Uneasy Negotiations:
Urban Redevelopment, Neoliberalism and Hindu Nationalist Politics in Ahmedabad, India

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the politics of urban space in the Indian city of Ahmedabad, focussing particular attention on the relationship of urban redevelopment to neoliberalism, Hindu nationalist politics and their intersections. While many scholars have studied the multiple ways in which urban landscapes are being re-imagined and re-configured as a result of neoliberal programs, few like Jane M. Jacobs and Arjun Appadurai have sought to specifically focus on the ways in which these neoliberal reconfigurations of the city intersect with racial, religious, and ethnic politics. This paper seeks to contribute to this slim but important body of literature so that we might better understand the multiple articulations and geographical specificities of this intersection and the challenges that it poses for creating inclusive cities in many parts of the world. Furthermore, by locating this study in Ahmedabad, a city which on the one hand has witnessed recurring violence against its minority Muslims at the instigation of Hindu nationalist organizations, and on the other hand is increasingly becoming an important local and regional site for articulating the desire to be "global," this paper hopes to shed light on the ways in which, through their intersections in urban space, the neoliberal project and religious identity politics reconfigure each other, opening up at the same time greater challenges and new possibilities in the struggle for social justice.

The paper examines the politics of urban space in Ahmedabad largely through the lens of an ambitious urban redevelopment project – the Sabaramti River Front Development Project, a US$ 262 million project currently under implementation. By interrogating the discourses and practices that constitute the multiple visions for and claims to the spaces marked for redevelopment under the project, and by examining the ways in which various actors attempt to negotiate their desires, interests and needs through the project, the paper seeks to make three arguments. First, that there are tensions in the pursuit of the project because of frictions between maintaining local legitimacy and pursuing neoliberal rationalities. Second, that the relationship between neoliberalism and Hindu nationalist politics is an uneasy one as a result of tensions between pursuing a wider political legitimacy for the state in order to attract global investment and pursuing blatantly exclusionary projects like Hindutva (a nationalist ideology that views India as a Hindu nation). And third, that as the class bias of urban redevelopment has collided with the religious bias of Hindu nationalist politics in a city where class and religion do not neatly overlap, the project has given rise to new, albeit fragile, alliances in the struggle for social justice and the right to the city.

INTRODUCTION

This paper, which is part of a larger dissertation project on the politics of urban space in the Indian city of Ahmedabad, examines an ambitious urban redevelopment project – the Sabaramti River Front Development Project, a US$ 262 million project currently under implementation. By interrogating the discourses and practices that constitute the multiple visions for and claims to the spaces marked for redevelopment under the project, and by examining the ways in which various actors attempt to negotiate their desires, interests and needs through the project, the paper focuses particular attention on the relationship of the project to neoliberalism, Hindu nationalist politics and

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their intersections. In the next three paragraphs I will briefly discuss the approach that this paper takes in examining these relationships.

The reconfiguration of urban landscapes in many cities around the world in the current moment of globalization has given rise to an extensive literature over the past two decades. An important strand of this literature has examined the implications of neoliberalism on urban restructuring and the often devastating effects of this on both the ideal of an inclusive city and on already marginalized groups as they are further excluded, displaced and/or criminalized (Caldeira, 2000; Harvey, 1989; Marvin and Graham, 2001). A recent approach for studying such geographies of urban restructuring, termed as "actually existing neoliberalism," calls attention to the differences between neoliberal ideology and neoliberal political practice (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 352). While this is indeed an important differentiation and critically confronts the promises offered up by neoliberal ideology, I find the concept of "actually existing neoliberalism" particularly useful in that it considers neoliberalism not as an "end-state" but as a process – as the term "neoliberalization" suggests (353) – and furthermore, as a contextually embedded project "produced within national, regional, and local contexts defined by the legacies of inherited frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices, and political struggles" (349). The notion of "process" suggests tensions, contradictions and negotiations in an ongoing pursuit of market-driven transformation while the notion of contextual embeddedness suggests that neoliberalism is not so much a unitary top-down force as it is itself constituted by situated practices. This paper thus examines urban redevelopment in Ahmedabad as part of an ongoing process of neoliberalism; it explores the tensions and negotiations that are a part of this process; and it attempts to understand how the specific context of Ahmedabad shapes and constitutes neoliberalism.

The notion of the contextual embeddedness of neoliberal projects does not however pay adequate attention to the translocal and transnational networks through which urban restructuring projects are increasingly pursued and implemented. As writings on "transnational urbanism" argue, a study of contemporary urbanism must pay attention to "the criss-crossing transnational circuits of communication and cross-cutting local, translocal, and transnational social practices that 'come together' in particular places at particular times and enter into the contested politics of place-making" (Smith, 2001: 5). These writings also emphasize the centrality of human agency while acknowledging the political-economic paradigm shift to neoliberalism since the 1970s. Thus, if neoliberal practices shape the city, they necessarily do so through the agency of individuals with particular needs, interests and ideologies. In studying urban redevelopment in Ahmedabad as constituting neoliberalism, this paper therefore also pays attention to human agency and to local, translocal and transnational practices.

