

BULLDOZER HINDUTVA: ETHNO-NATIONALIST SCAPEGOATING AND CUMULATIVE EVICTION LOGICS IN URBAN INDIA

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Abstract: This paper examines the role that ideologies and practices of ethno-nationalist scapegoating has played in residential evictions in Indian cities since the early 1990s. Focusing on case studies from Bombay (Mumbai), Bangalore (Bengaluru), and Ahmedabad, the paper traces how regional nationalist movements transformed into more virulent forms of Hindu nationalism, particularly after the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition. The paper argues that in the aftermath of the 1992 violence, a new “scapegoating eviction logic” developed that blended ethno-nationalist rhetoric with urban renewal imperatives. This logic legitimized discriminatory evictions by framing certain ethnic or religious groups, particularly Muslims and migrants, as threats to urban order and development. Based on historical newspaper analysis and discourse analysis of other archival material, the paper demonstrates how ethno-nationalist politics reshaped urban governance, leading to more explicitly targeted and violent forms of residential segregation. It reveals the role of critical events, such as the 1992-93 Bombay riots and the 2002 Gujarat pogrom, in crystallizing anti-Muslim sentiment and accelerating segregation processes in Indian cities. The analysis highlights the interplay between regional linguistic nationalism and broader Hindu nationalist movements in producing new forms of urban exclusion, tracing the historical development scapegoating discourses from anti-migrant rhetoric to more explicitly anti-Muslim targeting, particularly after the Ayodhya incident. And it concludes by discussing how the processes of neoliberal urban restructuring and “world-class city” aspirations in the early 2000s intersected with ethno-nationalist politics to further marginalize minoritized communities. By linking ethno-nationalist politics, urban governance, and spatial segregation, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex forces shaping India's increasingly divided cities. It demonstrates how seemingly disparate processes - linguistic nationalism, Hindu revivalism, and neoliberal urbanism - converged to produce new, more virulent forms of urban exclusion and violence.

In a demolition drive launched in the North Delhi neighborhood of Jahangirpuri in April 2022 – and halted two days later by the legal activism of Delhi's now-mobilized housing rights groups – the Delhi Municipal Corporation (DMC) targeted, and explicitly acknowledged the targeting of the homes of Muslim families for demolition. In contrast to some other cities (such as Ahmedabad and Mumbai), where informal settlement evictions have been more explicitly intertwined with local logics of discrimination and anti-Muslim violence, this type of targeting

has been rarer in Delhi. Yet in April 2022, with the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) having recently taken control of the DMC, and the impending municipal elections pushing local BJP leaders to showcase their anti-Muslim credentials, the DMC signaled its willingness to use evictions as a tool of Hindutva violence.

Scapegoating Eviction Logics

As reflected in the April 1993 eviction in Rajiv Nagar, a new ethnonationalist urban politics took hold in the immediate aftermath of the Babri Masjid's demolition on December 6, 1992. As waves of violence subsumed some of India's largest cities, evictions were also carried out – as they continue to be done today – in targeted ways against Muslim communities and other minoritized groups. A discursive logic deployed for electoral gain, scapegoating blames pervasive urban challenges – “encroachment” in the case of 1990s Bombay – on a specific group and then proposes their eviction as the most appropriate solution. From a political perspective, it is often unimportant if those being evicted are even part of the scapegoated population, as in the case of the “Bangladeshi threat” and “Bihari menace,” which have been used to justify evictions in communities where no Bangladeshis or Biharis may live.¹ But as the discursive targeting of minoritized populations became electorally expedient in the early 1990s, eviction politics and urban segregation patterns were transformed by the ethnonationalist politics of ethnic scapegoating.

¹ Sharat G. Lin and Madan C. Paul (1995). “Bangladeshi migrants in Delhi: Social insecurity, State power, and captive vote banks.” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 27(1): 3-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.1995.10413070>; Awanish Kumar (2009). “A Class Analysis of the ‘Bihari Menace’.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 44(28): 124-127. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40279265>

A widely recognized rhetorical strategy, scapegoating has been theorized by French anthropologist René Girard as a way to maintain social order, resolve internal group conflicts, and secure political power. Since the late 1970s, Hindu nationalist organizations and political parties like the BJP and Shiv Sena have been building a political movement based on what Girard called (in other contexts) the “murderous exasperation of mimetic rivalry,” or the “scapegoating mechanism.”² According to Girard, human desire is fundamentally mimetic, meaning that individuals and groups imitate one another’s desires, which leads to rivalry. Mimetic rivalries can escalate, which often leads to the rivalry becoming more important than the object of desire. Under certain conditions, a group may direct collective violence toward their rival group, but typically only when they are unable to retaliate effectively.³ The scapegoating mechanism unifies the community against a common enemy and temporarily resolves tensions by directing them outward.⁴

Girard’s cultural psychological theory of scapegoating has not been used extensively by political sociologists, relative to those in religious studies and literary theory, but it can help illuminate certain dynamics of ethno-nationalist politics.⁵ Girard’s ideas have been usefully employed to explain the mechanisms through which political dominant groups opt to target less powerful groups for political gain, as in a recent of anti-Roma policies and discourses in early

² Girard, René (1978): “Interview,” *Diacritics* 8(1) Special Issue on the Work of Rene Girard: 31-54.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/464818>

³ Girard 1978; Desmond, John and Donncha Kavanagh (2003). “Organization as Containment of Acquisitive Mimetic Rivalry: The Contribution of René Girard.” *Culture and Organization* 9(4): 239-251.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1475955042000195427>

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ For a useful application of Girard’s scapegoating mechanism to analyze the Islamophobia prevalent during India’s Covid-19 surges (similarly to Sinophobia in the U.S.), see Tieri Silvia and Amit Ranjan (2023). “Covid-19, Communalism, and Islamophobia: India Facing the Disease.” *Social Identities* 29(1): 62-78.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2023.2207460>.

2000s France.⁶ Highlighting the discourses that accompanied France's anti-Roma policies in this period, political scientist Alexandra Nacu draws the distinction between processes of "silent marginalization" and "spotlight scapegoating." Noting times at which they presented the policies as more universal and other times when they named Romas as the intended targets, Nacu draws our attention to the importance of political context to explain why the government may choose one approach over the other. Extending Nacu's analysis, we can understand the discriminatory evictions undertaken in earlier periods of India's urban history as examples of "silent marginalization." Yet after Ayodhya and the 1992-1993 Bombay riots, the practice of "spotlight scapegoating" had become more politically advantageous and new scapegoating eviction logics were born.

Writing about the specific context of post-riot Bombay, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai uses the term "urban cleansing" to describe this type of political violence that brings together objectives of ethnic cleansing and urban renewal.⁷ Developing this idea from a richly detailed account of Bombay increasingly communalized and capitalistic popular neighborhoods, Appadurai emphasizes the particular confluence of forces in 1990s Bombay.⁸

In this macabre conjuncture, the most horrendously poor, crowded and degraded areas of the city were turned into battlegrounds of the poor against the poor, with the figure of the Muslim providing the link between scarce housing, illegal commerce, and national geography writ urban. In 1992-93, in a word, spectral housing met ethnic fear, and the Muslim body was the site of this terrifying negotiation.⁹

⁶ Nacu, Alexandra (2012). "From Silent Marginality to Spotlight Scapegoating? A Brief Case Study of France's Policy Towards the Roma," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38(8): 1323-1328. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2012.689192>

⁷ Arjun Appadurai (2000). "Spectral housing and urban cleansing: Notes on millennial Mumbai." *Public Culture* 12(3): 627-651. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/26210>.

