize communalism at the grass roots, keep the "pot boiling"'.[13] Subsequent to the landslide victory of the BJP in the 2019 national election, further moves towards a Hindu majoritarian state occurred such as the Citizenship Amendment Act, a law that expedites Indian citizenship for non-Muslims from neighbouring countries and explicitly excludes Muslims. At the same time, violence against Muslims has become more routinised, particularly in UP, while the 'inter-communal civic networks' that Varshney found to be crucial to the maintenance of peace at times of interreligious friction[14] and that undoubtedly played a role in maintaining peace in the past in Banaras,[15] face challenging conditions. My material illustrates that the maintenance of peace in legal terms through policing at the KVT-GVM especially alienates local Muslims, who were initially supposed to be 'protected' but who feel, instead, increasingly insecure. Vulnerable individuals, I suggest below, then necessarily experiment with forms of self-containment.

To better understand this paradoxical outcome of containment, I draw on a second body of scholarship: the emerging field of the anthropology of security. In moving beyond the popular 'securitisation' theory that, in essence, framed security as a performative speech act through which a particular kind of threat is constructed that needs to be faced through extraordinary measures,[16] scholars in this field propose a broader conception of security. They see it as a lived social experience that not only pertains to the state and 'authorised' security agents (as in the Copenhagen School securitisation theory and previous approaches), but is also 'made and understood by actors and groups outside of the state and its official institutions'.[17] I have elsewhere engaged more closely with specific critiques of the original securitisation theory in a discussion of the ambiguous role of low-ranking police at the KVT-GVM,[18] but more important here is the fact that this scholarship shows that the presence of police and security measures can foster insecurity and alienate the very people they were supposed to protect, particularly if those people are already disadvantaged.[19]

The idea that policing has contradictory effects is hardly surprising to scholars working on ethnic and religious violence in urban South Asia. Police have been shown, particularly at critical times, to exacerbate interreligious divisions that would otherwise be latent,[20] and security procedures and material paraphernalia have been seen as sites for 'the recollection and anticipation of violence'[21] inasmuch as they retain memories

---

13. *Ibid*., p. 4.
14. Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*.
15. Williams, 'Hindu–Muslim Brotherhood'.
16. Buzan *et al.*, *Security*, p. vii.
17. Daniel M. Goldstein, 'Toward a Critical Anthropology of Security', in *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 51, no. 4 (Aug. 2010), pp. 487–517 [492].
18. Vera Lazzaretti, 'The Burden of Security: Moral Frictions and Everyday Policing in a Contested Religious Compound', in *Journal of Extreme Anthropology*, Vol. 4, no. 1 (Mar. 2020), pp. 74–93.
19. See, for instance, Didier Fassin, 'Petty States of Exception: The Contemporary Policing of Urban Poor', in Mark Maguire *et al.* (eds), *The Anthropology of Security: Perspectives from the Frontline of Policing, Counterterrorism and Border Control* (London: Pluto Press, 2014), pp. 104–17.
20. For an example about urban India, see Parvis Ghassem Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 230–3.
21. Pradeep Jeganathan, 'Checkpoint: Anthropology, Identity, and the State', in Veena Das and Deborah Poole (eds), *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* (Santa Fe, TX: School of American Research Press, 2004), pp. 67–80.

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

of past violence and implicitly point to the possibilities of future outbreaks. Recent episodes of police brutality against Muslims during political unrest, particularly in UP,[22] also confirm the findings of government commissions, scholars and even a few former officers of the Indian Police Service: police, the majority of whom are Hindus, are often partisan and discriminate against Muslims and other disadvantaged groups.[23]

But while this is clearly evident at times of violent outbreaks, I argue that the alienating effects of securitisation, and by extension of the containment of religious offence through policing, occur increasingly in more subtle ways too: during research around the KVT-GVM, I encountered among local Muslims a diffused sense of violation, insecurity and feelings of being out of place; these were not particularly linked to (memories and possibilities of) violent outbreaks but embedded in everyday life. I find anthropologist Das' description of these everyday forms of violation most useful:

> It is not only violence experienced on one's body in these cases but also the sense that one's access to context is lost that constitutes a sense of being violated. The fragility of the social becomes embedded in a temporality of anticipation since one ceases to trust that context is in place. The affect produced on the registers of the virtual and the potential, of fear that is real but not necessarily actualised in events, comes to constitute the ecology of fear in everyday life. *Potentiality* here does not have the sense of something that is waiting at the door of reality to make an appearance as it were, but *rather as that which is already present*. The ethnographic task here is to describe how feelings of scepticism come to be embedded within a frayed everyday life so that guarantees of belonging to larger entities such as communities or state are not capable of erasing the hurts or providing means of repairing this sense of being betrayed by the everyday.[24]

Although they do not entail physical violence and they do coexist with the maintenance of peace in legal terms, these everyday forms of violation are also hurtful and cause offence, but in ways not dealt with by the law. How, then, are these everyday violations and the entrenched insecurity and fear mitigated? Before addressing this question, I need to introduce my field site and define the kind of religious offence that the securitisation of the KVT-GVM is attempting to contain.