But this paper also stems from another important concern, one that continues to be rarely, though increasingly, addressed by scholars (e.g. Jacobs, 1996; Appadurai, 2000) – the question of how neoliberal reconfigurations of the city intersect with racial, religious and ethnic politics. While identity politics by ethnic/religious minorities has helped them negotiate their right to the city in this era of consuming difference (Jacobs, 1996), the increasing rise of majoritarian identity politics (religious or ethnic) also cautions us against the emancipatory potential of identity politics and the challenges that it poses for creating inclusive cities in many parts of the world today. By locating this study in Ahmedabad, a city which on the one hand has witnessed recurring violence against its minority Muslims at the instigation of Hindu nationalist organizations, and on the other hand, is increasingly becoming an important local and regional site for articulating the desire to be "global," this paper explores the relationship of urban redevelopment to neoliberalism, Hindu nationalist politics and their intersections. Before taking up an analysis of these relationships, I will outline the broader regional context so as to emphasize the importance of interrogating the intersections of

neoliberalism and majoritarian identity politics in Ahmedabad. And I will follow this with a brief description of the urban redevelopment project examined in the rest of the paper.

A BACKGROUND

The horrific state-sponsored genocide against Muslims in the state of Gujarat in western India in 2002 – which led to the death of over 2000 Muslims, the rape of Muslim women, and the damage or complete destruction of over 100,000 houses and 15,000 business establishments belonging to Muslims (CCT, 2002;) – was soon followed by concerns that the "riots" had affected the image of Gujarat as a safe and investor-friendly destination. Journalists, business analysts and trade associations attempted to quantify the monetary losses incurred by Gujarat's economy as a result of the "riots" (GCCI, 2002). In fact, two months after the violence had started, and even as the violence continued in some parts of Gujarat and thousands languished in Ahmedabad's relief camps with little support from the state, the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCI) organized a peace march through the city of Ahmedabad, inviting even Narendra Modi, the BJP[1] Chief Minister of Gujarat, a Hindu hardliner and the man considered responsible for the state's "ineffectiveness" in controlling the violence. Most Muslims refused to take part in the peace rally because the "killers" were also a part of it (The Tribune, 2002). Such business analyses and initiatives were not therefore a damning criticism of the human costs of the genocide or the state's involvement in it, and most of the business elite remained silent or ambiguous when it came to condemning the state or demanding accountability for what had happened. One of the bold voices from the corporate world was that of the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), which confronted Narendra Modi with questions about the "law and order situation" in the state, igniting tense relations between itself and the Government of Gujarat. (The Economic Times, 2002).

Ever since the genocide, however, and particularly after he was sworn in for a second term as Gujarat's Chief Minister with the BJP's landslide victory in the Gujarat state elections at the end of 2002, Narendra Modi has become increasingly forceful about articulating an aggressive development agenda for Gujarat and portraying himself as a development-oriented leader. Perhaps this explains why in March 2003, just a year after they had questioned him, the CII apologized to Modi for having hurt his sentiments, requesting him to restore the government's partnership with it. Modi, it is reported, responded positively to this request (The Hindu, 2003). Not long after this, in September 2003, the Government of Gujarat organized its first "Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors' Summit." Ever since, two "Vibrant Gujarat" events have been organized every year to promote Gujarat as "a state with a global vision and work culture of a multinational" and to showcase it as a culturally and economically vibrant state (GoG, n.d). Modi's photographs and words are omnipresent on the government's promotional websites. One of these websites describes him as "a man with a difference. Result, not rhetoric, matters to him. A blend of practical wisdom and long-term vision, Shri Narendra Modi has brought about a qualitative change in the state's governance with his new ideas for development and result-oriented approach" (GOG, n.d.).

With the present thus increasingly marked by Modi's aggressive development agenda in Gujarat and a toning down of the BJP's blatant Hindutva rhetoric, might we conclude that the genocide and the Hindutva project of the BJP and its sister organizations[2] was just a hiccup that had unsettled Gujarat's aggressive march towards development for a brief moment? I would argue in the negative. Three years later, in 2005, memories of the genocide continued to create an anxiety in the

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[1] BJP refers to the Bhartiya Janata Party, a political party with overt links to several right-wing Hindu organizations, which it considers its sister organizations.