⁸ This is also quite a personal essay, as Appadurai devotes significant attention to lamenting the loss of Bombay's distinct form of cosmopolitanism, contrasting the heightened communalism and capitalism of post-1992-1993 Bombay to his (nostalgic) recollections of growing up on the socially and economically diverse streets and alleyways of 1950s Bombay.

⁹ Appadurai 2000, p. 649.

But while India's scapegoating eviction logics came together in this moment, they soon spread to other Indian cities as ethno-nationalist and Hindutva politics further bolstered their political legitimacy over the past 30 years.¹⁰

Meanwhile, Bombay is not the only city in which these logics emerged. Before they were anti-Muslim, they were rooted in regional nationalist movements that had grown influential in the political vacuum left by the Congress' post-Emergency backlash. As regional nationalist parties, like the Marathi chauvinistic Shiv Sena in Bombay, but also Tamilian nationalist movements in Madras, and increasingly violent Kannadiga politics in Bangalore, assumed positions in state government and local administration in the early 1980s, urban governance grew increasingly discriminatory, with leaders employing both silent marginalization and spotlight scapegoating. After Ayodhya, many of these regional nationalist movements became incorporated into the trans-local Hindutva movement promoted by the Sangh Parivar. Since the early 2000s, the movement has transformed Indian politics, particularly in certain states and at the national level under the leadership of current Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Blending ethno-nationalist governing logics with the imperatives of urban renewal and broader neoliberal

¹⁰ While I have emphasized the demolition of Babri Masjid in December 1992 and the subsequent 1992-1993 Bombay riots as the critical events that reshaped the discourses, actions, and contestations around informal settlement evictions in this period, similar cases can be made for other events, such as the 1994 anti-Muslim protests in Bangalore in response to the airing of Urdu language news by the local Doordarshan station; the 2002 Gujarat pogroms; and even the airing of the Ramayana serialized epic on Doordarshan between January 1987 to July 1988, which have all been identified similarly as critical to the legitimation of Hindutva politics since the early 2000s. Meanwhile, rejecting the tendency to identify a singular event altogether, economist Ashoka Mody has characterized the development of these logics more incrementally, reflecting the "slow death" of India's secular democracy. (See Ashoka Mody (2024) "The Slow Death of India's Secular Democracy," Project Syndicate, Accessed online <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/modi-hindutva-hindu-nationalism-is-making-india-a-theocracy-by-ashoka-mody-2024-01> (1/4/24).) In contrast to the governing logics discussed in previous chapters, which were shaped by more of definitive ruptures, India's scapegoating logics can be better understood as the product of several smaller, more localized events (or nonevents) that have differentially shaped housing politics across urban India, as well as by the broader, more global, legitimation of ethno-nationalist politics over this period.

urban politics (as discussed in the next chapter), scapegoating evictions have become regular features of urban governance in Ahmedabad and Delhi.

Ayodhya as Critical Event

In December 1992 and January 1993, communal violence ravaged many Indian cities, killing around 2,000 people and injuring thousands more.¹¹ Tens of thousands of people living in informal settlements lost homes and livelihoods in the collective violence that targeted Islamic religious and cultural sites and properties belonging to Muslim city residents. The first wave of violence broke out on December 6, 1993 in the North Indian city of Ayodhya, where 150,000 Hindu pilgrims, calling themselves *kar sevaks*, or volunteers, had been gathered and whipped into a frenzy by Hindu nationalist leaders from the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and the BJP.¹² The Ayodhya gathering and subsequent violence were culminating events in the Hindu nationalists' Ram Janmabhoomi campaign, a movement launched in 1948 to construct a Hindu temple on the site where many Hindus believe the god Ram was born – and where the Babri Masjid had stood for more than four centuries.¹³ The movement escalated in 1989, when BJP President L.K. Advani set off on a *yathratra* or chariot procession, driving around India in a painted jeep to build support for the idea that a Ram Temple should be built in Ayodhya – and only in Ayodhya (“*mandir wohin banayenge*”).¹⁴

¹¹ UNHCR (n.d.) *India: Chronology of Event: February 1991 – November 1994*. Accessed online at <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/irbc/1995/en/96426> (1/2/25).

¹² Khilnani 2017; Thomas Blom Hansen (1999). *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in India*. Princeton University Press.

¹³ Sayad Serajul Islam (1997). “The Tragedy of the Babri Masjid: An Expression of Militant Hindu Fundamentalism in India,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 17(2): 345–351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602009708716382> More recent culminating events in this movement include the 2023 Indian Supreme Court’s ruling that the Ram Temple could legally be constructed and the subsequent construction of the temple in 2024.

¹⁴ Islam 1997, p. 346.

Legal cases were filed, asking the courts to decide which place of worship could be located on this site in the religiously diverse city in Uttar Pradesh.

A court judgement was due to be delivered in mid-December 1992, and movement leaders encouraged *kar sevaks* to gather in Ayodhya. Tens of thousands arrived by the beginning of the month with *ram shilas*, or bricks inscribed with “Sri Ram,” for which they paid large sums of money, that would be used to build the Ram temple.¹⁵ Crowds grew energized by the chants and political speeches calling for the removal of the Babri Masjid. On the morning of Sunday December 6, a small group pushed past the barricades and others soon followed, spending the day dismantling the 16th century mosque with ropes and pickaxes.¹⁶ As reported the following day in the *Times of India*, “The deed was done by 5pm when all three domes of the shrine had fallen.”¹⁷ Crowds soon spilled out from the mosque complex and attacked Muslim-owned businesses and homes across the city, killing 17 people and damaging more than 250 shops and houses.¹⁸ By late afternoon, violence had spread to other cities in Uttar Pradesh and around the country. Even after the central government called a nation-wide *bandh*, or shutdown, violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims engulfed Bombay, Calcutta, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, and many smaller cities, lasting days, or in the case of Bombay, for nearly six weeks over two

¹⁵ Rajgopal 2001.

¹⁶ MG Gupta and Vijay Jung Thapa (1992) “*Kar Sevaks* destroy Babri Masjid: President’s rule in U.P. Assembly dissolved, Imam appeals for peace,” *Times of India* Dec 07, 1992. Pg. 1; Ayush Tiwari (2024). “Babri Masjid Demolition: ‘I kept smashing the dome’: Four *kar sevaks* recall Babri demolition, ahead of Ram Temple opening,” *Scroll*, January 24, 2024, Accessed online at <https://scroll.in/article/1062449/i-kept-smashing-the-dome-four-kar-sevaks-recall-babri-demolition-ahead-of-ram-temple-opening> (1/1/25); Omar Rashid (2017). “What happened that December night in Ayodhya,” *The Hindu*, December 10, 2017. Accessed online at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/what-happened-that-december-night-in-ayodhya/article21383162.ece> (1/1/25).