Contesting and sharing: A brief history of the KVT-GVM compound

A layered historical narrative of repeated destruction and temple desecration has become attached to the KVT-GVM over recent centuries. While much has been

22. During protests against the Citizen Amendment Act in December 2019, cases of police brutality against Muslim protesters occurred in several states, but UP had the highest death toll of eighteen people, fourteen of whom died after being shot: see Human Rights Watch, 'India: Deadly Force Used Against Protesters', 23 Dec. 2019 [https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/12/23/india-deadly-force-used-against-protesters, accessed 30 Jan. 2020]; and Aarefa Johari and Nithya Subramanian, 'In Uttar Pradesh, Mapping Reports of Violence and Police Brutality from 15 Districts', *Scroll.in*, 27 Dec. 2019 [https://scroll.in/article/947980/in-uttar-pradesh-reports-of-violence-and-police-brutality-from-15-districts, accessed 28 Jan. 2020].
23. *Status of Police in India Report 2019*: *Police Adequacy and Working Conditions* (Delhi: Common Cause & Lokniti—Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2019) [https://www.commoncause.in/uploadimage/page/Status_of_Policing_in_India_Report_2019_by_Common_Cause_and_CSDS.pdf, accessed Dec. 2019]. For more on this, see Lazzaretti, 'The Burden of Security'.
24. Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 9.

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

hypothesised about multiple destructions of the Kashi Vishvanath temple,[25] material evidence to reconstruct the early history of this deity and temple is very poor. Thus, if we want to discuss the origins of the controversy over the KVT-GVM and, in particular, the history of offence linked to this area, the evidentiary trail begins in sixteenth-century Mughal Banaras with the construction of a grand Vishvanath temple supported by the Mughal emperor, Akbar. Together with patronage for the development of the whole area surrounding the temple, this represents the peak of active Mughal engagement in the reshaping of the urban landscape of Banaras.[26]

This legacy, however, is now obscured by subsequent disruptions linked to Emperor Aurangzeb. Commonly associated with multiple temple desecrations, Aurangzeb is usually depicted as a 'zealous bigot who ruled by the sword and left behind a trail of Hindu tears'.[27] The dismantling of a Vishvanath temple in 1669, however, is one of the few (but still very poorly) documented demolitions perpetrated by him.[28] The Gyanvapi mosque was apparently later built on the same site and using some of the material from the old Vishvanath temple. Although documentary evidence is lacking, this most likely happened shortly after the dismantling of the temple and popular accounts and scholarly works seem unanimous in assigning the construction of the mosque to Aurangzeb.[29] According to a mainstream narrative already popular in colonial accounts, the Gyanvapi mosque is a sign of the offence perpetrated by Aurangzeb, who left a portion of the earlier temple unpainted and visible to make clear his intention to offend Hindus.[30]

In the century prior to the construction of the current Vishvanath temple, moves to rebuild the temple on the site of the mosque had been initiated by various regional patrons, but were unsuccessful. Adjacent land for a new Vishvanath temple was finally secured by Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore, a notable regional patron who funded many religious institutions in Banaras and elsewhere and had the new Vishvanath temple built around 1777.[31] Documentation from colonial and post-colonial times shows that the whole area was treated as a sensitive site by the authorities, and police were already

---

25. On the early history of Banaras and the Vishvanath temple, see, for instance, Hans T. Bakker and Harunaga Isaacson, 'A Sketch of the Religious History of Varanasi up to the Islamic Conquest and the New Beginning', in Hans T. Bakker and Harunaga Isaacson, *The Skandapurana, Volume IIA (Adhyayas 26–31.14): The Varanasi Cycle* (Gröningen: Egbert Forsten, 2004), pp. 19–82; and Travis L. Smith, 'Re-Newing the Ancient: The Kashikhanda and Shaiva Varanasi', in *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia*, Vol. 8, no. 1 (2007), pp. 83–108.
26. On the Mughal Vishvanath temple, see Babu Motichandra, *Kaashi ka Itihaas* (Varanasi: Vishvavidhyaalaya Prakaashan, new ed., 1985), p. 168; Catherine B. Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 254; and Madhuri Desai, *Banaras Reconstructed: Architecture and Sacred Space in a Hindu Holy City* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), pp. 31–7, and on Mughal patronage in the city, pp. 31–44.
27. Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), p. 3.
28. The record of an order by Aurangzeb to destroy the Vishvanath temple is found in a sentence in Saqi Mustad Khan, *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, Jadunath Sarkar (trans.) (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, rev. ed., 1986 [1947]), p. 55.
29. Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India*, p. 254.
30. An early twentieth-century description of the mosque from a guidebook of the city, for example, reads: 'Higher up in the raised platform, we shall observe a large mosque, presenting in glaring characters, the extent of mischief wantonly committed by that most bigoted hater of Hinduism, the despotic Aurangazeb'. See K.S. Muthiah *et al.*, *Smiling Benares: A Sketch from the Vedic Days to the Modern Times* (Madras: Raithby & Co. Printers, 1911), pp. 105–6.
31. Desai, *Banaras Reconstructed*, pp. 58, 81–3.