[2] These sister organizations include the RSS, an organization that promotes Hindu ideology; the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad or World Hindu Council); & the militant youth organization, the Bajrang Dal.

corporate world and shape their discourses in subtle ways, blatant Hindutva rhetoric continued to surface every now and then, and those concerned with social justice persistently drew attention to the continuing repurcussions of the genocide on the social fabric of the state and the lives of its Muslim citizens.[3] However, if the genocide and the Hindutva project have implications for the present, then it is imperative that we understand their relationship to the BJP's aggressive development agenda, and to the development agendas of other social actors in Gujarat. It is this imperative that underlines this paper.

THE RIVERFRONT PROJECT

A few months before the first "Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors' Summit," Narendra Modi, Gujarat's BJP Chief Minister, laid the foundation stone for the Sabarmati River Front Development project in Ahmedabad. However, it was not only Modi and the BJP who were keen to pursue the project. As many scholars have pointed out, the prevailing wisdom in this neoliberal moment is that urban development and property development can be deployed to rejuvenate the local urban economy and integrate the city into the global economy in a successful way. Various studies show that political parties of all political persuasions have increasingly embraced this wisdom (for e.g. Roy, 2003). It is therefore crucial to realize that the secular Congress Party has also enthusiastically supported the riverfront project.[4] Although the riverfront project was initiated in 1997 when the BJP was in power in Ahmedabad's municipal government, the official inauguration of the project took place only in 2003 by which time the BJP had been voted out of power from the city. In 2003, with the Congress Party in power in the municipal government and the BJP in power in the state government, the inauguration of the project was a noteworthy coming together of leaders from both parties. Leaders of both parties are reported to have showered accolades on each other at the inauguration ceremony (TOI, 2003). In fact, in a country where a change in government often leads to the quick abandonment of projects supported by the earlier government, the project is seen as a true achievement in that it has brought both parties together. But this has also meant that there is little true political support for the slum dwellers living on Ahmedabad's riverbanks and who are concerned about their impending displacement under the project.

The first proposal for developing Ahmedabad's riverfront was put forth in the 1960s by Bernard Kohn, a French-American architect practising in Ahmedabad at the time. Although, professionals in the city as well as state and city departments worked on proposals for the riverfront over the next two decades, it was only in 1997 that the idea was taken a real step forward when the Sabarmati River Front Development Corporation Limited (SRFDCL) was formed by the BJP municipal government. The SRFDCL approached the Environmental Planning Collaborative (EPC), an Ahmedabad-based non-profit urban planning and urban development management firm, to prepare the project proposal. Under the EPC, the project grew in size from earlier proposals and it stretched out over a length of 9 kilometers along the river. This is not the place to describe the earlier proposals and contrast them with the EPC proposal. Suffice it to say that the scale of the earlier proposals was smaller; not all of them proposed reclamation of land from the river which would invariably drive up the project cost; and the extent of commercialization of land along the river in the earlier proposals was lesser. The EPC proposal report shows the project as involving the construction of infrastructure like bridges and roads; the reclamation of 162 hectares of land from

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[3] The longer history of Hindu-Muslim violence in Ahmedabad and the long and complex political trajectory that led up to the genocide furthermore discounts any suggestion that the brutal violence of 2002 is of the past and that it would have no or little implications for the present and future.

[4] Although the Congress Party has always officially taken a secular stance in Indian politics, scholars point out that it too has contributed to a communalized (divided on the basis of caste and religion) Indian polity by virtue of the vote-bank it has sought to create among lower castes and Muslims.

the river; the development of river boulevards and promenades; the development of cultural facilities; the allocation of 21% of reclaimed land for private development; the allocation of space for informal markets; and the relocation and rehabilitation of riverbank slums on three sites along the riverfront (EPC & SRFDCL, 1998). This proposal report was summarized in the first brochure on the project (SRFDCL (First)). In 2005, however, a second brochure appeared with no proposal report to accompany it (SRFDCL (Second)). According to this latest brochure, the project has been doubled in scale and now covers a stretch of almost 20 kilometers along the river. The map included in the brochure shows that the added stretch of land has been allotted mainly for elite use and development.

In the remaining paper, I will make three arguments. First, that in Ahmedabad there are tensions in the pursuit of large-scale urban redevelopment projects because of frictions between maintaining local legitimacy and pursuing neoliberal rationalities. Second, that the relationship between neoliberalism and Hindu nationalist politics is an uneasy one as a result of tensions between pursuing wider political legitimacy for the state in order to attract global investment and pursuing blatantly exclusionary projects like Hindutva. And third, that as the class bias of urban redevelopment has collided with the religious bias of Hindu nationalist politics in a city where class and religion do not neatly overlap, the project has given rise to new, albeit fragile, alliances in the struggle for social justice and the right to the city.