¹⁷ Gupta and Thapa 1992.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; Rashid 2017.

distinct waves.¹⁹ But while the destruction of the Babri Masjid was the immediate trigger, or what political scientist Ashutosh Varshney calls the “exogenous shock,” communal tensions had been building in these cities for decades, reflecting emergent and increasingly violent ethno-nationalist urban politics.²⁰

These politics were firmly entrenched by this time in Bombay, the city that experienced the worst of the Ayodhya rioting in December 1992 and January 1993. The Shiv Sena party and its charismatic leader Bal Thackeray had spent the previous decade refining a Bombay-specific version of ethno-nationalism, and the city was primed for violence. Clashes began at about 2:30pm, once news reached that the Babri Masjid was falling.²¹ The violence started first in Bombay’s working-class neighborhoods and slum communities and spread out from there.²² Since the Emergency, residents of these communities had been key sites of political mobilization by political parties, movement organizations, and advocacy groups, many organized on the basis of religion and community. Even at the most local level, politics had become communalized, as the Shiv Sena recruited a seemingly endless supply of angry young Marathi Hindus into neighborhood-level committees or *shakas* that operated like street gangs.²³ In the iconic neighborhood of Dharavi, gangs attacked early in the morning of December 7.²⁴ As a

¹⁹ “Widespread riots rock country: 220 killed in aftermath.” *Times of India*, Dec 08, 1992, pg. 1; “Mixed response to bandh,” *Times of India*, Dec 9, 1992, pg. 1; “Keeping the peace,” *Times of India*, Dec 20, 1992, pg. 11.

²⁰ Ashutosh Varshney (2003). *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. Yale University Press.

²¹ The Indian People’s Human Rights Tribunal (1993). *The People’s Verdict: Citizen Inquiry into Bombay/Mumbai Riots of 1992-1993*. Accessed online at <https://archive.org/details/the-peoples-verdict/page/11/mode/2up> (1/1/25); B.N. Srikrishna (1998). *Report of the Srikrishna Commission appointed for inquiry into the riots at Mumbai during Dec. 1992 & Jan. 1993. Vol. 1 & 2*. Accessed online at <https://archive.org/details/sochara.5640.reportofsrikrish0000srik/page/n17/mode/2up> (1/1/25).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Thomas Blom Hansen (2001). *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay*. Princeton University Press; “How gangsters gain by communalization,” *Times of India*, Mar 19, 1993, pg. 3.

²⁴ Deepak Mehta and Roma Chatterji (2002). “Boundaries, Names, Alterities: A Case Study of a ‘Communal Riot’ in Dharavi, Bombay.” In Veena Das (et al.) *Violence, Social Suffering, and Recovery*. University of California Press.

Muslim resident of Dharavi's predominantly Muslim Mukund Nagar recounted in a focus group interview a few years later:

The trouble started on the seventh morning (7 December 1992). Some two to three hundred people had surrounded Mukund Nagar. They started burning. We decided it was better to die fighting than to become [sacrificial] goats. We organized ourselves to meet the threat. We put out the fire and made sure our women and children were safe.²⁵

Battles like this raged across the city, particularly in the neighborhoods of Mahim, Jogeshwari, and Antop Hill.²⁶ By December 10, the violence had largely been quelled, due in part to extensive force used by the Bombay police, mostly against Muslim communities.²⁷

A few weeks later, another round of violence broke out. This time, the attacks were more coordinated, carried out as an organized campaign by the Shiv Sena party in retaliation for the Hindu casualties the previous month.²⁸ According to the findings of the Srikrishna Commission, which was established in 1993 to investigate the causes of the Bombay riots, the Shiv Sena was singularly responsible for the January violence.²⁹ The report explains:

The Shiv Sainiks mobilized themselves for retaliating against the Muslims. The shakas in different jurisdictional areas turned into centers of local commands. The attack on Muslims by the Shiv Sainiks were mounted with military precision, with lists of establishments and voter's lists in hand.³⁰

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.8501074.9>; Kalpana Sharma (2000). *Rediscovering Dharavi: Stories from Asia's Largest Slum*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India.

²⁵ Mehta and Chatterji 2002, p. 209.

²⁶ The Indian People's Human Rights Tribunal 1993. Rajdeep Sardesai (1992). "Anatomy of a riot" *Times of India*, Dec 13, 1992; pg. 15.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Bal Thackeray had given an interview to *Time Magazine* in January 1993, in which he admitted that their goal was "to teach Muslims a lesson." (Srikrishna 1998, p.102). For more details on this point, see Rajdeep Sardesai (1992). "Where were they when the city was burning?" *Times of India*, Dec 12, 1992, pg. 3.

²⁹ Srikrishna 1998, p.21; Priyanka Kakodkar (1998). "Govt.'s stand on Srikrishna panel report draws flak," *Times of India*, Apr 24, 1998; pg. 5.

³⁰ Srikrishna 1998, p.21.

With the violence targeting homes and businesses belonging to Muslims, these incidents resulted in significant displacement and dispossession by Muslim Bombayites, along with the deaths of more than 1000 people.³¹

In the weeks and months that followed, Bombay's rights-based organizations and community groups came together to establish *mohala* or peace committees to rebuild and rehouse the displaced.³² In activities reminiscent of Bombay's post-Partition refugee relief efforts, the Maharashtra government appointed a Secretary of Relief and Rehabilitation and appealed to citizen groups to raise funds and pitch in.³³ One group that took an active role was Majlis, a newly formed collective of feminist lawyers, architects, and activists who had raised more than 300,000 rupees in relief and worked closely with government officials to secure building materials and official permissions.³⁴ These efforts were opposed and actively undermined by political leaders with the Shiv Sena, working both in state government and the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC). In March 1993, a Shiv Sena Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) Gajanan Kritkar, lobbied in the assembly for action to be taken "against encroachments by the minority."³⁵ At the same time, articles and editorials were published in the

³¹ John F. Burns (1994). "Riot Scars are Gone, but Bombay is still healing," *New York Times*, April 17, 1994. Accessed online <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/04/17/world/riot-scars-are-gone-but-bombay-is-still-healing.html> (1/2/25).

³² "BMC warns settlers of demolition," *Times of India*, Mar 28, 1993, pg. 5.

³³ Gunvanthi Balaram (1993). "Red tape blocks reconstruction," *Times of India*, Feb 28, 1993, pg. 5; "60 huts of riot victims demolished," *Times of India*, April 4, 1993, pg. 7.

³⁴ Majlis, which was formed in 1991, eventually came to focus more on artistic and cultural production. According to its founding members, the choice to name the organization Majlis was "prompted by the desire to popularize a word that represents a broad Asian concept for collective / gathering and to restore it in its secular glory — Mejlis means council in Arabic; Majlis is site of public culture in Bengali; baithak in Punjabi; a parlor / salon in elite Arab households; parliament in Iran; elected and administrative units in UAE, Malaysia, Maldives and so on." Majlis (n.d.) "Majlis Cultural Centre: 1990-2016." Accessed online at <https://www.majlisculture.in/> (1/3/25).

³⁵ "Motorman assaulted; WR locals delayed," *Times of India*, May 14, 1993, pg. 5.

Shiv Sena newspaper (or “mouthpiece”) *Saamna*, decrying that “Muslim encroachments” had recently been appearing around the city.³⁶

On March 26, 1993, the Shiv Sena organized a march to the settlements of Rajunagar and Indiranagar, where the mostly Muslim victims of the riots were working with Majlis to reconstruct houses in the western neighborhoods along the Mahim-Bandra pipeline. March leaders demanded that the BMC demolish the “new encroachments.”³⁷ The following morning, a BMC demolition squad arrived, but activists working with Majlis, including Madhushree Dutta, Neera Adarkar, and Flavia Agnes, successfully stayed the eviction. According to a *Times of India* piece published at the time, the activists maintained that “the government had declared that the *status quo* could be restored in slums ravaged during the riots and had even provided some of the building materials for the project.”³⁸ While eviction that day was avoided, the success was short lived. On April 3, demolition squads from both the BMC and the District Collector arrived in the nearby settlement of Rajiv Nagar, which the *Times of India* described as a “predominantly Muslim basti.”³⁹ Ninety newly built homes were demolished in the daylong action that was overseen by more than 100 police officers, the local Shiv Sena corporator Milind Vaidya, and photographers from *Saamna* who were granted special permission to document the eviction.⁴⁰ Describing the explicitly targeted nature of the eviction campaign orchestrated against Muslims,

³⁶ “60 huts of riot victims demolished,” *Times of India*, April 4, 1993, pg. 7. *Saamna* and media campaigns more broadly were key components of Shiv Sena organizing in the late 1980s. A trained journalist, Bal Thackeray was a particularly astute propagandist.

