Mobility and the region: A multi-scalar ethnography of the Vohra Gujarati community, in India and abroad
Verstappen, S.B.

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):

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PART II

A local community
Vallabh Vidyanagar is on the left, Anand in the middle, Gamdi on the right.
Today, if one approaches Anand from the main road that connects it to the cities of Ahmedabad and Vadodara (Baroda), a high bridge provides a view of a sprawling residential area with a multitude of mosques and churches.¹ This area is referred to by the residents of Anand as a ‘Muslim area’, even though Muslims share the area with Christians and some Hindus. In this ‘Muslim area’, research has been based mainly in the suburban parts, home to a Muslim middle class who highlight their privileged social status through education and religious reform. Charotar Sunni Vohras, the single largest Muslim community here, are prominent among this educated and religiously reformed Muslim middle class.

This chapter introduces this town, Anand, as a key site of immigration for Muslims in central Gujarat, and describes the Vohra community in this local context. Muslims have moved here for two reasons: to seek safety and to achieve upward mobility through rural-urban migration. While this migration to town should be understood against the historical background of the violence and aftermath of the violence in Gujarat in 2002, it should also be related to the larger

¹ Some parts of this chapter, including a part of this introduction, have been published in Verstappen and Rutten (2015, 241).
processes of urbanisation and rural-urban migration in the region, in which Anand has become an important centre of immigration for those that value education (secular and religious) and a (sub)urban lifestyle.

The situation of Muslims in Anand is comparable with previous academic descriptions of the situation of Muslims in other Indian cities and towns, specifically with that in the nearby city of Ahmedabad (Breman 2002; Breman 2004, 221-231; Breman and Shah 2004, 176; Berenschot 2001; Berenschot 2009; Gassem-Fachandi 2012; Jaffrelot and Thomas 2012; Jasani 2008; Jasani 2010; Jasani 2011; Rajagopal 2010; Spodek 2010, Turèl 2007), and in the nearby town of Mahemdabad (Heitmeyer 2009a; Heitmeyer 2009b; Heitmeyer 2011). In Ahmedabad, segregation between Hindus and Muslims has increased significantly in response to the 2002 violence, leading to the emergence of ‘Muslim areas’ and ‘Hindu areas’ within the city and to strict separation of social life along religious lines. In the market town of Mahemdabad, Muslims and Hindus continue to live in shared neighbourhoods, defying separation of social life. The situation in Anand is between these two opposites: the residential areas of the town are segregated but social life is not entirely separated.
Rural–urban migration and displacement

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

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

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

This transcribed fragment from an audio-recorded group interview with three elderly men, long-term residents of Anand town, illustrates that a variety of meanings are attached to the history of Muslims in the town. The gentlemen had earlier explained to me that there has been a long history of settlement of Muslims from nearby villages. The question I then posed was: ‘Why did Muslims come to Anand?’ The discussion reveals ambiguity. Was the move to Anand motivated by education and business purposes? Or was it related to the 2002 riots? Or to both? As I show next, employment, secular and religious education, and the quest for a more (sub)urban lifestyle are important reasons for immigration of families from nearby villages and some towns into Anand, in addition to the particular history of violence and displacement after 2002. A quest for upward mobility through urbanisation and motivations of safety are intertwined and, as a result, an already existing suburban area at the north-eastern edge of Anand town has expanded and further developed over time, a process that sped up significantly after 2002, leading to the formation of a sizeable and still growing Muslim-majority neighbourhood.

Long-term residents of Anand town have witnessed their direct surroundings change considerably over the past decades. During a conversation, a resident whose family has lived in the town for three generations sighed: ‘When I grew up, this was a very small and quiet place. Shanti. Hardly any traffic. Now, it is so crowded! I hardly dare go into traffic anymore!’ According to the Census of India (table 3.1), the size of the town more than doubled between 1981 and 2011, growing from 83,936 to 198,282 residents. Construction of new urban areas expanded