LOCAL LEGITIMACY AND NEOLIBERAL RATIONALITIES

In this section I examine the riverfront project with the objective of uncovering the frictions between maintaining local legitimacy and pursuing neoliberal rationalities. Local legitimacy might come from different social groups in the city, and in urban India, the legitimacy of two social groups – the middle class and the urban poor – is important, although the interests of these two groups often come into conflict as "middle-class activism" begins to "champion varieties of NIMBYism" (Rajagopal, 2001). And yet, neoliberal practices such as privatization are not always embraced by India's middle-class, as demonstrated in the middle-class protests against water privatization in Delhi, and their ultimate victory in forcing the government to withdraw its request for a World Bank loan to finance the project (Tehelka, 2005). Indeed, Ahmedabad's municipal government, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), after taking a neoliberal turn in the mid/late-1990s toward a fully market-based system of local government finance (ICLEI, 2002), spent a large amount of money toward crucial water and sewerage projects and to a lesser extent in slum upgrading projects even as it began to explore public-private partnerships for road and park development and beautification. Maintaining and negotiating legitimacy among both the middle classes and the urban poor of the city might thus be considered central to municipal politics and to the way the AMC is run. And yet, the turn to neoliberalism has made it increasingly difficult to maintain this legitimacy, particularly among the urban poor.

For the AMC, the neoliberal turn in its finances also led to the viability of picking up long-dormant ideas like that of the riverfront project. I argue that those associated with the project atempt to build up local legitimacy for the project in particular ways. Project brochures and proposals largely couch the project using local rhetoric. A central rhetoric around the project has been that of giving the river back to the city and it citizens. Its second, most recent, brochure has the words "A Return Gift to Mother Nature" on its cover. At the back of this bochure, the project is explained under the title "A River Front for Everyone." Calling the project "A Gift Long Overdue," the river is described as "abused" by the "fast pace of urban and industrial growth" and the riverfront as "neglected and ignored," marking the project as urgent and inevitable. The two brochures available on the project make no direct reference to any trans-local aspect of the project. In fact, the first

brochure, based on the EPC's 1998 proposal, listed the project objectives under the title: "Major city-level benefits."

This argument that the project would produce a wide variety of "city-level benefits" did not however lead to an unqualified embrace of the project even by the city's middle class, although most of the middle-class seemed indifferent to the details of the project and those who expressed concerns did not do so with any intention to launch a public protest. One architect, in a small seminar in the city in 2005, expressed serious concern about the wisdom of reclaiming so much land from the river and "playing around with nature." One of the directors of SRFDCL mentioned that some residents of an apartment building located on the riverfront were angry that land was being relcaimed in front of their building and that this land would be sold to developers for residential and commercial development, thus blocking their view of the river (interview with Vakil, 2005). A newspaper article, after interviewing some middle-class residents of riverfront apartment buildings reported that they felt discriminated against since the houses of some elite residents living on the riverfront were not going to lose their view of the river (TOI, 2005). A couple of architects, including those associated with earlier proposals for the project, expressed disapproval of the 1998 proposal, saying that it commercialized a portion of the riverfront land and it allotted a portion of very valuable land to the construction of roads (interview with Shah, 2005).

But for Bimal Patel, the head architect-planner at EPC, the proposal was not simply another conceptual plan for the riverfront as the earlier proposals had been. He was interested in realizing the project and he argues that there was indeed little possibility of the project materializing if all aspects, particularly cost and financing, were not adequately addressed in the proposal (interview with Patel, 2005). In response to criticism that he had commercialized the project by marking 21% of the reclaimed land for private development in order to raise finances for the project, he argues:

> "All the earlier proposals did not take the financing component of the project seriously. We knew that we had to seriously think about the financing if we wanted the project to be viable. . . . The days of *sarkar paisa aapshe* [literally, "government will give the money" and specifically referring to an attitude of dependency on the government] are gone. We had to find a pragmatic way of financing the project. . . . I need to commercialize some of the land to make the project self-financing. But if I could, I would not have done so. I wish I could have left all the land as open recreational space. I wish I could make Golden Gate Park here. I have seen what spaces like that can do for the city. But I cannot do that here." (interview with Patel, 2005)

