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### The (failed) production of Hindu nationalized space in Ahmedabad, Gujarat

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## The (failed) production of Hindu nationalized space in Ahmedabad, Gujarat

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This article addresses the attempt by India's most extensive Hindu nationalist organization, the RSS, and its women's wing, the Samiti, to Hindu nationalize the city of Ahmedabad, Gujarat. It makes two inter-related arguments. It argues that notwithstanding long-term, intense Hindu nationalist efforts to Hindu nationalize the city space and its subjects, the project has been and remains a failure. The heterogeneity of the city-space and its subjects infinitely exceeds such homogenizing moves. It also suggests that while Hindu nationalists claim that religious difference is key, gender and sexuality are inseparably crucial to their constructions, violations and eliminations of subjects, architectural structures and territorialities across scale. In a first section this article addresses the RSS's and Samiti's grids of intelligibility: their categories (especially of space, gender, sexuality and subjects), logics and prescriptions for conduct. A second section focuses on RSS and Samiti practices to transform the city, envisaging these in relation to the organizations' grids of intelligibility. They include: daily paramilitary training, periodic economic boycotts against Muslims and exceptional massive anti-Muslim violence including genocidal pogroms. The article concludes with remarks about the links between Hindu nationalist discourse and practice, the failures of Hindu nationalization, and resistant agentic and non-agentic counter-transformations of the city. The author draws from three types of primary sources: RSS and Samiti publications; the publications of groups against Hindu nationalism; and notes from multiple periods of fieldwork in Ahmedabad from 1987 to 2008.

**Keywords:** Hindu nationalism; city-space; Ahmedabad; religious–political conflict; sexuality

'All meaningful and lasting change starts first in your imagination and then works its way out. Imagination is more important than knowledge.' (RSS website: <http://www.rss.org>)

The above quote, posted on the website of India's most extensive Hindu nationalist organization, the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (National Self Service Organization or RSS), is by Albert Einstein.<sup>1</sup> The quote's reference to the supreme place of the imagination in the process of transformation, its debasement of accumulated knowledge, and its reliance on the authority of the west (here western science via Einstein), provide a brief indication of the range of categories, drawn from distinct grids of intelligibility, that characterize Hindu nationalism, including those imposed through colonialism.

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In what follows I address imaginings, grids of intelligibility, categories, logics, agentic technologies, and non-agentic qualities and effects, of the RSS and its separate women's wing, the *Rashtra Sevika Samiti* (National Service Group or Samiti), that are central to the organizations' attempts to produce the city-space as Hindu nationalized space, but that are also key to resistance to the Hindu nationalist project. I do so by engaging with these processes and their failures in one specific Indian city, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, from the mid-1980s to today.

Throughout, I sustain two inter-related arguments. The first is this: notwithstanding intensive efforts by Hindu nationalists to Hindu nationalize the city-space and its subjects, across all dimensions this project has failed.<sup>2</sup> This contention moves against the grain of current, popular media representations of Ahmedabad as a completely polarized city where Hindu nationalists have triumphed and all Muslim residents uniformly live in terror. Yet, as we will see throughout, the city and its subjects are extremely heterogeneous, complicated formations comprised of physical, social, symbolic and memory-saturated dimensions. Ahmedabad's religiously pluralist genealogy is inscribed in its architecture and urban layout (see below). Its residents are not only Hindus and Muslims but also Jains, Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs, etc. Its Hindus, too, are internally diverse, encompassing a wide range of castes and various classes. Importantly, even as they are positioned inside the state, Hindu nationalist politicians have not been able to fully Hindu nationalize any of the many dimensions of Ahmedabad. Second, I maintain throughout that while Hindu nationalists claim that religious difference is the privileged key to their project, in fact gender and sexuality are completely inseparable to their constructions, violations, transformations and eliminations of religiously marked subjects, bodies, architectural structures and other physical, social and symbolic territorialities. Gender, sexuality and the racialization of religion also operate in fusion in the situated interpellations, repetitions, reversals and transformations that are implicated in the (failed) production of Hindu nationalist space.

The primary materials for this study include textual and visual materials, and data from my fieldwork and interviews. I make use of RSS and Samiti publications in English and Hindi from the earliest in 1939 to today (collections of essays, game manuals, historiographies, newspaper articles, pamphlets, short stories), internet sites and postings, posters, maps and illustrated comic books. My field work in Ahmedabad that is relevant for the present purposes was spread out at intervals ranging from one week to six months, sometimes annually and sometimes bi-annually, from 1987 to 2008. At each fieldwork interval I visited RSS and Samiti *shakhas* (neighborhood cells), participated in meetings and spent time in the homes of members.<sup>3</sup> I also engaged in non-directive interviews collectively and individually with fifteen RSS men and eight Samiti women, across a spectrum of ages and positions in the organizations. From among these I selected three RSS members and three Samiti members for 12 in-depth, non-directive interviews each, during the period 1987 to 1992. The interviews took place in the homes of interviewees and generally lasted over an hour and a half. From 1987 to 2008 I also interviewed members of two women's groups against Hindu nationalism in Ahmedabad: Chingari (Spark) and Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA or service). In June 2008, I carried out three days of collective non-directive interviews with residents of the Naroda Patiya relief camp within the camp itself, which had been constructed following the 2002 Hindu nationalist anti-Muslim pogroms to provide safety for those whose homes and livelihoods were destroyed in the violence.

The RSS is somewhat known outside of India for its implication in violent events. It first received transnational press attention when, in 1948, Nathuram Godse, a former RSS

*pracharak* ('preacher' or full-time worker) assassinated Mahatma Gandhi. In 1980, the RSS established the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, hereafter BJP) which, only a few months after its election in 1998, set off nuclear bomb tests without provocation in a show of hetero-normative masculine bravado. Significantly, Bal Thackeray, the leader of yet another Hindu right-wing organization, the related Hindu Shiv Sena (Hindu Army of the God Shiva or HSS), summed up that action thus: 'with these tests we have shown the world that we are not eunuchs'.<sup>4</sup> Throughout, it should become clear that Hindu nationalist imaginings, productions and conduct, are inseparable from the gendered and sexed relations of power in which they are constituted and which they reproduce in various forms.

### **Paradoxes: Ahmedabad, city-space and prior analytics**

But first, I want to note that to think about Hindu nationalist productions of Ahmedabad is to enter a series of paradoxes. The first concerns the wider issue of Ahmedabad's more generalized representation beyond Hindu nationalism. The city's public image, especially within India, has dramatically changed quite recently. From the early twentieth century until the 1980s Ahmedabad was associated with religious pluralism and anti-colonialism through the work of Mahatma Gandhi who was based there. Gandhi remains inscribed in the city-space through street names (such as Ashram Road named after his Sabarmati Ashram, Gandhi Road and Mahatma Gandhi Expressway), a bridge name (Gandhi Bridge), building names (such as Mahatma Gandhi Labour Institute, Gandhi Institute of Fashion and Textile and the Gujarat Vidyapith, a library that Mahatma Gandhi founded), his famous statue in public spaces, numerous districts, neighborhoods and housing societies (such as Bapunagar, Gandhi Bagh and Mahatma Gandhi Colony), and even a market (Mahatma Gandhi Shopping Centre). Additionally, in honor of Mahatma Gandhi alcohol remains banned throughout Gujarat, including in Ahmedabad. (It is possible to buy alcohol at the high end hotels frequented by wealthy tourists, thus making alcohol consumption a class privilege). Notwithstanding Gandhi's continued, and even perhaps increasing, presence in Ahmedabad's city-scape as it expands, since the highly publicized anti-Muslim pogroms of 2002, Ahmedabad circulates in India and often transnationally as a trope for right-wing religious-political violence in a mode that operates to partially displace the city's earlier representation.