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2 The Bharatiya Janata Party, the political party in power during the 2002 violence.
3 The population of Anand was about 40,000 people in 1961 and has increased gradually ever since. The rise in population has been accompanied by an increase in spatial spread of urban areas. Planners describe Anand as the first urban region within Charotar as a predominantly agricultural zone, where urban development takes place within a rural setting (urbanisation). Lecture by Prof. Shashikant Kumar, ‘Nature of Urban Development in Anand UA and Challenges for Planners’, July 24, 2013, https://www.irma.ac.in/ipublications/publicationdetail.php?cid=6&pid=1364, accessed April 5, 2015.
The causes of urbanisation in India have been the subject of much discussion among scholars, particularly in the Indian journal *Economic and Political Weekly* (Kundu 1986; Pradhan 2013; see also Parry 2003, 219). The rapid growth in population of Indian cities and towns is assumed to have been caused at least in part by a redrawing of urban boundaries. Other reasons for urbanisation are rural-urban migration in pursuit of education and urban occupations. The widening availability of (higher) education and non-agricultural employment has, it has been argued, turned towns into focal points of the regional dominance of rural elites, who access urban jobs through education while holding onto traditional resources such as land in the villages (Jeffrey 2001). At the same time, marginalised groups have accessed education and non-agricultural occupation in the hope of acquiring economic and social upward mobility (Jeffrey 2001, 226; Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery 2004a; Gidwani 2008, xix), a process associated with urbanisation.

The Census of India (in 2001) shows that migration within Anand district is significant. Of the respondents indicating that they previously lived somewhere other than in the place of enumeration, the majority came from within India, most from within the same district (appendix, table A.3.2). Although a closer look at the migrants within India reveals that rural-rural migration is by far the most important

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Table 3.1. Growth of Anand’s total population since 1981

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anand town*</th>
<th>Anand (town and outgrowths)**</th>
<th>Anand (urban agglomerate)***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>83,936</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>110,266</td>
<td>131,104</td>
<td>174,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>130,685</td>
<td>156,050</td>
<td>218,486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>198,282</td>
<td>209,410</td>
<td>286,921</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Anand town (M).
*** Anand’s town and expansions (M&OG) include Mogri and Jitodiya.

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4 The urban population of Anand district grew from 507,971 in 2001 to 633,793 in 2011 (an increase of nearly 25 per cent) while the rural population of Anand district increased from 1,348,901 in 2001 to 1,456,483 in 2011 (an increase of nearly 8 per cent). Census of India 2001, 2011.

5 Christophe Jaffrelot, ‘The Uneven Erosion of Caste in the Politics of Gujarat (India),’ lecture given at Gujarat Research Network Seminar, Organised by the University of Amsterdam and University Münster, at the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, September 11, 2014.
form of migration, rural-urban and urban-urban migration is also significant, with 110,648 rural-urban migrants and 81,202 urban-urban migrants recorded (appendix, table A.3.3). As the migration records for the more recent Census of 2011 are not yet available, whether the rapid urban growth in the last decade is due to increasing immigration into urban localities cannot yet be assessed.

To complement the Census data, I included a question in the household survey in Anand (Survey A), asking how long the residents had lived here. The responses show that 58% of the households arrived less than 10 years ago (table 3.2). With regard to the ‘home town’ of the heads of households and their spouses (vatan for a man, pir for a woman in Gujarati), we found that most of the residents come from villages and towns in the direct vicinity (table 3.3).

Table 3.2 Numbers of years the head of household resided in Anand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 years or less</td>
<td>29 58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20 years</td>
<td>10 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 20 years</td>
<td>11 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Household survey Anand, 2012. This table is based only on the last housing society surveyed, as the question was added to the survey at a later stage.