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

stationed at the mosque in the 1930s, although in very low numbers.[32] It was six decades later that securitisation at the site formally began in response to the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the declaration of the Gyanvapi mosque by Hindu nationalists as the next place to be 'liberated' from Muslim presence.

The 2019 Supreme Court decision in favour of the construction of a Ram temple at the site of the demolished Babri mosque in Ayodhya,[33] and the recent acquittal of all the surviving accused in the Babri mosque demolition case,[34] pave the way for a different narrative about the 1992 events. However, the Liberhan Commission set up by the Government of India at that time to investigate the Ayodhya events found Hindu nationalist organisations responsible and recommended the prosecution of several politicians, police officers and administrators.[35] The accused faced charges of conspiracy as well as of promoting religious enmity and defiling a place of worship with the intent to insult a religion.[36] These acts are punishable under the IPC, which defines 'damaging or defiling a place of worship or a sacred object with the intent to insult the religion of a class of persons' as a first kind of religious offence.[37]

The deployment of security forces at the KVT-GVM was then implemented to contain this kind of religious offence against the mosque, and more generally to enforce the 1991 Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act and maintain law and order at a site of potential interreligious violence.[38] The securitisation at the KVT-GVM is thus closely connected to legal measures for regulating religious offence and, along with the

32. In the 1930s, a group of Muslims achieved partial success in a lawsuit objecting to portions of land around the mosque that had been used for prayers being obstructed by the police and the city administration. A group of Hindus then appealed the decision: *Din Mohammad and Others vs. the Secretary of State for India Council through the District Magistrate and Collector Benares*, CWP no. 62 of 1936 in the Court of Additional Civil Judge of Benares, and appeal no. 466 of 1937 in the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad.
33. Although spelling out that the demolition and other events at Ayodhya were illegal actions, the Supreme Court verdict handed over the land where the Babri mosque once stood to the Hindu parties, seemingly rewarding the perpetrators of those actions. For an extensive report on the verdict, see 'Peace and Justice: On Ayodhya Verdict', *The Hindu* (11 Nov. 2019) [https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/peace-and-justice/article29938535.ece, accessed 17 Nov. 2020].
34. 'All Acquitted in Babri Masjid Demolition Case', *The Hindu* (30 Sept. 2020) [https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/ayodhya-babri-masjid-demolition-case-verdict/article32728552.ece, accessed 30 Oct. 2020].
35. The Liberhan Ayodhya Commission report states: 'The police and the administrators were the executors of the designs of the RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal, Shiv Sena, etc.': *Report of the Ayodhya Liberhan Commission of Inquiry* (Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2019), p. 950 [https://mha.gov.in/about-us/commissions-committees/liberhan-ayodhya-commission, accessed 15 Aug. 2019].
36. Pawan Dixit, 'Babri Masjid Case: Advani, Joshi, Bharti Charged with Criminal Conspiracy; Naidu Says BJP Leaders Innocent', *Hindustan Times* (31 May 2017) [https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/babri-masjid-case-criminal-conspiracy-charges-against-advani-joshi-bharti-naidu-says-bjp-leaders-are-innocent/story-53F9zVhdXW6f2tthJVNOoM.html, accessed 15 Aug. 2019]; and Prabhash K. Dutta, '25 Years of Babri Masjid Demolition and Twisted Tale of 49 Court Cases', *India Today* (6 Dec. 2017) [https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/25-years-of-babri-masjid-demolition-tale-of-49-court-cases-1101337-2017-12-06, accessed 15 Aug. 2019].
37. IPC, Chapter XV, s.295. The whole chapter is devoted to 'offences related to religion'. A report on the IPC and its text can be found in 'Law Commission of India, Forty-Second Report, Indian Penal Code' (June 1971) [http://lawcommissionofindia.nic.in/1-50/report42.pdf, accessed 15 Aug. 2019].
38. The Act was passed in 1991 under then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao at the peak of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and, paradoxical as it may seem, just before the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya. It prohibits the conversion of any place of worship of any religious denomination into a place of worship of a different religious institution and seeks to maintain the *status quo* of places of worship as it existed at the time of Independence (15 August 1947) with the exclusion of state-protected monuments under the 1958 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act and the Ram Janmabhoomi–Babri Masjid disputed site, The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act (11 July 1991) [https://indiankanoon.org/doc/603724/, accessed 15 Aug. 2019].