A second paradox concerns the analytical object 'city-space'. In prior approaches to Hindu nationalism, whether primordialist, constructivist, structuralist or poststructuralist, and regardless of the register of focus – such as the political in Jaffrelot (1993), the public cultural in Hansen (1999), the social in Sarkar and Butalia (1996) or the anthropological in Chatterjee and Mehta (2007) – the main scales for analysis have been the national, the regional or the very local (such as a neighborhood), but rarely the city-space. A significant exception to this is the study of the riot situation, which may seem logical for, as Gold (1993) remarks, the majority of Hindu–Muslim riots take place in urban space. Yet, I will suggest, the city is central to Hindu nationalism beyond the violent events produced there. Hindu nationalism was created in and operates mainly in urban sites. Its discourses, daily practices and exceptional events alike are implicated in the production and transformation of urban space.

Farther, Hindu nationalist organizations conceptualize space either simply as a passive backdrop to Hindu nationalist agents (as *abstract* space), as in the case of RSS maps of the Hindu nation or as a spatial structure that is relative to these agents' actions (as *relative* space) as in the case of the relationship between Hindu nationalist citizen-subjects and the

nation-space (see below). These same presuppositions about space are inadvertently reproduced in the bulk of scholarship on Hindu nationalism. In both cases space makes its appearance in essentialist terms (Smith 1984; Massey 1994, 1999; Gibson-Graham 1996). In what follows I draw on theoretical de-naturalizations of both space and subjects (Lefebvre 1991; Thrift 1996; Rose 1999; Smith 1992) that provide an opening for thinking about Hindu nationalist productions and transformations of city-space and their failures.

A third paradox I will mention concerns scholarly approaches to Indian subjects of religious politics and Indian space. Any discussion of these must detach itself from two colonial assumptions. The first is the notion of 'Eastern' subjects as always already figures of 'fanaticism', 'oriental despotism', 'irrationalism' (King 1999), 'backwardness' (Fabian 1983) and as sexually out of control (McClintock 1995). The second is the idea of the 'East' as a geo-political entity (Said 1978) endowed with mystical richness (King 1999, 147). Perhaps we can disable such constructions by: rendering explicit colonialism's epistemological violence (Spivak 1988, 1990, 1999) in the formation of Hindu nationalist subjects and of Ahmedabad; refusing to make Hindu nationalism alone bear the burden of irrationality, violence and sexuality; deconstructing the binaries in which this burden is based (rationality/irrationality, peace/violence, normative sexuality/hyper-sexuality); and finally accounting for Hindu nationalism's coeval placement in a global context of colonial to postcolonial relations of power (Fabian 1983; Shohat 2002; Alexander 2006).

In what follows I will first briefly contextualize the RSS, the Samiti and Ahmedabad. I will then engage with the RSS and Samiti grids of intelligibility via the categories of subjects, objects and conduct they produce. Next, I will address some RSS and Samiti practices, enactments and events, before arriving at some concluding remarks.

### **RSS, Samiti and/in Ahmedabad**

The RSS and Samiti are right-wing, religious-political, paramilitary organizations.<sup>5</sup> They must be distinguished from two other different but related formations: Indian nationalism and Hindu religious groups. Briefly stated, Indian nationalism envisages Indian subjects of all religions as integral to the citizen-body of the Indian nation-state (Kothari 1986). In contrast, Hindu nationalists desire a Hindu-only nation-state and work to eradicate all Indian minorities, especially Muslims. Hindu nationalists do not practice any one particular form of Hinduism, but do make political use of selected upper caste Hindu elements (divinities, principles). Individual Hindu nationalists' religious affiliations vary immensely; they belong to a range of sects. Some are deeply engaged in their faith, some are mildly engaged and some are not engaged at all (Jaffrelot 1993; Bacchetta 2004). Ultimately, Hindu nationalism is a form of identity politics (Thapar 1999) with a distinct anti-other political project. Importantly, some of the most energetic opposition to Hindu nationalism is from deeply religious Hindus who resent the deployment of their religion for anti-other ends (Bacchetta 2001a).

The RSS was founded in 1925 in the city of Nagpur, Maharashtra, as a neighborhood-based paramilitary group (Andersen and Damle 1987). It then spread in urban sites across the state, and finally across north and central India (Jaffrelot 1993). Today it has 2.5 million core members in India and branches among diasporic Hindus in 40 countries (Seshadri 1988). The RSS founded about 200 affiliated organizations that together comprise the *sangh parivar* ('RSS family' or network of affiliates).<sup>6</sup> The 'family organizations' include: workers unions; issue oriented groups; and identity groups such as for women and lower castes.

The Samiti, established in the nearby city of Wardha, Maharashtra, was the RSS's first affiliate. The RSS supported the Samiti's creation because it feared losing Hindu women to adversaries: the Indian Women's Movement (IWM); the Congress Party; the Communist Party of India; and the Labor Party (Kumar 1993, 1995; Gandhi and Shah 1991; Jayawardena 1986, 106). The Samiti is run by women and operates separately from the RSS (National Women's Conference, Northern Region 1993). The RSS and Samiti are supposed to be 'just like parallel lines which go in the same direction, but never meet, maintaining a specified distance between them' (Samiti 1988, 14). The Samiti has its own version of Hindu nationalism that reflects 'women's world view, her nature, her life ideals which in Bharat (India) is quite different than that of men' (Samiti 1988, 15). To produce its thought, the Samiti drew from Hindu religious and Indian historical sources beyond the RSS, such as the goddess-centered *Devi Mahatmyam* (Glory to the Goddess), dated 400–500 CE, and interpreted some shared sources, such as the *Ramayana*, differently.<sup>7</sup> Today the Samiti has 1.5 million members, as well as branches in the diaspora.

RSS and Samiti members alike are primarily from upper caste, upper middle and middle class milieus (Jaffrelot 1993, 226). Though only roughly 30% of India's population of 1.12 billion currently resides in urban space, and this percentage was lower at the founding of both organizations, the city-space has always been the primary site of their activities.

### *Ahmedabad and Hindu nationalism*

The city of Ahmedabad is an extremely complex, multi-layered space formed through multiple migrations, political regimes, moments of industrialization, expansions, social movements, disasters and recoveries. Located on the banks of the Sabarmati river, Ahmedabad is Gujarat's largest city with a population of 4.6 million (AMC et al. undated: 20). Of this Figure 84.62% is Hindu, 11.4% Muslim, 2.92% Jain, 0.72% Christian, and there is also a small number of Sikhs (11,635), Buddhists (2411), Parsis (approximately 2000) and Jews (300) (2001 Census). Ahmedabad was Gujarat's capital from 1960 to 1970 and is India's seventh largest city. It is also one of the country's most urbanized, economically intense and media and communications saturated sites, and has the largest sector of castes involved in commerce in India (Sheth 1998, 12). Since the 1970s Ahmedabad's Muslim population has entered the electoral political process, while the city's lower classes have expanded due to rural exodus (Sheth 1998, 84).

Ahmedabad was founded in 1411 as the capital of the Sultanate of Gujarat by Sultan Ahmed Shah who gave the city its name. He married a Hindu princess, appointed Hindus to the highest levels of political office, and oversaw the development of architecture with mixed Hindu and Muslim elements. Hindu nationalists wish to change Ahmedabad's name to Karnavati, after an upper caste Hindu king who, in the pre-Muslim period, defeated local 'tribal' leaders. This is a move not only to erase Islam, but also, implicitly, to foreground upper caste Hindu authority.

Under British colonial rule Ahmedabad became a military and commercial center. The British East India Company occupied Ahmedabad in 1818, established a military base there in 1824 and formed a municipal government in 1858. Long known for its artisan work in textiles, under colonialism textile production was industrialized and expanded, drawing labor migration from outlying rural areas. Ahmedabad soon became known through reference to the colonizer's home space as the Manchester of the East. Following India's independence in 1947, Ahmedabad continued to expand its textile industry, and is currently home to heavy metal and chemical industries.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Ahmedabad was a focal point for the Indian nationalist movement, labor movements (especially of textile workers and teachers) and civil rights campaigns. Mahatma Gandhi created two *ashrams* (Sanskrit: hermitage. Today: a locus of religious and cultural activity or instruction) there, in 1915 and 1917. In 1930, he launched his historic Salt March and in 1942 the Quit India movement from his Satyagraha Ashram.