³⁷ “BMC warns settlers of demolition,” *Times of India*, Mar 28, 1993, pg. 5. It is worth noting that none of the articles quoting Shiv Sena leaders at the time suggest that “eligibility” or other legal language was used. Sainiks appear to have exhibited discursive discipline by referring to these only as “encroachments,” “Muslim encroachments,” or “encroachments by the minority,” which is remarkable for the use of such explicitly ethnic targeting relative to earlier eras in which such language would have been used only in more private settings.

³⁸ “BMC warns settlers of demolition,” *Times of India*, Mar 28, 1993, pg. 5.

³⁹ “60 huts of riot victims demolished,” *Times of India*, Apr 4, 1993, pg. 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

the *Times of India* notes that, “Ironically, 35 huts belonging to Hindus were also razed.” In a statement that suggest the activists’ surrender, Majlis described the new eviction logics revealed by the action:

Today we realized what a riot is. We have seen the aftereffects. Today we saw the bias against the slumdweller and the Muslims at work. The riot isn’t over. The [Shiv] Sena rules the city.⁴¹

While Muslims and other minoritized groups had long been victims of eviction campaigns, never had their targeting been so explicit and so widely acknowledged by the journalists reporting on them, activists contesting them, government officials calling for them, and administrators carrying them out.

Anti-Migrant to Anti-Muslim Evictions in Bombay

Traces of these emergent eviction logics can be discerned in the July 1981 eviction campaign ordered by Chief Minister Antulay against Bombay’s pavement dwellers, which resulted in the famous Olga Tellis case. Antulay claimed the campaign was necessary to address the menace of encroachment, while remaining silent about the groups he held responsible for it. But with inter-state buses arriving alongside the bulldozers and evictees instructed to “return to their villages,” the anti-migrant character of the campaign was discernible and called out at the time by some journalists and opposition parties. Reporting on the incident for the *Times of India*, journalist Tyrone D’Souza drew attention to the campaign’s disproportionate impact on Bombay’s migrant workers and those working in lower caste occupations.⁴²

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² The author, Tyrone D’Souza, was among a growing number of activist journalists reporting on evictions from a social justice perspective in the aftermath of the Emergency. Exemplified by Olga Tellis, activist journalists became prominent voices among the middle class left in this period. Pieces published in the *Times of India* by these authors received bylines for their pieces, which had not been common practice up to this point.

The hut-dwellers hailed from Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, New Delhi, and Maharashtra itself, and consisted of rag-pickers, cobblers, potters, plumbers, repairmen, and smalltime traders. The common refrain was that they had migrated to the city ten to 15 years ago and had neither a house nor land in their in their places of origin on which to fall back on except to scrounge for a living in this metropolis of opportunities.⁴³

While rights-based organizations like PUCL and CPDR filed legal claims alleging a more universal denial of rights, other opposition groups, including the Ambedkarist Republic Party of India (RPI), emphasized the campaign's discriminatory character.⁴⁴ In July 1981, the RPI sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Gandhi, requesting that an inquiry be made into the "unconstitutional deportation of hutment-dwellers from Bombay by the Antulay government." The memo noted that many of the hutment-dwellers were "from Tamil Nadu and they were from 'Adidravidar' (Harijan) communities," suggesting that South Indian Dalits were particular targets in the eviction campaign.⁴⁵

Since the Shiv Sena's formation in the late 1960s, Bombay's South Indian migrants had served as a recurring scapegoat for the party. Despite the Shiv Sena's anti-Muslim organizing during the 1992-1993 riots, its roots lay in a version of Marathi ethno-nationalism that positioned Tamils as the main mimetic rivals of Marathi Bombayites, and main cause of their economic hardship.⁴⁶ In an early programmatic statement for the party, titled "Shiv Sena Speaks" published in 1967, Thackeray employed several classic scapegoating tropes to depict Tamils as

⁴³ D'Souza, Tyrone (1981). "Hundreds at mercy of wind and rain," *Times of India*, Jul 25, 1981, pg. 1.

⁴⁴ But even as journalists and anti-caste organizations worked to shine a spotlight on the discriminatory character of Antulay's 1981 eviction campaign, it has been remembered more for its legal framing around a universal, constitutionally guaranteed, right to life, due to its association with the Olga Tellis case.

⁴⁵ "RPI moves PM for probe: demolitions," *Times of India*, Jul 30, 1981, pg. 4.

⁴⁶ As described by Hansen (2001), in the early years of the Shiv Sena, Bal Thackeray published lists of names of executives in well-known firms and public undertakings in his magazine *Marmik* to show how few Maharashtrian names figured among them. He claimed that about 70% of these positions were held by South Indians. His movement demanded that 80% of jobs in the organized sector be reserved for Marathi speakers.

“barbaric blood-thirsty communists, aligned with larger interests of the Gujarati city elite in a secret parallel government.”⁴⁷ Relaying an incident in which victims of a railway accident were supposedly robbed by “bloodthirsty slum dwellers” and communists, Thackeray explained that “South Indian vultures from nearby huts swooped over the injured and dying women lying in agony, cut their limbs with sickles to snatch their ornaments.”⁴⁸ Using incendiary discourses, violent imagery, and outlandish storytelling, the Shiv Sena has helped dehumanize Bombay’s slum residents and legitimate violence against them.

Thackeray did not simply advocate for the eviction of migrant slum residents but called for the removal of non-Marathis from the city altogether. Citing efforts underway in Assam to deport Bangladeshi refugees who had come in the wake of the 1971 liberation war, Thackeray announced in a May 1985 speech that “newcomers like Bangladeshis and Biharis and criminal elements from Uttar Pradesh will have no place in Bombay.”⁴⁹ He accepted that “those who were born and lived in this city for generations will not be asked to go away so long as they respected the life and culture of the Marathi-speaking people,” but ultimately promoted a nativist vision of the city.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, as the Shiv Sena was working to transform itself from a city-specific movement to a state-wide political party, it shifted its scapegoated groups to appeal to Maharashtra’s rural voters.⁵¹ Increasingly, Thackeray drew on longstanding narratives of criminalization, speaking out against illegal immigrants and violent criminals. In a speech delivered in October 1985, at one of the first state-wide party events held outside of Bombay,

⁴⁷ Hansen 2001, p.50.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Hansen 2001, p.50.

⁴⁹ “City for Marathi-lovers,” *Times of India*, May 11, 1985, pg. 9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Hasen 2001.