For Patel, the preparation of the proposal was also a negotiation between the interests of different social groups. For him, the EPC proposal represents the "middle-path" wherein everyone is given space in the project – from the developers to middle-class residents to the riverbank slum dwellers. It is, in fact, interesting to note that the resettlement and rehabilitation of riverbank slum dwellers is presented as one of the objectives of the project, with the argument that their rehabilitation on "elevated and serviced land" will "eliminate the risk of flooding for many poor communities and will improve their economic well-being" (SRFDCL (First)). However, as I have shown above with the middle-classes, such stated objectives did not completely legitimize the project, in this case, for many NGOs and social activists. Some social activists opposed the project because, based on earlier experiences, they were skeptical that resettlement and rehabilitation would be carried out in a just manner (interview with Dhruv, 2005). Other NGOs, taking into account unsuccessful experiences in India at opposing the government altogther, pushed for fair resettlement by encouraging and supporting slum communities on the riverbanks to mobilize and demand for fair resettlement (interview with Lakdawala, 2005). And yet other NGOs waited and watched, hopeful that the project would deliver its promises to the slum dwellers because they believed that if

resettlement and rehabilitation were carried out properly, it would indeed benefit the slum dwellers who live in miserable housing conditions on a riverbank prone to floods (interview with Chatterjee, 2005). However, if architects-planners tried to negotiate a middle-path through a particular balance of land-use, the SRFDCL and the Government of Gujarat in 2004-05 succeeded in tipping the balance clearly in the favor of the elite by doubling the scale of the project and planning the land use of the added stretch entirely for elite use and development. Global desires among the middle-class and neoliberal agendas are increasingly becoming the mainstay of the project. Discursive and visual representations around the project – emanating from the state and elite civil society institutions – as well as the project's expansion shed light on these aspects.

In December 2005, one of the city's leading English-language newspapers *The Times of India* printed a full single-page on the riverfront project. The caption of the article read "Ahmedabad will Rub Shoulders with London, New York, Sydney, Singapore." Below the name of each of these four cities was a photograph of the city as viewed from its waterfront. The article went on to proclaim:

> "Mesopotamia, Egypt, Harappa. Great civilisations, cradled by great rivers – the Tigris and the Euphrates, the Nile, the Indus. Closer home it has inspried the movement for peace – the satyagraha [referring to Gandhi's non-violent resistance movement]. Now, as the 21st century unfolds, the Sabarmati is stirring again, making Ahmedabad take one giant leap to modernity. TOI [The Times of India] traces the city's growth as it once again falls back on the river, creating the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project."

The article thus represented the project as ushering Ahmedabad onto the global stage and taking a giant leap to modernity. It went on to introduce its readers to the new bridges, gardens and riverside walkways that would be built, the river cruises and floating restaurant that had been proposed, and the realty boom that would be triggered once the SRFDCL started selling land to developers for building the city's tallest buildings on the riverfront. The article made no reference to the proposed slum resettlement and rehablitation or the informal markets. In its annual Property Show in Ahmedabad, the Gujarat Institute of Housing and Estate Developers (GIHED), a real-estate developers' forum, exhibited its desires around the project by commissioning a sketch of the riverfront as it would look once the project was completed. The sketch showed a radiantly sky-blue river with people partaking in water-sport activities and colorful restaurants and outdoor cafes along its grassy banks. The caption read: "The river banks of Sabarmati as rich as the banks of Switzerland. Say Hello to the Sabarmati River Front Development." Elite sections of Ahmedabad's civil society had begun to dream about the project through the lenses of other cities, and of privatized public spaces to which undesirable social groups would have no access. For the Government of Gujarat, the project has become a way of attracting foreign investment into the state. The project is included in the list of "project proposals" on the government's promotional website of "Vibrant Gujarat." The website tells readers: "Considering these project profiles along with the nature and strength of Gujarat's economy, will provide prospective investors with unlimited investment opportunities" (GOG, 2005). During the Vibrant Gujarat event in January 2005, the SRFDCL & AMC signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Delamore & Owl Group of Companies, a multinational investment management company, to raise up to $88 million for financing the project (IndiaTimes, 2005).

The expansion of the project sometime in 2004-05 – as shown in the second and most recent brochure prepared by SRFDCL – is a clear step in pursuing a neoliberal rationality. The expansion involves land reclamation from the river along a further stretch of the river, most of which is located in villages adjoining Ahmedabad along the river. Unlike the first (urban) stretch where 31% of the land is marked as open public space, little land in the added peri-urban stretch has been

allotted for such open public space. The map included in the second brochure shows that land reclaimed in the added peri-urban stretch will be developed as "commercial areas," "residential areas," "a convention center," "space for water sports," "a museum park" and "a residential complex for NRGs [Non-Resident Gujaratis]." The areas marked as green are few and far inbetween and there are no areas marked for the use of lower classes and the urban poor. A considerable part of this peri-urban reclaimed land is also colored grey and it is not clear what land uses are planned for these grey areas. While 21% of the reclaimed land in the first (urban) stretch will be privatized, 53% of the reclaimed land in the added peri-urban stretch will be privatized (calculated from GOG, 2005). The doubling of the scale of the riverfront project is also largely responsible for the increase in the cost of the project from the initial $80 million to $262 million – a threefold increase (SRFDCL & EPC, 1998; GoG, 2005). However, no cut-down of this new total cost has been publicly disclosed, and the planners for this portion of the project also remain undisclosed.