Residential space in Ahmedabad has long been deeply segregated along the lines of the Sabarmati river which flows through the city's center. The eastern bank is home to the heavily populated old city, which is organized into *pols* (medium sized units with narrow, winding alleys and a gate at the entrance in the densely populated area), thickly peopled bazaars and many sites of worship.<sup>8</sup> The east has long been home to lower class Muslims, and lower caste Hindus and Dalits ('untouchables'). Since 2002 Hindus have been moving out of the area, thus provoking the beginnings of religious segregation (AMC et al. undated). The eastern bank also includes other, newer low income residential areas that have accommodated an influx of population since the 1980s, and both large and small industries. The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC et al. undated, 70–73) estimates that in 2001, 25.11% of the city's population lived in slums on 8% of the city's land, mainly in the east, while another million people lived in slum-like conditions in the eastern *chawls*.

In contrast, the western bank of Ahmedabad, formed during the colonial period after the construction of new bridges across the river, consists of spacious, well planned neighborhoods, educational institutions, shopping centers and cultural centers. It also houses the headquarters of industries (chemical and engineering). The west is predominantly inhabited by elite middle-to-upper classes of all religions and upper caste Hindus. But, it also includes the segregated Muslim enclave Juhapuri with a current estimated population of between 200,000 and 400,000. Juhapuri expanded greatly after violence in 1992–1993 and in 2002 provoked Muslim displacement from the east bank. Despite its proximity to elite neighborhoods Juhapuri has been neglected by the city and by commerce; for example it does not have a single bank.

The RSS established itself in Ahmedabad soon after its founding. Its *pracharaks* (preachers or full-time organizers) set up *shakhas* in the elite Hindu neighborhoods of the west bank. They were particularly successful in neighborhoods inhabited by elite Hindu migrants from Maharashtra. After 1936, the Samiti created cells in the same areas. These were followed, after 1964, by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, World Hindu Council, a RSS 'family organization') and in 1968 the Hindu Dharma Raksha Committee (Committee to Defend Hinduism) (Shah 1999, 246). In the 1970s, Hindu nationalists worked against corruption and price increases, and against Emergency repression directed by Congress leader Indira Gandhi, expanding their base (Shah 1999). They also tried to unite various Hindu sects and to organize among the lower castes (Shah 1999, 251–252) to eventually establish a wider electoral base. Indeed, after 1980 the BJP inserted itself in Ahmedabad. In 1981 and 1985, when upper caste Hindus protested against reservation (affirmative action for subaltern castes, classes and religions), Hindu nationalists managed to shift the focus away from caste divisions to direct sentiment against Muslims. Also, to position Dalits against Muslims the RSS founded the *Samajik Samrasata Manch* (Social Assimilation Platform) on 14 April 1983, the birthday of both RSS founder Dr Hedgevar and of the Dalit leader Dr Ambedkar (Shah 1999, 254). Due to these combined efforts, many social scientists identify the 1980s as a time when anti-Muslim violence intensified (Shani 2005).



As Ludden (1996, 19) remarks, Gujarat may be the site where Hindu nationalism's electoral political possibilities first became evident. In 1987 the BJP won in Ahmedabad Municipal elections. At that time Hindu nationalists brought into the public city-space their demand for the demolition of the Babri Masjid, a sixteenth century mosque in Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh. They claimed the mosque had been constructed on the site of a Hindu temple by the 'Muslim Foreign Invader' Barbar, and vowed to raze it and build a Hindu temple to the God Ram in its place. In 1989 RSS and VHP members carried out *Ramshila Pujan* (blessing of bricks for the projected Ram temple at Ayodhya) in Ahmedabad (Shah 1999, 247). They marched in RSS uniform in Ahmedabad's upper caste neighborhoods and painted Hindu nationalist slogans on the city's walls (Ibid.). They repeated this in December 1992, just days before Hindu nationalists illegally demolished the Babri Masjid (Bacchetta 2000). But in addition, in 1992 they covered the city's walls with posters and bought advertisements in newspapers, to saturate Ahmedabad's imaginary and its public space with a call for *dharma yudha* or Hindu religious duty to war (against Muslims). Following the destruction of the Babri mosque there was anti-Muslim violence in Ahmedabad and other cities in Gujarat (*Final Solution* 2006).

During the period after India's liberalization from 1991 onward, Ahmedabad's industrial base expanded again to include scientific and service industries. Today the city has an information technology sector, skyscrapers and shopping malls. Together the industries are responsible for massive pollution of Ahmedabad's air, water and soil. In January 2001 an earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale struck Ahmedabad. Many hundreds were killed and thousands became homeless when poor urban housing collapsed. Over 50 multi-storey buildings were destroyed and the city's entire infrastructure was damaged. Throughout the 1990s until today Hindu nationalism has continued to expand, but so have leftist, feminist and Gandhian organizations.

### **RSS and Samiti conceptualizations of the city-space**

To understand how the RSS and Samiti conceptualize Ahmedabad, it is helpful to engage with their wider notions of territorialities-temporalities, and Hindu and Muslim subjects.

#### ***Hindu nationalist territorialities-temporalities***

For the RSS and Samiti, all of India is Hindu nationalist space. This conception, of course, runs counter to the official Indian state definition of India as secular and religiously plural (Kothari 1986; Bhargava 1998).

In its earliest texts (Golwalkar 1939, 1996), the RSS designated the Hindu nation's territory as *Bharat* (after the Goddess *Bharatmata* as in official accounts and/or King *Bharat* of the vedic Kuru tribe and ancestor of the heroes of the epic *Mahabharata*), *Aryavarsha* (land of Aryans) or *Bharatmata* (the Goddess as in official accounts but also the mother of King *Bharat*). These three names are Puranic terms that were incorporated into nineteenth century Indian nationalism to signify the nation's territory as material and symbolic space and to evoke emotions of national belonging (Ramaswamy 2003, 151–190; Goswami 2004, 154–208). Today, the RSS and Samiti most often use the term *Bharatmata* to designate the nation's territoriality.

The Hindu nationalist notion of the nation's territoriality as feminine would seem to coincide with western constructions of vast territorialities as feminine (Domosh and Seager 2001, 68). However, Hindu nationalist notions of *Bharatmata* also depart from western views of territorial femininity in significant ways. That is, the western conception

is based in a hetero-normative binary wherein active (masculine) citizen-subjects are placed in opposition to passive (feminine) territoriality (Yuval-Davis 1998; Peterson 2000). In contrast, Hindu nationalists understand *Bharatmata* as a living Goddess and operate highly gendered procedures to assign her a range of characteristics (Bacchetta 2004). Notably, the men of the RSS imagine *Bharatmata* as domesticated, benevolent, shattered and in need of the protection of her 'virile' Hindu nationalist sons, the 'Men with the Capital M' (Golwalkar 1980, 570–588). This concept of *Bharatmata*'s passivity in relation to citizen-sons is coherent with western gender binary conceptions of the nation and citizenry. But, in contrast, the women of the Samiti view *Bharatmata* in active terms, as 'the protector of society' (Kelkar 1985, Lecture II), 'the very source of all power' and 'the origin of all divinities' (Samiti 1988, 54, 48). To arrive at these differentially gendered notions, the Samiti drew on the *Devi Mahatmyam* which the RSS ignored (Bacchetta 2001b).