Thackeray raised concerns “about one *lakh* (hundred thousand) Pakistani and Bangladeshis [who] had come over the last few years illegally.”⁵²

Calling for the deportation of “illegal Bangladeshis,” the Shiv Sena became both increasingly anti-Muslim and pro-eviction in the 1990s. Both shifts were solidified during the 1992-93 riots and the actions following, which brought together the BJP’s showy brand of Hindu nationalism with the Shiv Sena’s nativistic urban politics to carry out residential evictions rooted in anti-Muslim scapegoating.⁵³ The alliance served the electoral interests of both parties, who together secured a majority of seats in the next election and formed a coalition government in March 1995. While the Shiv Sena’s new affinity for Hindutva helps explain its electoral success outside of Bombay, the support it garnered in the city in 1995 is rooted, at least in part, in its deeper embrace of electoral eviction logics.⁵⁴ Before 1992-93, the Shiv Sena had said little about evictions, either advocating for them or against them. At times, they participated with other opposition parties in *morchas* against the government’s eviction actions, but never in a lead role.⁵⁵ The party’s anti-migrant stance set them in opposition to the city’s informal settlements, but Thackeray was more concerned about job opportunities than housing issues. Even so, in an interview years later, he commended Antulay “as being the only leader who had the ‘guts’ to demolish slum and pavement dwellings during his brief 18-month regime.”⁵⁶ But by the early

⁵² “Shiv Sena to meet at Mahad,” *Times of India*, Oct 31, 1985, pg. 6.

⁵³ Rajdeep Sardesai (1992). “Anatomy of a Riot,” *Times of India*, Dec 13, 1992, pg. 15.

⁵⁴ Jayant Lele (1995). “Saffronisation of Shiv Sena: Political Economy of City, State and Nation,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 30(25): 1520-1528. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4402914>; Gérard Heuzé-Brigant (1999). *Populism and the workers movement: Shiv Sena and labor in Mumbai*. South Asia 22(2): 119-148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856409908723368>; Katzenstein, Mary Fainsod, Uday Singh Mehta, and Usha Thakkar. “The Rebirth of Shiv Sena: The Symbiosis of Discursive and Organizational power,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 56, no. 2 (1997): 371-390. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2646242>.

⁵⁵ “Protest against slum demolition,” *Times of India*, May 11, 1994, Pg. 5.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Darryl D’Monte (1988) “No Bantustans in Bombay: Democracy Alone Will Work,” *Times of India*, Nov 18, 1988, pg. 8.

1990s, housing politics and evictions assumed a more prominent place on the Shiv Sena's platform.

In August 1990, Bal Thackeray made a bold proposal for a new housing scheme that would construct 400,000 apartment units and give them, free of charge, to four million slum dwellers.⁵⁷ But for as bold as Thackeray's plan was on hubris, his plan was weak on details. He referred vaguely to financing through cross-subsidization and use of developer incentives like increased floor-space index (FSI), but focused more on program's size and populist appeal. It was dismissed at the time by an array of critics that included former Municipal Commissioner S. S. Tinaikar; Kisan Mehta, head of the Save Bombay Committee middle class civic association; and Arputham Jockin, president of the National Federation of Slum Dwellers. The description that journalist Tyronne D'Souza offered of Jockin's reaction – as “very unenthusiastic about Thackeray's ‘grandiose’ scheme if the past record of the Shiv Sena is any indication” – effectively captured many of the reactions.⁵⁸ While the Shiv Sena's apparent shift toward vote-bank politics was viewed with skepticism, the exclusionary and scapegoating language that eventually framed the program was quite consistent with its “past record.” Little more was said about Thackeray's proposal for a few years, but he revived his call for “free houses for four million slum dwellers” in the lead up to the 1995 election. But in post-Ayodhya and post-riot Bombay, he was now explicit that the program would be unavailable to “illegal Bangladeshis,” signaling eligibility criteria based on religion, migrant status, citizenship, and participation in criminal activity.

⁵⁷ Tyronne D'Souza (1990). “Thackeray's housing plan ‘unrealistic’,” *Times of India*. August 11, 1990, pg. 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

In a March 1995 celebration following the swearing in of Maharashtra's first Shiv Sena Chief Minister, Manohar Joshi, Bal Thackeray delivered a "rousing speech," in which he warned that:

the government would not permit new migrants into Bombay once the alliance had fulfilled its campaign promise of building houses for 40 lakh slum dwellers. As a first step, no fresh ration cards would be issued, he said. Bangladeshis who did not vacate Bombay on their own would be thrown out.⁵⁹

In the coming weeks, as one of their first acts in office – after officially changing the city's name to its Marathi name "Mumbai" – was to launch a campaign to "throw out" "illegal Bangladeshis."⁶⁰ A *Times of India* piece published two weeks after the inauguration describes a new special branch established by the new government "under the guise of flushing out Bangladeshis." Remarking on the fairly small number of Bombay residents born in Bangladesh, which it estimated at about 25,000, the reporter Velly Thevar describes several incidents in which other migrants were mistaken for Bangladeshis and deportations were initiated.

Last week, a south Indian woman from P D'Mello Road was branded as a Bangladeshi and was almost packed away. Timely intervention from a local politician saved her. Many other Biharis in the city who come from border districts like Kishangunj resemble Bangladeshis and hence are more vulnerable to 'deportation.'⁶¹

He goes on to explain that most of Bombay's Bangladeshi residents came after the 1971 Indo-Pak war and that those living in "any of the 28 Bangladeshi settlements in Bombay" are now taking steps to appear Hindu, noting that they "now wear a huge bindi and Sindhoor before they go to bed to escape the public eye." The piece quotes a resident of a Bangladeshi community who asserted that "Hindus whether they are Bangladeshi or otherwise are always spared."⁶² This

⁵⁹ "No ration cards for fresh migrants: Thackeray," *Times of India*, Mar 15, 1995. pg 1.

⁶⁰ Velly Thevar (1995). "Fear grips Bangladeshis: In the Name of Aliens," *Times of India*, March 31, 1995, pg. A1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

special branch received no further coverage in the *Times of India*, but soon new eviction campaigns were carried out on the premise of addressing the “illegal Bangladeshi” problem.

Beginning one Friday evening in June 1997, “as rains pelted the Babrekar Nagar slum in Malvani,” the BMC initiated an eviction campaign that demolished 4000 homes in a two-day action.⁶³ Legal activists, including representatives from the Human Rights Law Network, worked to secure a stay order, on the grounds that “the supreme court has forbidden slum demolitions during the monsoons,” although the activists quickly admitted that “the ruling is rarely adhered to.”⁶⁴ A *Times of India* piece describing the campaign attributed the government’s decision to evict to a *Saamna* article published a few days earlier, which reported that “the slum was unauthorized and occupied by a large number of Bangladeshi immigrants.”⁶⁵ A few days later, Thackeray repeated this claim and, soon after, the demolition squads arrived in Babrekar Nagar. The article notes that the residents did not appear to be from Bangladesh and that everyone interviewed for the story was originally from Uttar Pradesh. But this was politically irrelevant, as evictions continued to be carried out through the discursive logics of ethno-nationalist scapegoating.