The forging of a broad-based local legitimacy, as attempted through the "middle-path" of the architects-planners of EPC, has begun to come under pressure particularly over the past two years, with the expanson of the project, the non-transparency of the SRFDCL and AMC with regard to slum resettlement, and the aggressive attempt to use the project to attract global investment and tourism into Ahmedabad and Gujarat. Although middle-class consent to the project is increasingly produced – via civil society institutions like the media and real-estate forums discussed above – by appealing to their desires to see Ahmedabad on a global stage, the exclusion of the urban poor from information and participation, as I will discuss later in this paper, has begun to create frictions between maintaining local legitimacy and pursuing neoliberal rationalities.

HINDU NATIONALIST POLITICS AND THE PURSUIT OF GLOBAL INVESTMENT

In this section, I examine the riverfront project with the objective of uncovering the tensions that it creates between pursuing wider political legitimacy for the state in order to attract investment and pursuing blatantly exclusionary projects like Hindutva. In recent years, scholars have pointed out that neoliberalism has not been antithetical to anti-democratic regimes and ethnic/religious fundamentalisms, and in fact the corporate world has often formed cosy alliances with such regimes (Watts, 1997; Mitchell, 2002). To what extent this is true in the context of Ahmedabad/Gujarat is a queston that is beyond the scope of this paper. However, as I have already argued, anxieties produced in the corporate sector around the Gujarat genocide were not necessarily a critique of the human costs of the genocide or the state's involvement in it. What these anxieties make clear is that such violence must not create a situation wherein investors feel that their investments in the city/state are threatened. One might therefore argue that there can be an alliance in so far as capitalist accummulation is itself not threatened. However, in Gujarat, in the immediate aftermath of the genocide, it was perceieved as threatening in this respect.

The Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry made an analysis of the losses to trade and industry during the worst four days of violence (Rs. 109 billion or US$ 2,430 million) and they made a presentation of their analysis to the BJP Prime Minister of India, requesting that it was imperative for Gujarat's economy that peace be restored in the state (GCCI, 2002). It was crucial then for the BJP-led government in Gujarat to tone down its Hindutva rhetoric and restore the confidence of investors in the state. The "Vibrant Gujarat" event organized in September 2003 was reported by the print media as an aggressive attempt to rebuild the state's image as a safe investment destination (Deccan Herald, 2003; Business World, 2003). In the follow-up "Vibrant Gujarat" event in 2004, the BJP Prime Minister of India who flew down for the inauguration, apologized to the Muslims of the state, and urged that everyone extinguish the flame of hate forever (The Telegraph, 2004). Thus, although the "Vibrant Gujarat" events often draw in subtle

ways upon a Hindu cultural idiom, they are wholly devoid of violent Hindutva rhetoric and in that sense attempt to portray Gujarat's development project as secular and all-inclusive. The riverfront project's inclusion in the "Vibrant Gujarat" portfolio of proposals and the showcasing of the project on a global stage meant that it too must be part of this secular development project. And yet, this "secular" representation is incapable of acknowleging the violence experienced by many of the riverbank slum dwellers during the 2002 genocide, and the divided social realities in the city.

By divided realities I refer to the fact that spatial segregation between Hindus and Muslims in Ahmedabad is almost complete. However, many of the riverbank slum settlements, particularly on the eastern edge of the river, are mixed localities, inhabited by both Hindu and Muslim families. As NGOs have pointed out in discussions with me, these are probably among the few pockets in the city in which the two communities live adjacent to each other. A survey in 1998-99 in the riverfront slums puts the percentage of Hindu households in these slums at 73% and the percentage of Muslim households at 26% (SAMVAD, 1998-99). Although the statistics do not indicate the spatial distribution of the two communities within the slums, a walk through these slum localities show how mixed many of them are. Although the two communities within each slum often live in separate lanes, members of the two communities have often come together to form community-based organizations in their locality. A question that emerges then is whether the Hindu and Muslim families of these riverbank slums will be resettled in mixed localities as many of them are living today, or whether they will be resettled in separate localities, increasing the segregation of the two communities in the city and the ghettoization of Muslims. During one of my interviews with a Muslim slum resident and community leader, he told me that a few years ago, there had been rumors that the Hindus and Muslims of the slums would be resettled in different locations. As one of the leaders in the grassroots organization resisting the project, he actively argues for Hindu-Muslim unity among the riverbank slum dwellers if they are to successfully fight for their housing rights. And yet, the fear of future Hindu-Muslim violence in the city and the fact that his house was among the 200+ Muslim houses burnt down or severely damaged on the riverbank slums during the 2002 genocide (IRCG, 2004; Begi, 2005), explains why he went on to remark that this seemed like a good proposal to him. The problem however is that this issue has simply not been addressed publicly by the state or the architects-planners, even though the city's divided social realities mean that whichever step is taken will have crucial impacts for the city's overall social fabric.