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

presence of the police, legal battles have continuously played a crucial role in shaping the spatial politics at the site. Disputes about the demarcation of space and ownership of the land occupied by the Gyanvapi mosque have been fought in the Banaras civil court, the Allahabad High Court and the Supreme Court by the Hindu religious authority in control of the space between the temple and the mosque (the Vyas family), the temple administration (especially after the temple takeover by the government in 1983), the managing body of the mosque (Anjuman Intazamiya Masajid) and the Sunni Waqf Board of Uttar Pradesh. Legal disputation is still in progress, and one case about the very right to existence of the mosque that was stayed by the Allahabad High Court in 1998 began being heard again in the Banaras Fast Track Court in January 2020.[39]

At the same time, there is also a history of compromise and agreement (*samjhauta*) between the various parties managing the compound, especially between the Vyas family and the Anjuman Intazamiya Masajid: the two parties filed a joint petition to the Supreme Court in October 2018 against demolitions around the compound for the controversial Kashi Vishvanath Corridor—a BJP flagship initiative for the development and 'beautification' of the area that began to be implemented after the electoral victory of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh in 2017.[40] Because spatial reconfigurations in the area are likely to further isolate the mosque, the KVT-GVM has been dubbed a prospective 'Ayodhya 2.0',[41] a definition that suggests the increasing probability of an outcome similar to that at Ayodhya, but this time achieved in line with the current Hindu nationalist government's emphasis on development. In their petition to the Supreme Court, the Vyas family and the Anjuman Intazamiya Masajid claimed that demolitions and works at the compound were dangerous for interreligious relationships and against previous agreements.[42] However, the court found the concerns of the petitioners arose 'only out of apprehensions': Justice Mishra stated that the mosque was protected by twenty-feet-high iron girders and 'nobody can touch it, so it is *secure*'.[43] The judge's statement apparently took for granted that religious offence would be prevented, but my discussion below complicates this understanding of security by providing insights into everyday life at the compound.

The mosque as the focus of offence and its shifting (in)visibility

To begin discussing how offence manifests in everyday life and the extent to which the policing of religious offence is a successful form of containment, we have to come

39. *Ancient Idol of Svayambhu Lord Vishwanath and Others vs Anjuman Intazamiya Masajid and Others*, CD, FTC, no. 610 of 1991.
40. For more on the Kashi Vishvanath Corridor, see Vera Lazzaretti, 'The Boundary Within: Demolitions, Dream Projects and the Negotiation of Hinduness in Banaras', in István Keul (ed.), *Spaces of Religion in Urban South Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), pp. 87–99.
41. See, for example, Abhishek Srivastava, 'Is BJP Planning an Ayodhya 2.0 in Varanasi?', *National Herald* (24 Mar. 2018) [https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/news/is-the-bjp-planning-an-ayodha-2-in-varanasi-gyanvapi-masjid-stands-in-way-of-connecting-kashi-vishwanath-with-ganga-ghats, accessed 15 Aug. 2019].
42. *Jitendra Nath Vyas and Another vs Union of India and Others*, CWP no. 1365 of 2018.
43. Bhadra Sinha, 'Supreme Court Refuses to Intervene in Ganga-Kashi Vishwanath Pathway Project', *Hindustan Times* (1 Dec. 2018) [https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/supreme-court-refuses-to-intervene-in-ganga-kashi-vishwanath-pathway-project/story-QWV8x7iXAVG7KQUuhFWwrK.html, accessed Aug. 2019], emphasis added.

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

closer to the mosque—a structure that embodies a certain reciprocity of offence. The destruction of the Babri mosque and the potential destruction of the Gyanvapi mosque are justified by perpetrators and potential perpetrators using the language of offence: these see Indo-Islamic architecture, and mosques in particular, as offensive because their very sight recalls the idea of temple desecration by Muslim rulers.[44] I have mentioned that colonial accounts already depicted Gyanvapi mosque as an eyesore to Hindus, but these probably drew on oral narratives that were in circulation then, and have now become entrenched in the city: they are widely accepted by the majority of my Hindu interlocutors—residents and shopkeepers of the area around the KVT-GVM—but friends from other neighbourhoods of Banaras also accept it. For instance, I had a difficult time when trying to discuss the history of the area with my former Hindi teacher, Gautam, a Bengali Brahman who has become a friend. He always claimed not to be a particularly religious person, but as soon as our conversations turned to the story of Kashi Vishvanath—a shrine that he had hardly visited—Gautam would become very emotional and express his anger about Aurangzeb's offence in ways that I never saw him doing otherwise, and that made me withdraw into a degree of self-censorship about my work.