For both the RSS and Samiti, the Hindu nation (*Bharatmata* and the nation's citizen-body combined) is an eternal, glorious entity (Anderson 1983), which is now, only temporarily, in a degraded state of being. The nation's two conditions belong to distinct temporal realms: the magnificent is in *Satyuga*, a Golden Age associated with eternal time, while the debased is in *Kaliyuga*, an Age of Chaos and Ignorance associated with linear time (Golwalkar 1939). The RSS and Samiti selectively draw these temporal categories from a wider concept of time in upper caste Hinduism, the *Yugas*, which consist of four cycles. But, they reduce the four cycles to two to produce a binary opposition between a lost but culturally rich past and a culturally impoverished present. This binary diverges from upper caste Hindu religious conceptions of time, but corresponds to the temporal categories assigned to Hinduism by nineteenth century orientalist W. Jones and H.T. Colebrook of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (Bacchetta 2004).

The RSS makes no mention of women's existence in *Satyuga*; it is a period wherein Hindu men are great (Golwalkar 1939, 1996). In contrast, the Samiti characterizes *Satyuga* as a time when women are respected, equal to men, and excel in every domain (Samiti 1988). For the Samiti, life in *Satyuga* revolves around the family in which women are central. For the RSS, in *Kalyuga* Hindu men have lost themselves due to foreign (Muslim and British) intervention. In contrast, the Samiti holds Hindu men responsible for the Hindu nation's fall and defines *Kalyuga* as a period wherein women are victimized by men, including Hindu men (Samiti 1990).

For the RSS the Hindu nation will emerge in its ideal state (again) once Hindu men realize themselves individually and collectively through character-building and paramilitary training (Golwalkar 1996). For the Samiti, in contrast, *Bharatmata* and both Hindu women and men will ensure the rise of the ideal Hindu nation (Samiti 1988).

Both organizations imagine the city-space as an integral part of *Bharatmata* that must be brought back into *satyuga*. This can only happen if the city-space becomes homogeneously populated with ideal Hindus and thus if non-Hindu others (especially Muslims), their religions, institutions and structures, are eliminated. Such homogenization could only be achieved through a violation of both dominant, official (state) and subaltern (popular) conceptualizations and practices of (Indian) national space as religiously plural.

### *Hindu people*

The RSS refers to the Hindu people in the masculine as the 'sons of the soil' or the 'men born in the land of Bharat', thereby erasing women from the Hindu nation's citizen-body (Golwalkar 1980, 107). In contrast, for the Samiti, the Hindu people is a bi-gendered

entity, comprised of 'Bharatmata's children' of both (normativized) genders (Samiti 1988). Both of these conceptions, of course, run counter to official Indian state and subaltern notions of the religious plurality of the Indian people.

For the RSS, ideal Hindu men combine qualities of militaristic bravado, sexual chastity, self-discipline, high morality and service to (Hindu) society. To legitimize this model the RSS draws upon basic categories of the caste system and *ashramas* (phases of life for an upper caste Hindu male), re-configures them, combines them and rewrites their meanings. Thus RSS bases its ideal Hindu male on its own selective merging and re-interpretation of the *kshatriya* (warrior and princely) caste, with either the *brahmacharya ashrama* or student phase (for young to middle aged members) and the *vanaprastha ashrama* or wanderer phase (for elderly members who have retired from their working lives) (see Gupta 2001). Each Hindu male, currently in *Kaliyuga*, is supposed to work to perfect himself through 'character building', paramilitary training in the RSS and fusion with other 'sons of the soil' (Golwalkar 1996). Importantly, the RSS's highest leaders and most committed young men are unmarried: the *sarsanghchhalak* (RSS supreme leader) and *pracharaks*. In stark contrast, for the Samiti ideal Hindu men are in *garhasthya ashrama*, the householder phase. They are dedicated to the nation *and* to the family as good husbands, brothers and sons, and are respectful of women (Samiti 1988).

The RSS rarely mentions Hindu women, but when it does, it constructs them in binary terms, as either good Hindu mothers or as westernized, corrupt mothers (Golwalkar 1996). In contrast, the Samiti outlines numerous possible subject positions for women (Kelkar 1985; Samiti 1988, 1989, 1990). The most valorized are fierce mothers, noble wives, sisters and *pracharikas* (unmarried full-time Samiti workers). The most devalued are feminists, prostitutes and traitors to the Hindu nation.

### ***Muslim subjects***

For both the RSS and the Samiti, Indian Muslims are ultimate others. The RSS divides Muslim males by class and political persuasion into three categories: (1) Muslim foreign invaders, who are middle to upper class; (2) Muslims as ex-Hindu converts, who are lower class; and (3) 'Hindu-Muslims' or non-religious Muslims of any class who could potentially be re-converted to Hinduism. The Muslims as foreign invaders are the main enemies. They are constructed as political and sexual threats to the Hindu nation, its territory, Hindu women and even Hindu men (Bacchetta 1999). The RSS envisions Muslim women only in relation to men and sexuality (Bacchetta 2004). When close to Muslim men, Muslim women are baby factories for Islam, aggressive defenders of Islam, victims of Islamic sexual practices or prostitutes who try to seduce Hindu men. When alienated from Muslim men, Muslim women are either shameless seducers of Hindu men or, albeit rarely, celibates who could be re-converted to Hinduism.

In contrast, for the Samiti all Muslim men are hyper-sexual rapists. Samiti founder Lakshmi Bai Kelkar illustrates this construction through a story in her major book (1988, Discourse X). In her narration, the sixteenth century Moghul Emperor Akbar enters a women-only public market space dressed in drag as a veiled woman in order to abduct women. Akbar unknowingly abducts the niece of Rana Pratap Singh, a Hindu king who fought Akbar and whom Hindu nationalists consider a hero. The niece humors Akbar, gets him intoxicated and plans to kill him, but ultimately spares him. Significantly, here the Muslim male intrudes into a chaste, female only, presumably Hindu, public space. Hindu women do not wait for Hindu men to save them: Rana Pratap Singh's niece finds her own

solution. Here, the Samiti imagines women as capable of neutralizing Muslim male aggression alone.

### *Temple/mosque*

Both the RSS and Samiti associate temples with the chaste body of *Bharatmata* and the mosque with the Muslim hyper-sexual phallus. For example, major RSS ideologue and lifelong *sarsanghchalak* (RSS supreme leader) M.S. Golwalkar (1968, 123) states that Muslims have transformed the Hindu nationalist Mother(land) into 'just a hotel, only a land for enjoyment', thereby linking the very presence of Muslims, mosques and Muslim neighborhoods to *Bharatmata*'s symbolic sexual violation.

Such Hindu nationalist notions are directly in opposition not only to vast sectors of the population across religions who do not imagine mosques or other Islamic structures as enemies but also to official Indian state and Ahmedabad city government representations of mosques and other Islamic structures. Thus, all of Ahmedabad's major mosques and other Muslim structures are included as official governmental tourism sites. They are also officially protected by a 1996 governmental Heritage Cell (AMC et al. undated). The state promotes Ahmedabad as one of the best places in the world to study Indo-Saracenic architecture, a fusion born of Sultanate and Hindu temple architecture. Beyond mosques, the city also supports the Hazrat Pir Mohammad Shah Library which has an extensive collection of rare original manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Sindhi and Turkish.

### **Everyday practices**

Let us now turn to some Hindu nationalist spatial productions and transformations in everyday practices in Ahmedabad, in which the above categories of space and subjects are centrally implicated.

### *The shakha*

The *shakha* is the RSS and Samiti's second smallest spatial scale, after the individual bodies of members. It is the basic unit designed to Hindu nationalize Hindu subjects and space (Andersen and Damle 1987). The RSS claims 28,922 *shakhas* and 43,127 'sub *shakhas*' (multiple groups within a *shakha*) in India (Bajpai and Barthawal 2007, 13). This includes 1381 in Gujarat and at least one in nearly every upper caste Hindu neighborhood of Ahmedabad. The Samiti has 500 *shakhas* located in some same sites as RSS (Ibid., 28).