Furthermore, one of the persons associated with the project told me that in one of their meetings, a BJP politician had complained: "Do we have to give resettlement to the M people?" This person, who for obvious reasons did not want to be named here, said that the BJP politician was referring to Muslims and that his blood boils whenever he hears such statements. The secular commitment of some of those associated with the project is quite at odds with the Hindu nationalist desires of the BJP, which politically controls the project. But, the BJP has not yet attempted to pursue its Hindu nationalist desires through the project in blatant ways. It remains to be seen whether over the implementation of the project, the BJP is able to pursue its exclusionary politics in blatant or more informal ways. For example, will the complete religious segregation in housing spaces and the discrimination against Muslims in the housing market allow members of this community to buy into the new elite residential developments proposed on the riverfront? Will the violence and segregation created by Hindu nationalist politics in the city recogfigure neoliberalism in that only a certain religious group – i.e. Hindus – will be able to participate in the ownership and development of these new elite spaces in the heart of the city?

THE POLITICS OF GRASSROOTS PROTEST: A CHALLENGE TO HINDUTVA?

In this section, I examine the politics of grassroots protest around the project. I argue that as the class bias of urban redevelopment has collided with the religious bias of Hindu nationalist politics

in a city where class and religion do not neatly overlap, the project has given rise to new, albeit fragile, alliances in the struggle for social justice and the right to the city. The grassroots protest has the potential to impact the project because there are a large number of families living in the riverbank slums. Although the figures regarding the exact number of famlies wildly vary between 10,000 to 30,000 – a population of 50,000 to 150,000 – the former being the official figure (SRFDCL & EPC, 1998) and the latter being the estimate put forth by the slum dwellers themselves (PIL, 2005), this is nonetheless a relatively large population, which if mobilized can pressure the government to listen to their demands.

The impulse for protest has emerged due to a number of reasons besides that fact that NGOs are skeptical about the resettlement being carried out in a fair manner. Although the project proposal states that only 4,400 of the 10,000 families will be affected by the project (SRFDCL & EPC, 1998), the second project brochure mentions that it will build housing for 7,000 slum dwellers, and the AMC in its annual diary for 2005 mentions that it will rehabilitate 14,500 slum families under the project. These continuously varying figures, in which no indication is given as to which families will be affected and which will not, have created an immense feeling of vulnerability among the slum dwellers, with speculations about whether their homes will be demolished within 2 months or 2 years or more. Rumors and informal pronouncements by politicians regarding a cut-off date that would determine eligibility have further created confusion. For example, a cut-off date of 1995 would mean that families who had moved into the slum after 1995 would not be considered eligible for resettlement. The official cut-off date pertaining to slums in the city as a whole is 1976! The complete lack of official and detailed information on the resettlement sites and the rehabilitation package, despite huge protest rallies and a Public Interest Litigation, has led to both helplessness among slum dwellers and the will to step up their protest.

The helplessness of the slum dwellers has also been accompanied by a sense of betrayal by political leaders since both political parties (the Congress and the BJP) have officially joined hands around the project. However, since both parties have vote-banks in the riverbank slums, some party leaders have attempted to respond to the concerns of slum dwellers. In 2004, some Congress leaders and Congress party workers founded the "Ahmedabad Shaher Ane Riverfront Jhupaddpatti Samiti," an organization that would fight for the rights of slum dwellers in the city and on the riverbank. Whether the founding of this organization was a result of their empathy towards the slum dwellers or as an attempt to acquire political legitimacy for themselves, or a combination of both, is difficult to say. But since the organization has not held regular meetings and has not attempted to include the slum dwellers as leaders within the organization, many of the riverbank slum dwellers consider this as simply another political ploy to get their support in the form of votes. If members of the Congress Party have been active in trying to mobilize the riverfront slum dwellers, members of the BJP have not been passive either. However, BJP leaders have not attempted to mobilize the slum dwellers as a collective body that might ask for its rights. Rather, they have taken an approach of pacifying the slum dwellers – an entirely Hindu constituency – with promises that they would be taken care of, and that they must not be led astray by the Congress Party or by NGOs. Some BJP supporters living in the riverbank slums show faith in the party and its concern for them. But there are also some who have a pragmatic understanding of politics. One of them, a member of the local RSS,[5] believes that the BJP is after all involved in *raajniti* [politics], and that its leaders do not really care about the poor. He has therefore decided to join the grassroots organization which argues that Hindus and Muslims living on the riverbanks must come together in their struggle against the riverfront project.