For Hindu residents and frequenters of the area, the mosque is experienced as fraught with the potential to hurt over and over again. At the same time, though, the mosque is a site of possible offence to Muslims were it to be attacked or destroyed, and my ethnography reveals that its mainstream representation as an ambiguous and disputed structure already hurts the religious sensitivities of mosque-goers and other Muslims who live around the area. These people, unlike other Banarasi or UP Muslims who may (as suggested by an episode recounted below) have fragmented knowledge about Gyanvapi, are exposed every day to the controversial memory embodied by the mosque. It is not surprising, then, that the containment efforts at the KVT-GVM began with the mosque. A crucial step of securitisation recalled by my interlocutors was the placement of a barricade of iron fences,[45] referred to by Justice Mishra as almost a guarantee of security. This further concealed the walls and perimeters of the Gyanvapi mosque, which were until very recently partially hidden by the surrounding residential buildings.

The back of the mosque, where portions of a previous structure (most likely the previous Vishvanath temple) can be seen, has been since the 1990s a major focus of security and access to it has been highly regulated: Shringar Gauri—a goddess principally worshipped during Navratri—is said to be located there,[46] and during major Hindu festivals, there have been repeated attempts by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and other Hindu nationalist associations to perform special rituals (*jalaabhishek*) and the circumambulation (*parikrama*) of the mosque.[47] These episodes constitute the most

44. On the origins of the idea of a contested 'Indian Islamic Architectural Heritage', see Hilal Ahmed, *Muslim Political Discourse in Postcolonial India: Monuments, Memory, Contestation* (Delhi: Routledge, 2018), pp. 50–96.
45. '*Gyanvapi Masjid ki Morchebandi Lohe ki Paip se Bairiketing Hogi* (The Fortification of the GVM Will Be Done through a Barricade of Iron Pipes)', *Dainik Jagran* (19 Dec. 1992), p. 2.
46. Vera Lazzaretti, 'Tradition versus Urban Public Bureaucracy? Reshaping Pilgrimage Routes and Religious Heritage around Contested Places', in Yamini Narayanan (ed.), *Religion and Urbanism: Reconceptualising Sustainable Cities for South Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge), pp. 80–96.
47. Almost daily reports about Shringar Gauri and attempts by the VHP (Vishva Hindu Parishad) and others to access the securitised area can be found in the local press in July 1995, when a major confrontation with the police took place. See, for example, '*Shraavan ke Pratham Somvaar par Aj GV ki Kadi Suraksha Vyavastha* (On the First Monday of Shravan, Tight Security Arrangements at GV Today)', *Aj* (17 July 1995), p. 2; and '*Suraksha*

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

tangible and still recurring attempts by Hindutva outfits to access the mosque. Although ostensibly the intention is only to worship the goddess, such access would clearly provide opportunities for those inclined to do so to defile the mosque. These attempts have almost always been successfully halted by security forces, but at times police have been criticised for being too permissive towards Hindu nationalists.[48] If we only consider the legal definition of religious offence, though, it can be argued (as the Supreme Court did recently) that the policing of religious offence is an effective form of containment inasmuch as the mosque has not been damaged.

Security measures, however, have also had other outcomes. For instance, they contributed to the concealment of the potentially offensive mosque, which made it even more ambiguous, and almost out of place in this predominantly Hindu area: until recently, non-residents of the neighbourhood could well have been unaware of the presence of the concealed-behind-the-barricade mosque when faced with the overwhelming presence of temple-focused shops in the *bazaar* surrounding the KVT-GVM, the crowds of Hindu devotees compared with the few mosque-goers, the signs welcoming people to the temple (but not to the mosque) and the soundscape overtly oriented to enhancing the Hindu pilgrims' experience. This became very clear to me as I listened to stories told to Hindu pilgrims accessing the compound from the gate at the side of the mosque; many are confused and mistake the few glimpses of the Gyanvapi mosque for the temple. They are then told by local guides, temple workers and police themselves that, indeed, *that* structure *is* the 'original' (*adi*), 'real' (*asli*) or ancient (*puraana*) temple. No mention is made of the fact that Gyanvapi is a functioning mosque.

Confusion about the mosque, though, is not confined to Hindu pilgrims: one day in March 2018, I bumped into a group of youths who were trying to access the Gyanvapi mosque and were turned back by the police, who told them they could only enter at prayer times (this is not a published rule, but is commonly said, especially to non-local Muslims). Glancing between the crowd of pilgrims holding offerings for the Hindu deity and the partially visible domes of Gyanvapi, the youths seemed confused and asked the police whether this was a temple or a mosque. One officer, laughing with his colleagues, told them sarcastically: '*Tum dekho, kya lagta hai tumko*? (Look for yourself, what does it seem to you?)'. He was pointing to the domes of Gyanvapi but, at the same time, hinting at the mosque's juxtaposition to the temple and the dubious origins of the mosque. The youths told me they had come from a town around 80 kilometres away to visit the Juma *masjid* of Banaras and had been pointed to the area by someone in the street. However, they were still unsure whether they were in the right place. They knew almost nothing about the mosque or the temple and, coming to the area as complete outsiders, they could not even recognise the mosque despite its only partially visible but unmistakable Islamic architectural features.