RSS and Samiti *shakhas* and sub *shakhas* meet daily, separately, mainly in Ahmedabad's western bank neighborhood parks for one hour of ideological and paramilitary training, a modality that ensures class and caste homogeneity among *shakha* members (Bacchetta 2002). In doing so, each organization attempts to transform the park into homogenized Hindu nationalist space. However, the park has historically been a multi-layered and multi-dimensional location of becoming. As Kaviraj (1997) points out, urban Indian parks were sites of colonial spectacles of power: via colonial state pageantry, military assemblies, segregation for the colonizers' exclusive use, iconographic representations such as famed colonizers' busts and they were often named to honor notorious colonizers. Parks were also places of anti-colonial resistance: via demonstrations, public hunger strikes and daily trespassing in defiance of segregation laws. After colonialism, parks became spaces of postcolonial state power through state pageantry, military assemblies, replacement of the colonizers' busts with those of Indian

nationalists and their renaming. Today parks are also sites of democratization. People of all classes, religions, castes, genders, sexualities, languages and regions have access to them. Public events (festivals, protests, etc.) are held in them. During the day, the working poor install portable businesses in them: the clothes washer and ironer, the tea seller, the snacks hawker. In the evening, families and friends use the space for walks and socializing. Late at night, parks often belong to homeless individuals and families, sex workers and clients, illicit lovers, and, in some neighborhoods, to men seeking men. All the while, the postcolonial state provides (mainly male but also some female) police presence there. As they attempt to Hindu nationalize neighborhood park space across the city to render it an integral part of *Bharatmata*'s body, the RSS and Samiti *shakhas* interrupt all the park's other investments and meanings.

RSS and Samiti *shakha* activities take place in early mornings and in some areas additionally in evenings. Each *shakha* is divided into 40 minutes of physical and paramilitary training, and 20 minutes of ideological indoctrination. The physical training includes a number of games. One that I often saw repeated is 'Kashmir Hamara Hay' ('Kashmir is Ours'). To play it, RSS members divide into two teams at opposite ends of the *shakha* ground, which stands for *Bharatmata* in miniature. One team represents Hindus and the other Muslims. A hole symbolizing Kashmir is dug in the center of the ground. A whistle is blown and the teams fight each other to place their feet in the hole, thus signifying possession of *Bharatmata*. Finally, when one team is successful, its members cry victory: 'Kashmir Hamare Hay.' But, soon both teams join the victory cries.

In the game, the main elements are the *shakha* grounds (*Bharatmata*'s body), Kashmir (which, in this scheme, we can think of as *Bharatmata*'s hole-vagina), the RSS members' feet (symbolizing in the game the means of territorial appropriation, but also in Brahminism caste pollution and in western psychoanalysis the phallus). With this symbolic dimension in mind the placing of feet in the hole against the will of the other team inadvertently carries latent meanings as an act of simultaneously possessing and polluting *Bharatmata* (with feet), but also evokes heterosexual rape (the violent foot-phallus in the hole-vagina).

Ultimately, 'Kashmir Hamara Hay' produces RSS bodies as hardened, warrior bodies, but also, indirectly of course, in light of the sexual symbolism involved, as the taboo Hindu nationalist sexual bodies that the RSS claims do not exist. At the same time the game transforms the *shakha* ground into a passive object (the RSS version of *Bharatmata*) of Hindu-Muslim dispute and finally of Hindu nationalist (male) becoming.

Notwithstanding the intense efforts to Hindu nationalize the neighborhood park space, these efforts fail in relation to the city space in three significant ways. First, the neighborhood parks in question are largely confined to middle class Hindu areas on the west bank. They are relatively thinly populated and do not effect the majority of people in the city. Second, *shakha* meetings occupy the neighborhood park space for only a few hours per day. The rest of the time the parks are traversed and used by people across religions, but also by Hindus who may be totally uninterested in or may oppose Hindu nationalism. And third, the very process of Hindu nationalization means that Hindu nationalists do not ever forget Muslims. On the contrary, thoughts of Muslims remain at the forefront of every moment of the *shakha*. Their presence is reinforced symbolically, and even physically, in many forms, including in the body of the RSS member in Muslim drag in the game 'Kashmir Hamara Hay'.

*The Samiti, spatial mobility and/in the city*

Part of the lived experience for Hindu nationalist women in the city-space is the sense of flows and blockages in their own corporeal mobility. In the past, upper middle class women were expected *not* to circulate in the city alone, even if working class women have always, by necessity, been amply in the public space. Globalization is effecting changes in this situation. Over the past decade the number of cars and motorcycles in Ahmedabad has increased threefold (Singh Brar 2004, 46); with this trend a more significant portion of upper middle class women are visible driving cars or motorcycles in the city space. Paradoxically, as Samiti members liked to remind me, Samiti members who have been para-militarily trained have always moved through the city alone at will.

The RSS father of one Samiti member I interviewed in Ahmedabad told me his daughter Kamlabehn 'can go where ever she likes' because he trusts her completely and she can 'bash up any man' who bothers her (Bacchetta 2004). Indeed, Kamlabehn had been a paramilitary trainer in the Samiti when we first met. During my stay in Kamlabehn's neighborhood, at her suggestion I often sat behind her on her motorcycle as she drove through the streets at any hour of the day or night for purposes that ranged from getting medicine for her mother, to visiting friends, to finding a good tea stall. Several times, upon encountering groups of men blocking her way, instead of driving around them she honked the motorcycle's horn and drove right through them, screaming out that men do not own the streets.

Such incidents indicate how Samiti members' imaginings of the city-space are produced with and through the body. With the advent of the Samiti, bodies otherwise formed in their spaces (mainly the home) enter the *shakha* that transforms them via paramilitary training (Bacchetta 2002). The type of Hindu female body created in and with the *shakha* space is fierce, alert and determined. In turn, it is this particular female body that returns to continually attempt to transform the home, the neighborhood, and, through its wanderings and investments, the city-space itself, as bi-gendered, Hindu nationalizing space.

Ultimately, however, this female upper middle class Hindu nationalist corporeal investment in the streets as part of the project to Hindu nationalize the city-space fails for three main reasons. First, Hindu nationalist women remain relatively few in number and the impact of their presence on the city-space remains minimal. Second, the subjects' mobility is largely restricted to Ahmedabad's west bank; it does not encompass the entire city. Third, the same west bank areas are inhabited by middle class feminists and leftists who directly oppose and resist Hindu nationalism (a point I elaborate below).

**Exceptional practices***Samiti spatial purifications*

The Hindu nationalist effort to Hindu nationalize the city-space consists not only in its occupation by ideal Hindus but also in eliminating Muslims and Islam. While the RSS and VHP have periodically called upon their members to boycott Muslim businesses, early on the Samiti, too, albeit for some somewhat different reasons, entered this fray. For example, in 1988, following RSS and VHP claims that Saudi Arabian Muslims provide local Muslims with capital for their cloth businesses, the Samiti organized a public boycott of 'Muslim cloth' stalls at Law Gardens, a very large park located centrally in one of Ahmedabad's longstanding commercial zones on the west bank.

Historically Law Gardens was a site of intense local and global flows of capital, goods, services, people (of all classes, faiths, castes, genders, sexualities, regions) and of information. Currently vendors there are regulated by the state and confined to specific areas. Samiti members I have interviewed traverse Law Gardens quite regularly as consumers, as do others of their class. Notwithstanding the Samiti designation 'Muslim cloth', the textiles in question are woven by local Muslim *and* Hindu artisans. One aim of the Samiti boycott, then, was to divide lower class Muslims and Hindus of the same profession.

In the 1988 action Samiti leaders began to organize the boycott in their own neighborhoods before bringing it to Law Gardens. One Samiti leader, Ratnabehn, told me she called 15 women neighbors to her home, explained the Samiti position on 'Muslim cloth' and requested they join the struggle. But, she remarked, this effort was not very successful because the women were 'more interested in buying fancy clothes than in serving the nation'. This situation was reproduced in other neighborhoods, too. Ultimately the boycott was rather poorly observed.