Table 3.3. Hometowns of 50 households in a housing society in Anand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vatan (home town of the head of household)</th>
<th>Pir (home town of the wife of the head of household)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bakrol</td>
<td>Borsad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anand</td>
<td>Anand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anand</td>
<td>Anand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahudha</td>
<td>Mahemdabad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pancmahal (Jahol)</td>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhalej</td>
<td>Anand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadeli</td>
<td>Salun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>Bihar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathlaal</td>
<td>Thasra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhalej</td>
<td>Bhalej</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anand</td>
<td>Savli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>Pedlad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amreli</td>
<td>Anand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narsanda</td>
<td>Navsari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melej</td>
<td>Dahiyab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhalej</td>
<td>Padhra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azarpura</td>
<td>Khatlal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padad</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padal</td>
<td>Baroda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the household survey gives an indication of the migration patterns, my understanding of the situation is primarily informed by conversations with the residents of Anand town. For them, it is clear that there has been significant immigration into town. They have seen the people coming. They have seen the new housing societies being constructed. They assume that most of their new neighbours are local people, from nearby villages and towns, although they say that some people from places further beyond have also found their way to Anand, such as Muslim artisans from Bihar, Momin restaurant holders from north Gujarat, and government servants from all over India.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anand</th>
<th>Nadiad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gamdi</td>
<td>Dabho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayad</td>
<td>Bayad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamidpura</td>
<td>Palloli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kutch</td>
<td>Rasloli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odh</td>
<td>Anand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jargal</td>
<td>Katlal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jargal</td>
<td>Karjal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarapur</td>
<td>Godhra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhalej</td>
<td>Mithapur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navli</td>
<td>Anand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhalej</td>
<td>Bhalej</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amirpura</td>
<td>Umreth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anand</td>
<td>Anand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umreth</td>
<td>Sojitia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anand</td>
<td>Anand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alwar</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aasi (Pedlad)</td>
<td>Kheda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undel</td>
<td>Vadodara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thasra</td>
<td>Ananad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thasra</td>
<td>Mahemdambad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasol</td>
<td>Kathlal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudan</td>
<td>Vadodara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buhranpur(MP)</td>
<td>Saurastria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarsha</td>
<td>Surat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anandnd</td>
<td>Kheda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anand</td>
<td>Anand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapadvanj</td>
<td>Kalsad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaklsi</td>
<td>Vallavh Vidyanagar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathiyavad</td>
<td>Anand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tranol</td>
<td>Tranol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Household survey Anand, 2012. This table is based only on the last housing society surveyed, as the question was added to the survey at a later stage.*
The town’s growth can be understood within the larger regional context: Anand long been the centre of the economically well-developed region of central Gujarat and has recently developed into a hub of education and government in the region. The major stimuli for the urban growth of Anand and its surroundings were developments in the agro-industrial and industrial sector, including the establishment of the Amul Dairy Co-Operative in 1946, the large-scale industrial enterprise Elecon in 1960, and the Vitthal Udyognagar Industrial Estate in 1965 (Verstappen & Rutten 2015). The population of Anand town also grew after Independence as a result of Anand's position as a centre of education in the region. With the establishment of the Sardar Patel University in 1955, and the subsequent development of the university township of Vallabh Vidyanagar, the number of high schools and educational institutions increased rapidly, along with hostels, staff quarters and other facilities catering for the growing population of students and staff members. Alongside the increase in educational facilities, the public sector has expanded significantly over the past two decades. With the administrative division of the larger Kheda district into two separate districts in 1997, the town
became the capital of the newly-established Anand district, leading to an increase in government offices and administrative jobs, construction activities and businesses catering for the expanding public sector. These developments in the educational and public sectors have been an important driver for immigration of new residents, attracting rural-to-urban migrants from nearby villages and urban-to-urban migration from elsewhere in Gujarat and India. As a consequence, the real estate sector in the town has experienced a boom, especially since the mid-1990s, with rapidly-rising housing prices, large-scale conversions of agricultural land and the construction of new housing societies. It has also resulted in new settlements on the outskirts of Anand town, which have facilitated the arrival of an upwardly mobile middle class seeking a (sub)urban lifestyle.6

For Muslims and Christians, Anand has been attractive for other reasons too. Besides being a centre for education and urban jobs, it has also been a centre of religious education and a refuge for religious minorities in the region. The Catholic Church began its mission in 1893 in Gamdi, a village now part of the urban conglomerate of Anand,7 establishing churches, convents, schools and student hostels, and the Anand Press office.8 According to local Christians, the Church appealed particularly to the lower caste of Vankars attempting to escape caste oppression through baptism and education. One aspect of their process of upward mobility was moving out of the villages into the growing Christian centre of Anand-Gamdi. An Islamic centre was founded in Anand a few decades later, in the 1920s,9 by Deobandi scholars from Uttar Pradesh in collaboration with a local man, Gulamnabi Vohra. Their ‘mission’ was not to convert Hindus to Islam, but to educate the local Muslims about ‘proper Islam’. Their aim was to improve the position of Muslims, perceived as economically and religiously backward in the region, by reforming their religious practices.10 To this end, they started a madrassa in Anand and in Tarapur, followed by smaller ones in the villages. According to the teachers I spoke to in the madrassa, this development was spurred by competition with the Church, who had ‘started to convert people to Christianity’ at the time.