Ways in which the landscape has been selectively presented and visually managed (through security measures) have contributed to making the mosque invisible to

Ghere ko Chakma Dekar VHP Samarthak Shringar Gauri Pahunche (VHP Supporters Reached Shringar Gauri by Dodging Security Circles)', *Aj* (25 July 1995), p. 2.

48. '*Masjid Dhvast Karne ki Yojna ke Tahat Nayi Paramparaayen* (New Traditions under the Plan to Demolish the Mosque)', *Aj* (27 July 1995), p. 2.

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

passers-by and to othering the Muslims of the area.[49] In a progressively Hinduising landscape—which will be even more so after the Kashi Vishvanath Corridor is realised—the mosque is made to stand as a contradiction.

At the same time, though, we could see the concealment of the mosque as instrumental to the containment of the resentment and hurt felt by Hindus in the area on seeing it. The clear visibility of the mosque after the recent demolitions for the Kashi Vishvanath Corridor, indeed, is potentially offensive and likely to provoke reactions. In the winter and spring of 2018, I witnessed the first wave of demolitions that resulted in making the mosque clearly visible for the first time in decades.

Prakash, who we met above, used to own a shop (demolished in Spring 2019) directly facing the then newly-visible mosque. While drinking tea and discussing the development project, the sound of the *azaan* often broke into our conversations, intruding on the otherwise temple-dominated soundscape. Prakash at those times turned his nose up and lamented the fact that he could hear the *azaan* perfectly, whereas he would hardly notice it before. He and Sonu, a neighbouring shopkeeper, made jokes about how much they disliked this sound and how little they appreciated the new view of the *safed imaarat* (white building), as they often refer to the mosque. They mimed with their faces the disgust they experienced by just looking at it: the white building is for them a derisory presence in the domain of the city's major deity, Vishvanath. Prakash even suggested that visitors would soon become enraged by this sight and might start throwing stones at it. He said this with a mixture of concern and sarcasm, leaving room for me and Sonu to wonder whether he himself would like to participate in taking revenge for one offence by committing a new offence. As Prakash's remark suggests, the new visibility of the mosque has already provoked a renewed consciousness of offence in residents and frequenters of the area, who, in 2018, had begun speaking more openly about their resentments and sharing their views with Hindu pilgrims. Expressions of these feelings range from explicit sentences such as 'it feels bad to see it (*dekhne se bura lagta hai*)' to misrepresentation or complete negation of the status of the building as a mosque; indeed, as seen in the discussions at Prakash's shop, the mosque is often referred to as 'the white building' or just as 'that (*vah*)'. While arousing latent resentment and hurt in Hindu residents and pilgrims, the new visibility of the mosque has pushed local Muslims into an even more volatile position. By 2019 they were already navigating the overwhelmingly Hindu space carefully and had increasingly to justify the presence of the mosque and indeed their own presence.

From dialogues with local Muslims who live and work around the KVT-GVM, it became clear to me that narratives about the origin of the mosque and its contested status circulate widely in this part of the city, and also among them. Indeed, the offended Hindus' very arguments about the mosque are rejected by local Muslims as hurting *their* religious sensitivities. Sitting at the shop of two brothers on the main road close to the compound, I was repeatedly told that both local and foreign guides tell people a 'wrong story (*galat baat* or *kahaani*)', as Karim, one of the brothers, put it.

49. This is comparable to the 'visual management' of Jerusalem discussed in Dana Hercbergs and Chaim Noy, 'Mobile Cartographies and Mobilized Ideologies: The Visual Management of Jerusalem', in *Antipode*, Vol. 47, no. 4 (Jan. 2015), pp. 942–62.

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

The 'wrong story' is evidently about the mosque and Karim referred to the widespread account of the Gyanvapi mosque being built on the debris of the previous Vishvanath temple. This account was completely rejected by several other Muslim interlocutors as well and the recurring reason for this rejection, which Karim expressed clearly to me, is that the destruction of places of worship is considered alien and sinful in Islam. He stressed that nobody would want to pray in a place originating from such a destruction and that such a place would not be a proper place of worship.

Some of the city's Muslims who live in other areas exhibit resilience by choosing to come to Gyanvapi mosque for their Friday prayers despite the reportedly discriminatory practices of the police at the checkpoint, while the religious authorities in charge of the mosque show resilience by mounting litigation about their rights over *waqf* properties in the area. Local Muslims are more exposed to offence due to their proximity to the ambiguous mosque and, for them, discussing feelings of hurt openly, in contrast to my Hindu interlocutors, is evidently not a feasible option, and neither is openly manifesting anger. Only a persistent ethnographic gaze at a 'frayed everyday life'[50] reveals that even if hurt is not spoken about openly, it is there in potentiality and, as in Das' formulation, present and felt in the everyday. To deal with this potentiality, local Muslims increasingly rely on self-containment that, although unable to erase the hurt they feel, helps them to avoid letting the forms of violation present in their everyday lives escalate into confrontation or even violence.