Notwithstanding its near failure, the boycott was a very significant action. It aimed to remove Muslims from a site, Law Gardens, where Hindu and Muslim social and capital flows were fused. It evoked, albeit in a deformed manner, traces of earlier Indian nationalist anti-consumption, anti-colonial struggles centered on cloth, around which discourses of gender, sexuality and the (Indian) nation coagulated. That is, as early as 1908, Mahatma Gandhi identified cloth produced in Ahmedabad's British-owned mills and cloth imported from Britain with colonial exploitation and impoverishment (Gandhi 1927). He led mill workers' strikes for higher wages and urged middle class Indians to boycott British cloth. He advised all Indians to use the *chakhra* (spinning wheel) to spin their own cotton (Ibid., 407, 355). Masses of women were first politicized when, in 1919, Gandhi appealed to them to join the movement against British cloth (Patel 1988). Gandhi also linked spinning to sexual purity and pointed out that women producing their own cloth would not need to work outside the home where they risked sexual harassment (Kishwar 1985a, 1985b; Patel 1988).

In its actions against 'Muslim cloth' the Samiti drew on these prior struggles, but reworked their meanings within the Samiti's grid of intelligibility. While Mahatma Gandhi had addressed women across faiths, the Samiti called upon only Hindu women and pitted them against Muslims. Gandhi had worked against impoverishment and middle class consumption, yet the Samiti's action encompassed no such class critique. In fact Ratnabehn told me she did not care how much cloth Hindu women bought as long as it was from Hindu merchants.

The Samiti targeted 'Muslim cloth' not only in order to injure Muslim businesses. Insofar as Hindu nationalists envision all space in India as Hindu nationalist space, the Samiti imagined the cloth stalls as foreign invading sites of penetration into a Hindu nationalist space of flows (of capital, socialities and bodies). This imagining relies on an equation of Law Gardens with *Bharatmata* and the entry of 'Muslim cloth' (into her) as the invasive access of Muslim males who handle the cloth. This notion of Muslim intrusion has many referents in the Hindu nationalist literature, of which the 'Akbar in drag' narrative I evoked above is only one. But, further, for the Samiti 'Muslim cloth' is connected with the Muslim male body (that circulates it through sale) and thus should not come near the Hindu female body (that wears it as Hindu women circulate through the home, neighborhood and city). Therefore the cloth also signifies a medium for physical contact, for taboo heterosexual erotic flows across normativized, binarized genders and

religions. In the Samiti's spatial logics, such 'cloth' must be eliminated if the city is to be produced as *Bharatmata's* pure, chaste body in *Satyuga*.

Yet the boycott became yet another site of the failure of Hindu nationalization insofar as the Samiti's addressees, the upper caste, middle class Hindu women of their own neighborhoods, preferred to remain indiscriminate consumers rather than participate in the Samiti's actions.

### **RSS Muslim eliminations**

Some of the same mechanisms of flows, blockages, shutting down and making disappear are operative in yet another situation that would have longer lasting effects: Ahmedabad's 2002 Hindu nationalist anti-Muslim pogroms. The pogroms began on 28 February, one day after a tragic fire broke out in a coach (#S6) of the Sabarmati Express train as it was leaving the station in the nearby town of Godhra. The fire left 58 people, mainly women and children, dead. The train had carried members of the general public, but also Hindu nationalists returning from the VHP *Chetavani Yatra* (Journey of Warning) in Ayodhya, where in 1992 they had demolished the Babri Masjid and where, since then they had agitated to build a Ram temple in its place (Bacchetta 2000). To date the fire's origin remains under dispute. For example, an official 2005 government report by the Banerjee Committee (formed by the Railroad Minister) attributed it to a cooking fire accident in the train. But Hindu nationalists, and the later 2008 Nanavati Commission appointed by the BJP government of Narendra Modi, claimed that Muslims threw bottles filled with gasoline into the coach and organized an attack (Singh 2007).

The basis for and procedures of the pogroms are also under dispute. For example, the Concerned Citizens Tribunal Report (2002) which draws on 2000 interviews, NGO investigations such as by Human Rights Watch (2002), and later data from a sting operation by the newspaper *Tehelka* wherein state and RSS officials were filmed discussing their roles, all affirm that the pogroms were 'planned and executed by top functionaries' of the RSS, its 'family organizations', and 'state authorities with the sanction of the [Gujarat] Chief Minister Narendra Modi' (*Tehelka* 2007) but all of these latter denied the charges.

Indeed, immediately after the fire was quelled, the Gujarat government had the bodies of the dead brought to Sola Civil Hospital in Ahmedabad and a public rally and march were organized. The same day, a headline in Gujarat's daily newspaper *Sandesh* read 'Around 10 Hindu Girls Pulled Out of the Railway Carriage by a Group of Religious Fanatics', thereby reproducing and disseminating for the reading public the figures of hyper-sexual Muslim men and sexually vulnerable Hindu women that Hindu nationalists often deploy to provoke anti-Muslim violence (Basu 1993). The next day, the VHP called a state-wide general strike; it was supported by the Gujarat state government. The massive attacks against Muslims across Ahmedabad (and elsewhere in Gujarat) began that day and lasted until 3 March; they then resumed again on 15 March until June.

According to official estimates, the pogroms left over 1000 people, primarily Muslims, dead. Other sources put the figure at 2500. Police reports indicate that 413 bodies were so badly battered, sliced to pieces or burned that they could not be identified and that 228 bodies have still not been traced (Editors 2007). They had prepared the attacks in advance by collecting Muslim addresses from voting lists.

In the pogroms Hindu nationalists allegedly especially targeted Muslims living in religiously plural neighborhoods, though they killed massively in Muslim enclaves, too. They attacked businesses owned by Muslims. They burned 1150 hotels and 1000 trucks,



destroyed 1965 shops, looted 204 shops and 21 warehouses, and razed 205 mosques and 298 Sufi shrines (Panday 2002). The latter include the celebrated tomb of Wali Gujarati, a seventeenth century Sufi saint from Ahmedabad, though it was located near a police station (*Final Solution* 2006). In all, 150,000 people, mainly Muslims, lost their homes and livelihoods. Over 66,000 people became refugees in relief camps quickly constructed at Ahmedabad's eastern outskirts (Setalvad 2002). Some camps remain to this day. The perpetrators of the pogroms were mainly men but, as Ahmad (2002) points out, a distinguishing feature in 2002 in comparison to previous Hindu nationalist violence was the participation of Hindu nationalist women, including middle class women, in the brutalities and the looting.

In one horrific act at Gulberg Society in Ahmedabad, a mob of 25,000 allegedly surrounded the home of (Muslim) former trade unionist and ex-Congress Member of Parliament, Ahsan Jafri, where he, his family and 80 people, mainly Muslims, from nearby areas had taken shelter (Human Rights Watch 2002). The mob threw stones, bottles, kerosene, gas cylinders and burning cloth into his home. When Jafri came out to ask that he be killed and the others spared, Hindu nationalists captured him, cut off his fingers, toes and then his limbs. They tried to force him to shout Hindu nationalist slogans; he refused. Finally he was dragged to a fire where he was burned to death. After that, men in the crowd allegedly raped, dismembered and burned 10 women, while many others were killed in the house fire (Setalvad 2007).

Indeed, one striking feature of the riots was the degree and quantity of public sexual violence. Many organizations documented it (Human Rights Watch 2002; Mander 2002; *Final Solution* 2006; International Initiative for Justice in Gujarat 2003), and it was a centerpiece of the widely disseminated 2007 critical documentary film, *Kya Hum Jinda Hai (Are We Alive?)* by Rafique Pathan. According to some reports Hindu nationalist mobs gang raped, dismembered and then burned approximately 400 girls and women to death (Editors 2008). They cut fetuses of pregnant Muslim women from their wombs. They castrated Muslim men, dismembered them and then put them to death. These enactments need to be understood in relation to the RSS grid of intelligibility, but also in relation to ethnicized, racialized, religious-political sexual violence elsewhere.