Kannada Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Scapegoating in 1990s Bangalore

Ethno-nationalist urban politics also took hold after the Emergency in other Indian cities, including in Madras and Bangalore. Regional nationalisms have their roots in the 1910s, when movements promoting regional language and culture grew increasingly nationalistic, particularly

⁶³ “Demolition leaves a trail of misery,” *Times of India*, Jun 15, 1997, pg. 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

in southern India.⁶⁶ During the independence struggle, regional nationalisms played a secondary role to more unifying, and strategically useful visions of pan-Indian nationalism.⁶⁷ After Independence/Partition, these groups pushed for the reorganization of Indian states along linguistic lines; and, between 1956 and 1960, seven new states were carved out from the old administrative territories of the British Raj, including Marathi-speaking Maharashtra, Tamil-speaking Tamil Nadu, Kannada-speaking Karnataka, and Gujarati-speaking Gujarat.⁶⁸ As regional nationalist movements continued to push for the primacy of local language and culture throughout the 1960s and 1970s, they became enmeshed in new, increasingly violent electoral logics, shaped by locally specific configurations of caste and power.⁶⁹ In Bombay, Marathi nationalism took shape under the Shiv Sena's distinctive brand of anti-communist nativism; while in Madras, it was more explicitly anti-caste, rooted in an anti-Brahmin celebration of Dravidian culture.⁷⁰

Bangalore's emerging ethno-nationalist urban politics, like Bombay's, were rooted in nativist anxieties and anti-migrant scapegoating. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, large cities were attracting waves of rural migrants, particularly from drought-ridden regions in Tamil-

⁶⁶ Asghar Ali Engineer (2002). *Competing Nationalisms in South Asia: Essays for Asghar Ali Engineer*. Orient Blackswan; Janaki Nair (2007). *The Promise of the Metropolis: Bangalore's Twentieth Century*. Oxford University Press; Gail Omvedt (1982). "Tamil National Question." *Economic and Political Weekly* 17(43): 1734–36.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4371500>.

⁶⁷ Khilnani 2017; Ali Engineer 2002.

⁶⁸ Ali Engineer 2002; Marshall Windmiller (1956). "The Politics of States Reorganization in India: The Case of Bombay," *Far Eastern Survey*, 25(9): 129-143. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3024387>; A. M. Rajashekhariah, P. S. Jayaramu, and Hemalata Jayaraj (1987). "Karnatka: Ideology and Politics," *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 48(4): 575–96. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41855340>.

⁶⁹ Ali Engineer 2002; Marshall Windmiller (1956). "The Politics of States Reorganization in India: The Case of Bombay," *Far Eastern Survey*, 25(9): 129-143. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3024387>; A. M. Rajashekhariah, P. S. Jayaramu, and Hemalata Jayaraj (1987). "Karnatka: Ideology and Politics," *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 48(4): 575–96. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41855340>.

⁷⁰ In contrast to analyses of national and state politics, the impact that India's regional national and language politics had on urban politics in this period remains underexamined. A useful exception is Suhas Palshikar (2004). "Shiv Sena: A Tiger with Many Faces?" *Economic and Political Weekly* 39(14/15) (2004): 1497–1507. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4414867>.

and Telegu-speaking areas, and Tamil migrants proved effective scapegoats. Describing the scapegoating logics becoming prevalent 1980s Bangalore, P.A. Sebastian, a political reporter for *Economic and Political Weekly*, explained,

The ruling classes do it because it is easy to arouse the masses on emotive issues like religion and language which are deeply ingrained in their psyche. This directs anger and frustration of the people against an unreal enemy and diverts their attention from the failures and misdeeds of the rulers. The undercurrent of the propaganda was that the Kanadigas were poor and unemployed because of the presence of the Tamils. Once they were removed from the scene, there would be employment and prosperity. So the poor Tamils became the enemy.⁷¹

In less urbanized parts of Karnataka with smaller Tamil populations, pro-Kannada organizing remained opposed to the cultural hegemony of North Indian Hindi; but, in Bangalore, pro-Kannada politics became decidedly anti-Tamil.

Outside of electoral politics, Kannada nationalism thrived in sites of cultural production, particularly in music and dance,⁷² and particularly in the Kannada film industry.⁷³ Cultural organizations, such as those built around Kannada film star Raj Kumar, became sites for promoting Kannada language and culture – and, at times, vehicles for anti-Tamil violence.⁷⁴ In January 1984, the Raj Kumar Abhimanighala Sangha (Fan Association) perpetrated widespread violence in protest of a proposal to loosen Kannada language requirements for government employees.⁷⁵ Two people were stabbed to death and Tamil communities experienced extensive

⁷¹ P. A. Sebastian (1992). “Cauvery Water Dispute and State Violence,” 27(27): 1371-1372 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4398580>.

⁷² For a rich analysis of the ways that regional-caste politics have shaped urban cultural production, see Diwakar, Pranathi (2022). *Resounding Caste: Practices of Distinction, Urban Segregation, and Musical Politics in Chennai, India*. Order No. 29320649 The University of Chicago, 2022. United States -- Illinois: ProQuest. Web. 9 Jan. 2025.

⁷³ Raghavendra, M.K. (2011). *Bipolar Identity: Region, Nation, and the Kannada Language Film*. Oxford University Press.

⁷⁴ Nair, Janaki (1994). “Kannada and Politics of State Protection.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 29(44): 2853-2853. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4401962>.

⁷⁵ “2 die in Bangalore bandh violence,” *Times of India*, Jan 19, 1984, pg. 1.

property damage in the day-long bout of anti-migrant violence.⁷⁶ At the time, the event received widespread condemnation, with Chief Minister Hege declaring to Kannada-speaking Bangaloreans that “we are one country.” A *Times of India* journalist reporting on the events reminded readers “that there were more Tamil and Telugu-speaking people than Kannadigas in Bangalore, till the state was reorganized in 1956.”⁷⁷

Kannada nationalism grew increasingly more vocal and more violent during the second half of the 1980s, coming to a head in December 1991, when the critical event of Bangalore’s anti-Tamil “Cauvery riots” helped reshape Bangalore’s scapegoating eviction logics. The “exogenous shock” that sparked the violence was a *bandh* called by the Karnataka Government on December 13 to protest an order from national Cauvery Water Tribunal that directed Karnataka to release water from the Cauvery River to drought-affected Tamil Nadu.⁷⁸ Quickly, a conflict over water rights devolved into an anti-immigrant riot that targeted Tamil migrants and Tamil-owned properties in Bangalore and other urbanized parts of Karnataka.⁷⁹ Twenty-two people were killed in the violence that was severest in western Bangalore, where whole settlements housing Tamil migrants were burned to the ground.⁸⁰ In an article describing the targeted character of the attacks, and suggesting the complicity of Karnataka’s political leaders, a reporter explained:

The established Tamilian localities in Bangalore’s erstwhile cantonment area were totally peaceful. Violence plagued only five of Bangalore’s 12 assembly constituencies, nearly

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ “Normalcy returns to Bangalore,” Jan 20, 1984, pg 1.

⁷⁸ Sebastian, P. A. (1992). “Cauvery Water Dispute and State Violence,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 27(27): 1371-1372. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4398580>.

⁷⁹ Nair, Janaki (1994). “Lurching to the Right? Karnataka and the BJP,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29(53): 3308-3309. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4402187>.

⁸⁰ Nair 1994; Nair, Janaki (1999). *Battles for Bangalore: Reterritorialising the City*. Sephis.

all harboring Tamilian dominated slums skirting the huge Uttarahalli assembly constituency of Kannada and culture minister Mr. S. Ramesh.⁸¹

Reflecting the complex interplay of language, class, geography, and political power, the city's informal settlements had become a main target of anti-Tamil violence.⁸²

After more than a decade of heightened middle-class anxieties about “encroachments” and unchecked city growth, reflected in dozens of editorials lamenting Bangalore’s lost status as India’s “garden city” – with many mentioning the predominantly Tamilian composition of the city’s growing slums – Bangalore’s ethno-politics were increasingly taking shaping as eviction logics.⁸³ An article published at the time vividly described the targeting of informal settlements in the Cauvery violence:

The century old dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over sharing the waters of the Cauvery River should have little to do with the squalid squatter colony of Ashokpuram in Bangalore. Life in the teeming slum on the outer fringes of Karnataka’s capital centered around just one theme – survival. The coolies and laborers, mostly impoverished Tamilian migrants who inhabited Ashokpuram’s nearly 400 flimsy shacks never had any prospect of getting the Cauvery’s water from their communal taps. On Friday the 13th, that fact did not matter to the marauding mobs as the ravage Ashokpuram and other slums in western Bangalore. Today, blackened shells of one-room huts stand as mute testimony to an orgy the likes of which have never been seen in India’s sleepest metropolis.⁸⁴

Ethno-nationalist scapegoating was, meanwhile, supported by Karnataka’s political leadership, which had earlier distanced itself from anti-Tamil violence. During the Cauvery riots, Karnataka’s Chief Minister Sarekoppa Bangarappa seemed unfazed by the anti-Tamil character of the violence. An article published at the time described him as “unconcerned with the rioting

⁸¹ “In troubled waters,” *Times of India*, December 22, 1991, pg. 11.