This self-containment, and the shrinking space assigned to Muslims in this central area of the city, became very clear to me during my regular visits to Karim's shop in the winters and springs of 2018 and 2019, particularly on Fridays. At the time of the Juma prayers, Nomani regularly addresses hundreds of mostly habitual worshippers who come from the neighbourhoods adjacent to the KVT-GVM as well as from more distant areas of the city. At these times, the usually temple-centred landscape is breached by an Islamic festive atmosphere. Groups of men and boys dressed in clean *salwar-kurtas* and with heads covered by *topis* walk down the main road to access the mosque, finding their way through the crowds of Hindu pilgrims and the incessant traffic of auto-rickshaws, motorbikes and cycle rickshaws. From the loudspeakers of the nearby Raziya mosque, where many others choose to pray to avoid the security procedures at Gyanvapi, the local imam's animated tones can be heard amidst the car horns and devotional chants of the pilgrims.

At those times, Karim and his brother's domestic appliance shop becomes very lively. Both brothers will be elegantly dressed, wearing their *topi*s and taking turns to go for *namaaz*, although only one does that at Gyanvapi. Karim explained that he prefers performing prayers at a smaller mosque located in the mixed neighbourhood close by where he lives. He is not the only person I talked to who told me he has given up visiting Gyanvapi because of the police and security procedures. 'I don't want to get angry or disturbed while I'm going to pray; the police attitude makes me upset', Karim said. Azan, another interlocutor, told me that he was troubled by the way in which the police disrespectfully touched his body with dirty hands when he—clean, perfumed and in his best clothes—was going to pray. But, unlike Karim, Azan keeps going to

50. Das, *Life and Words*, p. 9.

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

Gyanvapi and is one of the *mufti*'s followers. At the end of the prayers, some men wait for the *mufti* to shake hands and accompany him for a distance and a few women in black burqas squat on the sides of the main road adjacent to the compound, begging coins from the congregation.

On a Friday in Winter 2019, I sat in the shop, as I usually did, to observe the passing by of Hindu pilgrims and Gyanvapi frequenters and converse with the brothers and other acquaintances who come and visit them on their way to the mosque. The shop is narrow and cramped and there is not much room to sit. The crowd of Hindu pilgrims is particularly dense; people heading for, or coming from, the temple seem to occupy every inch of space. Some stand outside the shop and obstruct the entrance; several mosque frequenters manage to get in and leave their belongings with the brothers, as they often do before proceeding to the checkpoint at Gyanvapi. Hindu pilgrims often stop in front of the shop to ask for information about the temple, with no interest at all in the merchandise; some try to sit inside but are told that this is not a place to sit. Suddenly, a middle-class Hindu woman, carrying offerings for Vishvanath, comes and sits on the stool usually occupied by one of the two brothers. She does so without asking, and a group of people stands next to her. They ask Karim, who is elegantly dressed and wears a skull cap, if other people can come and sit inside the shop. He says no at first, but then asks them if they are elderly and says, if so, he would agree to have them sit. Meanwhile, another group of women directed to the temple enters the shop and they sit next to me, without a word. They position their offerings of flowers and milk on the stool next to Karim and spill some milk. He is visibly disturbed: when they entered the shop, he had made a gesture of shock and disagreement by bringing his hand to the forehead in a quick move. He does not look at the women, or at me, but I can see his neck pulsing and his jaw becoming tense. His eyes look enraged. The women seem not to notice his turmoil and ask him several questions about temple rules. He replies that he does not know these things. After some time, they leave without another word; meanwhile, the other group is also about to leave. Silence falls in the shop and it takes a long time for the atmosphere of tension to dissipate. That day Karim took some of the appliances on sale and positioned them where the women had sat, to show that there was no space to sit. And he did the same on following Fridays as well.

A few days later, I asked Karim if he would have behaved otherwise had I not been there, perhaps by openly expressing his anger. He told me that he mostly agrees to have women and elderly pilgrims briefly sitting in the shop, but these days people do not even bother to ask. At other times he admitted that he felt bad, disturbed or angered (*disturb*, *garbar*, *tension*, *gussa*) by all these pilgrims and the police behaviour, and discussed his feeling of being out of context, particularly in Yogi Adityanath's Uttar Pradesh. For instance, Karim told me that he would no longer venture into the *bazaar* around the temple because, as he put it, he has nothing to do there ('*hamaara koi kaam nahin hai vahaan*); he saw the area as belonging less and less to him *(*'*aajkal hamaara koi jagah nahin hai yahaan*, there is no space for us/me here, these days').[51] But his anger was hardly ever expressed openly. His comments resonated with a

51. The pronoun '*ham* (we)' is widely used to refer to oneself in Banaras, so in this expression it could mean either Karim as an individual or a general 'we', indicating Muslim people.