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6 This paragraph has been published in Verstappen and Rutten (2015, 233–234).
8 From this centre of Christianity, Jesuits travelled around the region to teach, recording local music to transcribe Biblical texts in indigenous music. ‘Gurjarvani, 50 years of Communication in Gujarat’, a film produced by Gurjarvani, Xavier Centre for Culture and Communication. Film screened on September 11, 2011, at St. Xaviers College in Ahmedabad, during a honorary celebration for Father Lawrence, Father Devasia, Father Rappai, Father Ornellas, Father Thomas and Brother Paul, for having served in the Jesuit order for 50 years.
9 In an interview with three teachers of the institute, 1919 was mentioned as the year of foundation. A written source mentions that the institute was founded in 1924: Purushotam C. Shah and Chandrakandh F. Shah (eds.), Charotar Sarvasangra (1954). Nadiad: Parekh Kevdachand Kanjiibhai and Sons, in Volume 1, Chapter 21 ‘Muslims in Charotar’ (Part III): 926–952. Translation of this section: Mayur and Monica Macwan, 2012. Mr. Odhavji H. Vadgama kindly lent me this precious book.
10 This information on the institute is based on a group interview with three teachers.
A historical record\textsuperscript{11} describes Muslims as already present in Anand (which then had a total of 25,767 residents) in the 1950s. Some lived in the old town among Brahmins, Patidars, Ksatryas, artesans, and Rabari, others lived a little further away, in a small area called Azad Chowk. There was a mosque in western Anand. From the 1960s, Muslim settlement in Anand started to increase. Two housing societies were established specifically for Muslims (near Gamdi): Nutannagar (1959/1963),\textsuperscript{12} and, on the former premises of the then bankrupt Polson diary,\textsuperscript{13} Ismailnagar (after 1969). Over time, the percentage of Muslims in the population rose (from 13\% in 1991 to 16\% in 2001, table 3.4).

Table 3.4. Population by religious community, Anand town and urban outgrowth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Jains</th>
<th>Christians</th>
<th>Sikhs</th>
<th>Buddhists</th>
<th>Other religions</th>
<th>Total persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>104,145</td>
<td>17,047</td>
<td>935</td>
<td>8,600</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>131,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>118,355</td>
<td>25,099</td>
<td>1,972</td>
<td>9,963</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>156,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, table C-1.

The initial immigration of Muslims to Anand was related to wider processes of rural-urban migration, and to the increasing opportunities for secular and religious education, agro-industry related businesses and non-agricultural employment in the fast-growing town. It was, however, only after 2002, in a direct response to the riots, that the wider area surrounding the initial Muslim housing societies of Nutannagar and Ismailnagar further developed into what is now known as a ‘Muslim area’. A brief explanation of these violent events is necessary here because references are made to them throughout the thesis.

There are many competing versions of this history, some highlighting the role of politicians in inciting and organising the violence, others highlighting the ‘clean chit’ given to the then Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi.\textsuperscript{14} Despite the still ongoing discussions and court cases, there is considerable evidence of the involvement of political actors in the instigation and organisation of the violence. Dhattiwala and Biggs (2012, 504) have shown that Muslims were most vulnerable

\textsuperscript{12} Different years were given at various times in the same interview, a group interview with residents of Ismailnagar.
\textsuperscript{13} Polson Diary was established in Anand in 1930 but, in 1946, in connection with the Independence movement, farmers decided to set up Amul Dairy Co-Operative, a milk producers’ cooperative to counter the low prices offered for their milk. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polson_%28brand%29, accessed November 10, 2015
in places where the Hindu nationalist political party BJP had previously won around 33-36 percent of the vote, indicating that the violence served to attract more voters at the next election. Berenschot (2009), explaining the capacity and interest by political actors to organise religious violence through ethnography, has argued that shifting patterns of state-society interactions in Gujarat and growing insecurities due to integration of Gujarat’s economy in global markets cause increasing dependence of citizens on political actors to access state services, which accounts for the ability of Hindu nationalist organisations to mobilise large groups of (poor) people for rioting as a means of strengthening patronage networks (Berenschot 2009, 272-277, and for an overview of explanations 32-61, see also Breman 2002; 2004, 290, Simpson 2006b).