⁸² Nair 1999.

⁸³ See for example, “Can Bangalore be saved?” *Times of India*, Oct 23, 1982, pg. 7; “Lakes Dying in ‘Garden City,’” *Times of India*, Oct 15, 1985, pg. 17; Karkia, Bachi J. (1988). “Towards User-Friendly Cities: Adjusting to A New Identity,” *Times of India*, Dec 27, 1988, pg. 12; Kusumakar, H. (1976). “Curbing growth of Monster Cities: Prof. Srinivas’ plea,” *Times of India*, Aug 28, 1976, pg. 8.

⁸⁴ “In troubled waters,” *Times of India*, December 22, 1991, pg. 11.

and his reaction was blasé,” noting that he was while playing his daily game of badminton during the interview.⁸⁵ Asked specifically about large numbers of Tamil migrants fleeing the city, with many having been made homeless in the riots and others fearing further bouts of violence, he insisted that “all this business of Tamilians leaving is false. There is no question of (an) exodus.”⁸⁶ Historian Janaka Nair, meanwhile, has highlighted the complicity of Karnataka’s government in the Cauvery violence, asserting that Chief Minister Bangarappa “found it politically expedient to embrace an anti-Tamil stance during the Cauvery riots.”⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the state’s complicity was also reflected the non-responsiveness of the police, who did little to stop the violence. A *Times of India* piece explained:

When the gazetting of the Cauvery water tribunal’s interim award was announced on Wednesday, it was clear that passions were going to run high. Yet, when miscreants took advantage of the procession taken out by the Raj Kumar Fans Association and hurled a barrage of stones at a slum colony, there was little resistance by the police.⁸⁸

The limited support for the Tamil victims of the Cauvery violence continued over the next year, as community-groups and rights-based organizations, like Women’s Voice at the Bangalore Tamil Sangham, pushed for rehabilitation and new housing to be built in the original communities.⁸⁹ Alleging that the government was moving displaced riot victims to resettlement camps outside of the city, the activists claimed that their recommendations were “ignored by the government and no further action was taken in regard to the rehabilitation of victims.”⁹⁰

Meanwhile, amid nation-wide mobilizations by Hindu nationalist groups and political parties like the VHP and BJP, Bangalore’s ethno-politics were becoming increasingly anti-

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Nair 1999.

⁸⁸ “Karnataka police ignore lawlessness,” *Times of India*, December 17, 1991, pg. 9.

⁸⁹ “Aid sought for victims,” *Times of India*, Dec 26, 1992; pg. 7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Muslim.⁹¹ Initially, the links between Kannada activists and Sangh Parivar organizations like the VHP and BJP remained tenuous, even as language activists increasingly made anti-Muslim statements and took steps to suppress the contributions that Muslim writers and speakers made to Kannada literature and culture.⁹² After Ayodhya, the shift from purely linguistic concerns to a more communal agenda was reflected in October 1994, when Kannada activists carried violence out against Bangalore's Muslim community. Responding to the introduction of a 10-minute Urdu news bulletin on the state-run television station, Doordarshan, Kannada activists carried out targeted violence against Muslims and Muslim-owned properties.⁹³ Over several days of rioting, Kannada linguistic organizations like Kannada Shakti Kendra collaborated with Hindu nationalist groups to carry out anti-Muslim violence, particularly in the western parts of Bangalore that were sites of violence against informally housed Tamilians three years earlier.⁹⁴ As in Bombay, regional nationalist groups had grown increasingly aligned with a national-level politics of Hindutva, linking language, religion, and housing insecurity to produce new scapegoating logics of eviction.⁹⁵

Scapegoating Evictions in Modi's Ahmedabad

Urban politics rooted in anti-Muslim scapegoating materialized more fully in Ahmedabad in the early 2000s, when more than 2000 people, mostly Muslim, were killed across the state of

⁹¹ Nair 1994.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Asghar Ali Engineer (1994). "Bangalore Violence: Linguistic or Communal?" *Economic and Political Weekly* 29(44): 2854-2855+2858. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4401963>; "Fresh Violence in Bangalore: Urdu news Bulletin Withdrawn; toll 23," *Times of India*, Oct 10, 1994, pg. 1; "Violence in Bangalore," *Times of India*, Oct 10, 1994, pg. 12; "Bangalore toll up to 18: Army Stages Nag Marches; DD Reschedules Urdu News," *Times of India*, Oct 09, 1994, pg. 1.

⁹⁴ Ali Engineer 1994.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*; Nair 1994.

Gujarat and tens of thousands more lost their homes. Unprecedented levels of communal violence erupted on February 27, 2002, after Muslim activists set fire to a train at the Godhra railway station in eastern Gujarat that carried Hindu *kar sevaks* back from Ayodhya, killing 58 people.⁹⁶ The struggle over Ayodhya had continued for more than x years? after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, particularly in Gujarat where the BJP had established an electoral stronghold and the state's newly elected Chief Minister Narendra Modi promoted a particularly virulent version of anti-Muslim scapegoating.⁹⁷ Trains full of *kar sevaks* made regular trips across North India back and forth to Ayodhya, passing through Gujarati cities and towns, chanting Hindutva slogans and hurling rocks at passing Muslims.⁹⁸ After the train was set ablaze in Godhra, Hindutva leaders called for immediate retribution and violence erupted across the state, in a familiar pattern of events that targeted Muslim people and homes and businesses belonging to Muslims. The violence was particularly severe in Ahmedabad, where it quickly escalated from a riot to a pogrom given the scale of genocidal violence and complicity of state actors.⁹⁹ Hindu mobs dragged Muslims from their homes, carrying out lynchings in the streets and widespread sexual violence.¹⁰⁰ The violence was particularly severe in Ahmedabad's working-class neighborhoods, particularly in the walled city and Ahmedabad's largely informalized eastern regions.¹⁰¹ While it initially appeared to be a spontaneous response to the events in Godhra, investigations revealed that the violence was highly organized and actively

⁹⁶ Asghar Ali Engineer (2002). "Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37(50): 5047-5054. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4412966>.

⁹⁷ Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth (2002). "Whither Gujarat? Violence and After," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37(11): 1009-1011. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4411864>.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Manali Desai (2009) "Colonial Legacies and Repertoires of "Ethnic" Violence: The Case of Western India, 1941–2002," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 22(2): 147-179. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6443.2009.01346.x>

¹⁰⁰ Upendra Baxi (2002). "The second Gujarat catastrophe," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37(34): 3519-3531. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4412519>.