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

dialogue I had with another man, the head of one of the last Muslim families who still live in the temple *bazaar*. When I asked him how the family felt about living in an increasingly temple-focused area, Aziz explained clearly: 'All is well, we don't create any trouble. *We know how to behave* and that's why we feel safe'.

Another example of this 'know-how' goes back to the idea of the mainstream narrative about the origins of the mosque being a 'wrong story'. When Karim told me about guides standing in front of his shop and telling people about the destruction perpetrated by Aurangzeb, he explained that what he and his friends do is ask them to move on. In this way, he said, he does not have to hear those wrong stories anymore. This reaction is similar to the placing of merchandise to prevent people from sitting in the shop: Karim has learned to take action to avoid situations that would anger him.

Unpacking a complex field

How does this material speak to questions about the containment of religious offence? To what extent is policing an effective form of containment? As already suggested, security measures at the KVT-GVM can be seen as effective only if we take into account the legal definition of religious offence because the mosque has not been attacked and is still there. My ethnography, however, shows that it also has effects that result in the further alienation of the mosque and of local Muslims. The hyper-protection of the mosque and the presence of the police hardly makes them feel safe and protected. Local Muslims at the centre of Banaras instead resort to forms of self-containment that provide a sense of (albeit precarious) safety and generate a quick fix by downplaying the shared sense of insecurity that they experience. Policing of religious offence has done little to alleviate the forms of violation felt, but generally not voiced, by Muslims, while it has allowed resentments to increasingly be expressed by some local Hindus such as Prakash and his friends. This occurs, for instance, through the explicit endorsement by the police of mainstream narratives that the mosque is the 'original' temple.[52]

The possibility of expressing hurt, anger and outrage remains unequal, but all my interlocutors, irrespective of their religion, shared a strong sense of alienation and, ultimately, violation resulting from the very presence of the police. Their feelings were vociferously expressed in the 2005 episode when the *mufti* was frisked. A shared nostalgia for an imagined harmonious past has not, however, been able to reduce the increasing inequality and the unequal possibility of articulating feelings of offence. Containment of legal controversies and interreligious violence seems, instead, to increasingly depend on, and burden, local Muslims who have to experiment with self-containment and silence to navigate life with an increasingly assertive and vocal Hindu majority. In the current situation of everyday communalism and deterioration of inter-communal networks in UP and beyond, these forms of self-containment may be one of the few remaining ways in which some sort of precarious security is achieved.

52. More on the role of everyday policing in sidelining the mosque can be found in Lazzaretti, 'The Burden of Security'.

Review Copy – Not for Redistribution
File Use Subject to Terms & Conditions of PDF License Agreement (PLA)

Epilogue

In Spring 2019, I was sitting as I usually do on Fridays in my 'office'—Karim's shop. After Juma *namaaz*, one of his friends rushed into the shop on his way from Gyanvapi and told the brothers angrily that Nomani, the *mufti*, had again been frisked and they should all do something. There was a discussion in the shop, but in sharp contrast to the violent protest after the 2005 episode, nothing overt happened. The next day, sitting in the *mufti's* house, I asked him how he had reacted to the frisking this time. Smiling, he shrugged and said: 'This time I didn't say anything because I didn't want the episode to become something big and cause trouble'. A few days later, during discussions with another Muslim leader, I was able to read the 2005 FIR filed against Hindu and Muslim protesters at the time of the frisking of the *mufti*. 'People should not know about it *this time*', I was then told, and 'Nomani made sure *not to express anger* so that people would not notice'. I was to understand that an outburst of anger on behalf of local Muslims would be very dangerous for the city, and especially for local Muslims themselves.

Acknowledgements

For what we shared in Banaras, I thank all interlocutors whose words and silences I have tried to make sense of in this article, in particular Karim, Prakash, the Vyas family and the *mufti*, Abdul Batin Nomani. I am very thankful to the co-editor of this special issue, Kathinka Frøystad, for the enthusiastic support for my research and her sophisticated analytical gaze; the participants in the 2018 workshop 'Containing Religious Offence in South Asia' at the University of Oslo and the Research Colloquium at the Department of Cultural and Religious History of South Asia at the South Asia Institute in Heidelberg for commenting on and engaging with previous drafts of this article; the two anonymous reviewers for *South Asia*, whose valuable suggestions and encouragement were much appreciated; and Geoff Ainsworth, for editorial support and much more throughout this research. Any errors or omissions are my own.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Research for this article was funded by the Research Council of Norway [Grant no. 231569] and writing for the final version supported by the Heidelberg University's Flagship Initiative 'Transforming Cultural Heritage' [HeiConnect funding 2020].

ORCID

Vera Lazzaretti http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5621-189X