On 27 February 2002, a train stopping at the train station of Godhra in Gujarat caught fire, resulting in the deaths of 59 travellers. The cause of the fire was not clear, but the effect was three months of state-wide communal violence, with well-organised large-scale attacks on Muslims. Most of the travellers had been Hindus returning from Ajodhya, where they had been to celebrate the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)’s construction of a temple on the grounds of a 16th-century old mosque, a contested issue that had led to earlier communal violence, in 1992 (Dhattiwala and Biggs 2012, 486). Describing the fire on the train a ‘pre-planned terrorist attack’, the BJP government of Gujarat brought the 59 corpses to Ahmedabad railway station on February 28, one day after the fire (Patel, Padgaonkar, and Verghese 2002; Dayal 2009; in Dhattiwala and Biggs 2012, 486). This was further fanned by inflammatory media reports. Dhattiwala and Biggs continue:

On February 28 alone, 248 Muslims were killed. In three days, the death toll reached pogrom-like violence, almost entirely against Muslims, spread on an unprecedented scale in villages across the state with sporadic killings continuing until December that year. Qualitative evidence in media and academic reports suggests that the violence was the product of a well-organized ‘riot system’ even though the BJP presented it as spontaneous. (…) The government referred to the massacres as ‘disturbances’. There is evidence of police complicity in the violence in many places. In the aftermath, moreover, the police failed to properly investigate and prosecute (Dhattiwala and Biggs 2012, 486-487).

Violence on this scale was unprecedented in the state of Gujarat. According to official figures, 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus\textsuperscript{15} died as a result, but human rights

\textsuperscript{15} These figures were given by Minister of State for Home Affairs Sriprakash Jaiswal, in: ‘790 Muslims, 254 Hindus perished in post-Godhra’, Times of India, May 11, 2005.
groups put the number of killings higher, at approximately 2000. The official figures record that a total of 223 people were reported missing, 2,548 sustained injuries, 919 were rendered widows and 606 children were orphaned. Brutalities included raping and maiming. A feature of the violence was the targeted destruction of property, of Muslim shrines, shops and houses, sometimes by large mobs of 2,000 or more attackers, resulting in widespread financial losses. These riots were different from previous communal violence in Gujarat, which had been largely confined to Ahmedabad, because they were widespread in rural parts of the state, affecting a total of 151 towns and 993 villages in Gujarat. There was violence in 19 districts. Anand district was among the 8 districts where violence was most intense. Local records of the district show that nineteen violent events occurred here (table 3.5) in towns including Borsad, Pedlad, and Umreth. Not included in these records, however, are the burning and looting of Muslim houses and shops in smaller villages such as Bedva, Navli, and Chikodra (reported by informants).

Table 3.5 Incidents reported in Times of India of the 2002 riots, district Anand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of incident</th>
<th>Sub-district</th>
<th>Town/village</th>
<th>Killed</th>
<th>Cause of incident, as reported in newspaper</th>
<th>Whether a clash between police and attackers</th>
<th>Whether a clash between Hindus and Muslims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 March</td>
<td>Anand</td>
<td>Ode</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Prev violence (communal)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 March</td>
<td>Anand/Vasad</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prev violence (communal)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 March</td>
<td>Anand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prev violence (communal)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 March</td>
<td>Anand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prev violence (communal)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 March</td>
<td>Adas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Protest against police action</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 March</td>
<td>Anklav</td>
<td>Umeta</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prev violence (communal)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 March</td>
<td>Borsad</td>
<td>Borsad</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prev violence (communal)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 April</td>
<td>Borsad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prev violence (communal)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 April</td>
<td>Borsad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prev violence (communal)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 September</td>
<td>Borsad</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Other (accident)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 March</td>
<td>Khambhat</td>
<td>Khambhat</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prev violence (communal)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 March</td>
<td>Khambhat</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prev violence (communal)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 March</td>
<td>Pedlad</td>
<td>Pedlad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Prev violence (communal)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 March</td>
<td>Pedlad</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prev violence (communal)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A widely reported event in the area, in a village just a half-hour drive away from Anand, was the massacre of Ode. On March 1, 2002, a large mob, of an estimated 2,000 people, attacked approximately twenty Muslim homes. When members of several of the families took refuge in a three-storeyed house, the mob locked the doors from the outside, and threw burning rags, kerosene and petrol inside. In the fire, 23 people died, including 9 women and 9 children, and 6 people escaped by jumping off the roof. Of the 46 accused, 23 were found guilty by the district court in Anand (on April 9, 2012).  