¹⁰¹ Ali Engineer 2002.

supported by the government, who equipped the Hindu mobs with gas cylinders, swords, petrol bombs, and mobile phones, as well as with voter lists and sales tax details to help identify Muslim shops and homes.¹⁰²

The 2002 Ahmedabad violence was the culmination of decades of ethno-nationalist political organizing, built on anti-Muslim scapegoating, communal polarization, and deepening spatial segregation.¹⁰³ Political analysts trace the 2002 violence back to 1992, when, like Bombay, Ahmedabad experienced severe post-Ayodhya rioting.¹⁰⁴ While Ahmedabad's Hindu nationalist roots reaching back before Independence/Partition, the BJP had been building its power base in Ahmedabad since the party's formation in 1980 and particularly once it assumed state-level office in 1995. Supported by a robust organizational network of Hindutva groups like the RSS, VHP, and Bajrang Dal, spreading hate against Christians as well as Muslims, non-Hindu city residents were increasingly viewed as disloyal and threatening.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, the Congress party and secular civil society organizations grew weaker and increasingly less well equipped to counter Ahmedabad's emergent ethno-nationalist urban politics.¹⁰⁶

These politics were exacerbated by growing residential segregation in Ahmedabad's neighborhoods. Analyzing the spatial dynamics of the 2002 violence, geographer Ipsita Chatterjee emphasizes the impact of longstanding spatial practices, including ghettoization, bordering, and landscape destruction, particularly since the communal riots of 1969 and 1992.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Ali Engineer 2002; Desai 2009; Neera Chandhoke (2009). "Civil Society in Conflict Cities," *Economic and Political Weekly* 44(44): 99-108. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25663739>; Ipsita Chatterjee (2009). "Violent morphologies: Landscape, border and scale in Ahmedabad conflict." *Geoforum* 40(6): 1003-1013. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2009.08.005>.

¹⁰⁴ Desai 2009; Yagnik and Sheth 2002.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Chandhoke 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Chatterjee 2009.

While Ahmedabad has been a highly segregated city since its founding in the 15th century, with Hindus and Muslims living in separate clusters (*pol*s and *mohallas*), the calcification of ethno-religious boundaries since the 1970s limited interaction between communities and produced violent morphologies.¹⁰⁸ A *Times of India* piece published in the immediate aftermath of the 2002 pogroms similarly attributed the violence to Ahmedabad's heightened residential segregation. Focusing on the Muslim neighborhood of Juhapura, referred to as "the largest Muslim ghetto in Gujarat," which was the site of extensive violence in March 2002, reporter Robin David notes that when the neighborhood was first constructed in the 1970s to rehabilitate communities displaced by the 1972 flooding the Sabarmati River, it was built to house equal numbers of Hindus and Muslims.¹⁰⁹ It elaborated that even as Ahmedabad became more segregated over the 1980s, "a large number of Hindus lived here as late as 1992," when the ethno-religious lines became sharper and the last Hindu residents of Juhapur fled.¹¹⁰ Other pieces published around the same time similarly emphasized the impact of decades of residential segregation on the morphology of violence in February and March 2002, linking the scale of violence to the level of segregation in Ahmedabad neighborhoods.¹¹¹

Meanwhile, it was not only Hindu mobs who targeted violence against Muslim residents of Ahmedabad, but also police officers and even government officials who were seen actively participating in the violence.¹¹² The involvement of city officials further exacerbated conditions of spatial segregation, as Muslim residents refused to return to neighborhoods in which they felt

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*; Chandhoke 2009; Varshney 2003.

¹⁰⁹ "This Muslim Ghetto once had Hindu Neighbors," *Times of India*, June 15, 2002, pg. 6.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ "Split Wide Open: India slinks into Ghettos," *Times of India*, April 21, 2002, pg. 12.

¹¹² Ali Engineer 2002; Sanjay Pandey (2002) "Riots in Gujarat drive thousands of workers to the brink of starvation," *Times of India*. April 6, 2002, pg. 6.

unprotected.¹¹³ This sentiment was expressed to *Times of India* reporter Sourav Mukherjee in early March 2002.

Mujib Ahmed, one of the organizers of a relief camp at Aman Chowk in Bapungar says: 'More than 4,000 have been staying here since the night of March 1. Nobody is willing to go back to the riot-ravaged homes.' Sheikh Sahabuddin from Parikshitlal Nagar in Behrampura now lodged at the Shah Alam relief camp, says: 'I am not sure I will feel safe in an area that I had come to regard as my own.'¹¹⁴

Articles published over the next several months described the continued reluctance of Muslim residents to return to homes, particularly in religiously mixed neighborhoods. One resident of Naroda-Patia, a mixed neighborhood that experienced severe violence on February 28, was quoted, "God has saved us once, I won't try my luck a second time."¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, the government's complicity was further revealed by their slow response to providing compensation or alternative housing for Muslim riot victims.¹¹⁶ With widespread displacement produced by the targeted, state-supported violence, scapegoating logics of eviction were on full display in Ahmedabad in the immediate aftermath of the 2002 pogroms.

Meanwhile, the events in Ahmedabad in the early 2000s reveal how scapegoating eviction logics were becoming increasingly enmeshed with a new emphasis on global competition and efforts to make Ahmedabad a "world class city."¹¹⁷ As noted by urban planner Renu Desai, neoliberal restructuring of Ahmedabad's economy and urban space since the 1990s

¹¹³ Mukherjee, Sourav and Leena Misra (2002). "Riot victims in relief camps refuse to go home," *Times of India*, April 13, 2002, pg. 7.

¹¹⁴ Mukherjee, Sourav (2002). "Riot Victims don't want to go back home," *Times of India*, March 6, 2002, pg. 7.

¹¹⁵ Mukherjee, Sourav (2002). "Riot Victims visit Homes, Find only Ruins," *Times of India*, May 16, 2002, pg. 7.

¹¹⁶ Pandey, Sanjay (2002) "Riots in Gujarat drive thousands of workers to the brink of starvation," *Times of India*, April 6, 2002, pg. 6; Sourav Mukherjee and Harit Mehta (2002). "Riot Victims inflicted another unkind cut," *Times of India*, May 25, 2002, pg. 1.

¹¹⁷ Chatterjee 2009; Ipsita Chatterjee (2012). "How are they othered? Globalisation, identity and violence in an Indian city," *The Geographical Journal* 178(2): 134-146. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.neu.edu/10.1111/j.1475-4959.2011.00427.x>; Renu B. Desai (2008). "The Globalizing City in the Time of Hindutva: The Politics of Urban Development and Citizenship in Ahmedabad, India. PhD diss.," University of California, Berkeley.

exacerbated existing socio-spatial inequalities and created new forms of economic and spatial marginalization, contributing to the 2002 violence.¹¹⁸ A growing sense of economic precarity among Hindu youth, amid the reduction of formal labor in Ahmedabad's textile mills and other sources of labor informalization, created greater receptivity to the scapegoating discourses underlying Hindutva organizing.¹¹⁹ New discourses of the need to make Ahmedabad a "global city" or "world class city" were used to justify exclusionary practices and the further marginalization of Muslims, who were increasingly portrayed as obstacles to Ahmedabad's economic success. At the same time, the urban renewal projects promoted by Chief Minister Modi, including the Green Partnership Program, Sabarmati Riverfront Development, and "Mega City" initiatives, which were designed to improve Ahmedabad's economic competitiveness, created new incentives for clearing land and evicting informally housed urbanites.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Desai 2008.

¹¹⁹ Chatterjee 2009; Chatterjee 2011.

¹²⁰ Desai 2008.