For example, as Theweleit (1987, 194) observes about fantasies of organized, militarized sexual violence in inter-war Germany, in the Ahmedabad violence too 'it is striking that most of the attacks are aimed at producing a particular *condition* of the female body' (when acts are perpetrated by men on women). Indeed in the pogroms the transformation of victims' bodies was central; the assaults put into relief sexual body parts that were severed, ripped apart, reduced to nothing. But paradoxically, these actions also transform the Hindu nationalist perpetrator's body by producing it in specific, highly sexualized ways.

Theweleit (1987, 194) remarks that in male on female murders preceded by rape 'there are two distinct processes at work'. First, rape is a 'symbolic sexual act' that destroys female genitalia that 'threaten with castration' (Ibid., 195). The rape-death scenario is a defensive act of distancing, based in fear (Ibid., 196-197). Second, in such murder there is 'the pleasurable perception of women in the condition of the "bloody masses"' that the attacker wants, out of desire, to draw near (Ibid., 196-197). But, the Hindu nationalist enactments of rape, mutilation and murder, if read in the context of RSS prescriptions linking RSS members' sexual abstinence to their proper Hindu nationalization and the RSS construction of Muslim women as seductive, might signal Hindu nationalist male anxieties about their own desires for Muslim women. Such desires would de-masculinize them (insofar as for the RSS ideal Hindu nationalist masculinity is chaste) and

de-nationalize them (insofar as ideal Hindu masculinity is necessary to proper Hindu nationalization). Further, when Hindu nationalist men mutilate Muslim female body parts, they inadvertently come to inhabit the position they assign to Muslim men as sexual aggressors. When they sever Muslim women's breasts or extract their fetuses, they de-maternalize the women's bodies, render them a-gendered ('not women, not men') and inhuman (beasts to be slaughtered). The fetus ripping reverses Hindu nationalist claims about Muslim women as baby factories for Islam, eliminating both the baby factory and the fetus as future Muslim. Similarly, the castrations of Muslim men might combine Hindu nationalists' anxieties about their own queer excitement for Muslim men and fears of becoming effeminized by them. As Anand (2007, 265) rightly notes, the 2002 pogroms were 'an exercise in the masculinization of the Hindus'. Some Hindu nationalist perpetrators exposed their penises to the crowds to show their manhood and distributed bangles and saris (signs of the feminine) to Hindu men who did not participate (Ibid.).

These sexualized, genocidal acts against Muslim bodies and the destruction of Muslim religious structures and territories (houses, parts of neighborhoods or enclaves), reveal the connection across human, architectural and territorial scales in Hindu nationalist operations designed to produce Hindu nationalized space. But they also reveal some of the dimensions of Hindu nationalization's failures. Here I shall mention only two: first, paradoxically, one effect of the 2002 pogroms was to produce yet more religiously pluralist layers and extensions to Ahmedabad. They had the effect of permanently inscribing some signs of othered subjects, their subjection and resistance, into the materiality and the symbolic of the city-space. The (mainly Muslim) dead now permanently reside in mass graves under affected neighborhoods (such as Dudheshwar, Juhapura, Sarkhej and Sarangpur) and some parts of the city have since been reconstructed on the eternal ashes of pogrom victims. Camps for the homeless continue to exist in the poor and working class eastern outer areas of the city. Second, activists against Hindu nationalism are in the process of permanently inscribing their resistance in the city, too. Two groups, Citizens for Justice and Peace (which was formed after the 2002 pogroms) and Sabrang, are currently planning a 'museum of resistance' in Gulberg Society, the site of the brutal murder of Ahsan Jafri and 80 others, and of rapes, dismemberments and burnings. The museum's objective is to ensure the survival of the memory of the massacre and resistance, but it will also mark the city-space in a lasting, even obstinate, manner with the subjects Hindu nationalists thought they had erased. The museum will house reports, books, literary works and films about the 2002 pogroms, but also about other religious-political, caste, ethnic, racist, and language-based violence and resistance in Ahmedabad, in India and across the globe.

### Concluding remarks

To conclude, I will offer two remarks about the partial success and massive failure of Ahmedabad's Hindu nationalization.

First, the RSS and Samiti's projects and strategies to Hindu nationalize Ahmedabad are inseparable from their respective grids of intelligibility and the categories of subjects, objects and prescriptions for conduct they propose. They depend upon imagining the city-space and its subjects as ideally homogeneously Hindu nationalized. They rest upon repeated interpellations to form properly Hindu nationalized subjects through *shakha* discourses and practices, and other daily and exceptional practices. They also hinge upon recurring, thinly disguised sexualized enactments of Muslim elimination, whether symbolically as in 'Kashmir Hamara Hay' or the 'Muslim cloth' boycott, discursively in

pamphlets or newspaper articles or directly in material terms as in the 2002 pogroms. This Hindu nationalist obligation to repeat the Muslim other's defeat, while concealing the production, circulation and deployment of sexuality in these repetitions, exposes the chaotic character of the Hindu nationalist subjects and objects of the repetition, and ultimately the fragility of the Hindu nationalization project.

Second, while Hindu nationalists seek Ahmedabad's closure and its internal religious cleansing, the city-space is constantly held open and productively messy through both agentic and non-agentic means. The agents in question are many. They include: activists against Hindu nationalism; Hindus who are simply non-Hindu nationalists; and Muslims and other non-Hindus of all political persuasions. Each of these sectors refuses, directly or indirectly, Hindu nationalist interpellation, the Hindu nationalist grid of intelligibility, its categories of subjects, objects and prescriptions for conduct. For example, leftist and feminist organizations such as People's Union for Civil Liberties, *Communalism Combat*, Citizen's Initiative and the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a Gandhian-inspired labor union for women workers from all faiths in the informal sector, have long worked against Hindu nationalist violence (Bacchetta 2001a). Since the 2002 pogroms leftist and feminist resistance has expanded considerably as new groups, such as Citizens for Justice and Peace, have appeared on the scene. A range of local organizations can now be counted upon to oppose Hindu nationalism.<sup>9</sup> Also, resistance jumped scale (Smith 1992) as activists in Ahmedabad, across India and elsewhere united to form fact-finding teams and to intervene on behalf of 2002 pogrom survivors (Bacchetta 2009).

Beyond such activism, there are many indications that various unorganized residents of all faiths do not adhere at all to the Hindu nationalist worldview or demands and are not preoccupied with the Hindu-Muslim conflict. For example, the campaign to change the name of Ahmedabad to Karnavati has not garnered any significant interest. Longstanding Muslim social and religious organizations, such as the Muslim Coordinating Committee, have not wilted but rather have expanded since 2002 while publicly mobilizing for relief for pogrom survivors. For at least some Muslim survivors of the 2002 pogroms the violence has faded into the background as new concerns have arisen. For example, Muslim survivors of the 2002 pogroms residing at Naroda Patya relief camp on the eastern bank explained to me that their current major worry is not about more pogroms but rather about their unstable living conditions as the city plans to displace the camp to construct a new road. All were adamant that they would not leave the city; they feel they are its rightful residents.

But what of religious pluralism in non-agentic forms? Above I mentioned that othered Muslim subjects and spaces are eternally inscribed in the now unseen mass graves that are integral to certain neighborhoods and in ashes that sometimes rest under the very foundation of the city's newest structures. Beyond this ghostly and symbolic presence, Ahmedabad's heterogeneity is visible above ground too. It resides in Muslim structures scattered mainly in the east bank but also in the west.<sup>10</sup> It exists in all other non-Hindu religious structures across the city, as well as in Hindu religious structures which include mixed architectural elements. The mark of multiplicity lives in every building, street, neighborhood, structure or commercial center officially named in commemoration of Mahatma Gandhi. It is part of the very formation of each layer of what Hebbert (2005) calls 'the people's memory' of pluralism, of both the subaltern and official histories of pluralism, and of the city's living spaces and subjects of today.