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[5] RSS stands for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a right-wing Hindu organization.

This grassroots organization – comprised of a network of community-based organizations (CBOs) located in the riverbank slums – calls itself the Sabarmati Nagrik Adhikar Manch (SNAM) (translated as: Sabarmati Citizens' Rights Form). It has the moral, and sometimes financial, support of some NGOs in the city. With the support of these NGOs the SNAM filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) through a well-known activist lawyer of the city. Disillusioned by the politicial parties for whom they traditionally vote, the leaders of these CBOs have joined hands, arguing in their meetings that the slum dwellers must shun all political parties. Beginning in 2004, the SNAM began to regularly organize meetings in different slums along the riverbank to mobilize support from within. They argue that if they can mobilize even 10,000 people, it will create immense pressure on the municipal government. Their arguments range from demanding information about rehabilitation to challenging the idea that city beautification requires the disappearance of the urban poor. In one of their meetings, one of their leaders argued that if the AMC helped them monetarily and gave them proper services in their existing slums, the riverfront would be beautified automatically. But one argument that is reiterated in each and every one of these meetings by the leaders of the SNAM is that the slum dwellers must unite across religious lines in this struggle for their housing rights. Two of the SNAM leaders have been particularly important for the SNAM's message on Hindu-Muslim harmony. The two leaders, one of them a Hindu and the other Muslim, are members of a community-based organization in their slum. Presently, it is the Hindu leader who is the President of this community-based organization. The organization is however founded on the premise that the President will be changed every two years and he should alternate between a Hindu leader and a Muslim leader. The importance of their slum and these leaders is often emphasized at the SNAM meetings by pointing out that the organization was recognized by international media and even the Congress Party for the way in which it maintained peace amongst its Hindu and Muslim residents during the Gujarat genocide.

Their call for Hindu-Muslim unity has therefore not been empty rhetoric. Leaders have consciously made an attempt to reach out to leaders from the other community to make the struggle broad-based and effective. Early on in the formation of the SNAM, two of the Muslim leaders visited a riverbank slum known to be a strong BJP constituency. They had been told that as Muslims they would be harrassed by residents of the slum. In reality, this had not happened. They had come across the President of the slum's community-based organization, who had been drunk at the time. This man had however welcomed them and had guided them to talk to one of the younger members of his organization. Although this younger man was an active member of the area's RSS branch, he too had welcomed them and after having heard them out, had decided to join the SNAM himself and convince his neighbors to do the same. Perhaps one reason for the SNAM's rejection of all political parties has also been a way of dealing with tensions between its members whose political allegiances so obviously lie on different sides. But this emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity does not mean that there have been no tensions between the leaders around their religious identities. One tense moment which emerged and since then has been successfully negotiated was around the question of who – that is, members of which comunity – should be made President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, etc of the SNAM. I argue that the SNAM has articulated a challenge to Hindutva's dividing ideology although to what extent it will continue to do so remains to be seen. The success of this challenge will also determine the extent to which slum dwellers are able to forget their internal social and political differences and mobilize as a group with a shared interest in fighting for the spaces they inhabit.

CONCLUSION

By interrogating the discourses and practices that have constituted the multiple visions for and claims to the spaces marked for redevelopment under the project, the anxious nature of their intersections, and the ways in which various actors attempt to negotiate the project, I have

attempted to shed light on the uneasy intersections of neoliberal rationalities, political legitimacy and Hindu nationalist politics. I have argued that the project, although controversial in several ways from the beginning, has steered further and further toward a neoliberal rationality, and the challenges that this will pose to the legitimacy of the project and the municipal government have perhaps only begun to unfold. I have also argued that the riverfront project cannot be seen as part of the BJP's Hindutva project in any simplistic way since it is also enthusiastically supported by the secular Congress Party. Rather, to showcase it on a global stage and by deploying it to attract investment into the city/state, it has been imperative to represent the project as a secular development project. But in doing so, this simply silences the violent histories of the past and the divided social realities of the present. This silencing, I have argued, might only serve to reproduce divided spaces in a city which already has few spaces shared by both Hindus and Muslims. Finally, I have also argued that the project has given rise to new alliances in the struggle for the right to the city and that these new alliances pose powerful, though fragile, challenges to Hindutva's dividing ideology. The mobilization of slum dwellers under the SNAM, and its emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity, indicates that the right to shelter and housing can be an important arena of protest and challenge to Hindu nationalist politics. However, this arena can exist only so long as the two communities share spaces in the city. The increasing spatial segregation of the two communities in Ahmedabad threatens to make this arena disappear as well.

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