Ultimately it is all these elements combined and in interaction that render Ahmedabad and its peoples continually resistant to Hindu nationalist imaginings and homogenization practices.

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## Notes

1. *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* is often translated as National Volunteer Corps or National Volunteers' Organization. But I find the literal translation (National Self Service Workers Organization) most useful for gender comparative purposes. In contrast to the 'parallelism' between RSS and *Samiti* (see below), the all-male RSS names itself as a larger scale structure (*Sangh*) than the women's group (*Samiti*). The RSS names its members' selves (*swayam*); this term is absent from the *Samiti*'s name thereby inadvertently suggesting that women members are ideally selfless. For an in-depth analysis of the gender politics of the organizations' names, see Bacchetta (2004).
2. I use 'Hindu nationalize' instead of possible alternatives such as 'communalize' (which is commonly deployed for South Asia) or 'polarize'. This is because, as many scholars argue, 'communal' and 'communalize' derive from and ultimately perpetuate colonial administrative discourses designed for divide and rule practices (Pandey 2007). But also, 'communal' is highly imprecise. It englobes disparate phenomena ranging from peaceful religious interest groups to radically anti-Other, violent projects. It can obstruct more nuanced and accurate analysis of cultural, social, economic and political phenomena. Finally, Hindu nationalists do not seek to 'polarize' but rather to produce the city (and all space) and all subjects as homogenously Hindu nationalized.
3. *Shakha* means 'branch' or 'limb' in Sanskrit and historically refers to a school of a specific Vedic sect. However, I have chosen to create the non-literal translation 'neighborhood cell' to mark the following: (1) there is no real analogy between the Sanskritic and RSS uses of *shakha*; the RSS is not a sect or a school, nor does it claim to be; (2) in India the RSS *shakha* is a specifically *neighborhood*-based unit, as opposed, for example, to RSS 'branches' in the diaspora which may or may not be neighborhood based; (3) the term *cell* signals that the *shakha* is the most basic grassroots level of the RSS's structure and reflects the RSS's notion of its structure as organic. For a summary of the RSS organizational chart in India and the diaspora, see Andersen and Damle (1987) and Jayaprashad (1991).
4. For a queer feminist analysis of this event, see Bacchetta (1999).
5. For a more detailed definition of Hindu nationalism, see Bacchetta (1996, 2004).
6. The notion of *sangh parivar* ('RSS extended family') is a specifically male dominated kinship configuration as suggested by the inclusion of *sangh* (for RSS) and exclusion of *Samiti*. *Sangh parivar* also evokes racialization by suggesting blood ties and sexualization through asexuality (i.e. the incest taboo). On the hetero-normative male-dominated family as the basic model for nationalisms, see McClintock (1995) and Peterson (2000). The RSS also conceptualizes its 'family' hierarchically. For example, it claims this about 'tribals' (Saxena 2004): that 'we' (the RSS) 'approach them' (tribals) in the spirit '*tu men ek rakta*' (you and I have the same blood in our veins) (Ibid., 21) and that RSS has 'no sense of superiority' over tribals (21). Yet it paternalistically calls them 'backward' (15) 'children of nature with minimum needs' (16) who require RSS education and 'welfare projects' (21).
7. For the *Samiti*'s interpretation of the *Ramayana*, see the collected discourses on it by *Samiti* founder Lakshmbai Kelkar (1988).
8. The spatial division of Ahmedabad includes the following units: *mohallas* (relatively large units without much structure); *chawls* (very small units often of five or six homes owned by a single extended family); *pols*; and *bastis* or slums constructed in less densely populated areas or areas with appropriate space.
9. Some additional groups in Ahmedabad that actively oppose Hindu nationalism include: Gujarat Lok Sangharsh *Samiti*, Gujarat Khet Vikas Parishad, Lok Adhikar Sangh, Gujarat Ekta Manch, Insaf, Prashant, Punaruthan, Gujarat Adivasi Sabha, Banaskantha Zila Dalit Sangathan and Dalit Panthers.
10. The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (undated, 86) notes 52 'heritage' Islamic structures under government protection in the city. Hindu nationalists themselves list 18 major Muslim monuments in Ahmedabad that they would like to, but have not been able to, 'convert' to temples (see Goel 1998, 90).

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## ABSTRACT TRANSLATION

### La (fallida) producción del espacio nacionalizado hindú en Ahmedabad, Gujarat

Este artículo trata sobre el intento de la mayor organización nacionalista hindú, el RSS y su ala de mujeres, el Samiti, para nacionalizar como hindú la ciudad de Ahmedabad, en Gujarat. Desarrolla dos argumentos interrelacionados. Sostiene que a pesar de los intensos esfuerzos nacionalistas hindúes para nacionalizar como hindú el espacio de la ciudad y sus sujetos, el proyecto ha sido y permanece siendo un fracaso. La heterogeneidad la ciudad-espacio y sus sujetos excede infinitamente estos intentos homogeneizantes. También sugiere que mientras los hindúes nacionalistas afirman que la diferencia religiosa es clave, el género y la sexualidad son inseparablemente cruciales para sus construcciones, violaciones y eliminaciones de sujetos, estructuras arquitectónicas y las territorialidades a través de las escalas. En una primera sección, este artículo aborda las redes de

inteligibilidad del RSS y el Samiti: sus categorías (especialmente de espacio, género, sexualidad y sujetos), sus lógicas y sus prescripciones para la conducta. Una segunda sección se centra en las prácticas del RSS y el Samiti para transformar la ciudad, concibiéndolas en relación a las redes de inteligibilidad de las organizaciones. Éstas incluyen: entrenamiento paramilitar diario, boicots económicos periódicos contra musulmanes, y excepcionalmente la violencia masiva antimusulmana, incluyendo matanzas genocidas. El artículo concluye con un comentario sobre los enlaces entre el discurso y la práctica nacionalista hindú, los fracasos de la nacionalización hindú, y las contratransformaciones resistentes agénticas y no agénticas de la ciudad. La autora se basa en tres tipos de fuentes primarias: publicaciones del RSS y del Samiti; las publicaciones de grupos contra el nacionalismo hindú; y notas de múltiples períodos del trabajo de campo en Ahmedabad desde 1987 hasta 2008.

**Palabras clave:** nacionalismo hindú; ciudad-espacio; Ahmedabad; conflicto político-religioso; sexualidad

#### 阿默达巴德, 古加拉特的 (失败的) 印度教国族空间生产

本文关注印度最庞大的印度教国族主义组织RSS与其女性次团体Samiti企图以印度教国族化古加拉特 (Gujarat) 的城市阿默达巴德 (Ahmedabad) 之尝试, 并提出两个相关论点: 尽管印度教国族主义长期力图将该城市空间及受治者国族化, 该计划最终仍宣告失败。都市空间及受治者的异质性不断地溢出此一同质化运动。此外, 即便印度教国族主义者宣称宗教差异才是关键, 但我认为性别与情欲在其建构、破坏及消灭主体、建筑结构及领域性时, 同样是不可分割之要素。本文第一部分首先处理RSS以及Samiti的认知框架: 他们的行为指导之分类 (特别是空间、性别、情欲以及主体)、逻辑与认知; 第二部分聚焦RSS和Samiti依循该组织的认知框架提出远景以改造城市的实践行动, 包含日常军事模拟训练、对回教徒进行周期性的经济抵制, 以及大规模的反回教暴力, 包括种族屠杀计划。在结论中, 我提出印度教国族主义的论述与实践、印度教国族主义的失败, 以及施为者与非施者反抗都市变迁之间的关联性。我主要引自三大数据类型: RSS以及Samiti的出版品、反对印度教国族主义的出版品, 以及我1987年至2008年间在阿默达巴德的多次田野笔记。

**关键词:** 印度教国族主义、都市空间、阿默达巴德、政教冲突、情欲