Amidst all this turmoil, Anand remained relatively quiet with one stabbing incident recorded (27 March, table 3.5). The person killed was probably Hindu. In some parts of the town, Muslim shops were attacked. The Muslim student hostel in the campus area of Vallabh Vidyanagar was ransacked. What all residents of Anand felt was the curfew, which lasted for ten days and effectively confined people in their houses in an extremely tense situation. Muslim women remember how they gathered on rooftops in groups, with buckets of marchi (water boiled with pepper) to ward off potential attacks while their husbands were out on

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21 The identity of the victim is not recorded in the Times of India record (table 3.5). When I asked some informants in Anand about this event, they were not aware about it, but one man remembered it and he thought the deceased was a Hindu.  

22 I came to know of these events in Anand through people whose property had been looted or burned, or who had witnessed such incidents.
the streets, standing guard. But, ‘nothing happened in Anand town’ because ‘we are safe here’. The news of attacks in nearby villages, the massive influx of refugees camping on the local community grounds, and the arrival of many relatives, some of whom stayed over for weeks in the period, contextualise their idea that ‘nothing happened in Anand’ in comparison with what was happening elsewhere.

The violence displaced more than 200,000 people. Muslims sought safety in makeshift relief camps, in mosques, and in the homes of their relatives in Muslim-majority areas of nearby villages and towns. At least 104,318 people had sought refuge in relief camps by 28 April 2002, two months after the violence began. In Anand, refugees were accommodated in three refugee camps, and in mosques and community halls. The refugees came from 46 different villages, including the aforementioned village of Ode. Local leaders say that there were hundreds, possibly thousands of refugees. Their arrival made quite an impression on the long-term residents of the town. Men remember the period as a time of friendship and small acts of heroism, when they went out in groups to collect refugees from nearby villages by truck and helped to organise shelter and provisions. Young men and boys helped with the distribution of food in the camps. Some men became brokers, guiding visitors from all over India and even abroad who had come to provide financial and legal support. Support came from individuals and from associations, from Indian human rights activists in Mumbai, from Muslim associations in South India, from two young, possibly Canadian, women, from local Church organisations, and from a corporation associated with local (mainly Hindu) farmers.

When the violence died down, some refugees returned to their villages while others decided to stay on. For those willing to return to their villages, ‘rehabilitation plans’ were started by several NGOs in collaboration with local Muslim leaders from Anand and from the villages concerned. These plans aimed to rebuild and repair damaged houses in the villages of origin and to help people to (re)start their businesses. In the village of Ode, 63 new houses were built for people who had lost their houses, 62 for Muslim families and 1 for a Hindu family affected by the violence. This politics of return, which can be interpreted as an attempt to reclaim the villages as a shared space, took place in the context of notice boards put up in some villages announcing ‘This is a Hindu village’. Local leaders helped people to return to their original homes. During meetings they

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25 This number is derived from an interview with a resident of Anand who had been actively involved in the organisation of relief after the riots.
26 Personal communication with an Anand-based member of an informal group that helped to arrange this.
organised with the *panchayats* and other leaders of the villages, Muslim leaders demanded guarantees for the safety of the returnees. The leaders felt return was beneficial for the refugees because ‘life is cheaper’ in the village and because ‘they have some assets there’. There was a concern that the situation in refugee camps was untenable in the long term, and that the influx of so many unknown people might result in social tensions with the resident Muslim population in the places of arrival.

Still, not everyone was ‘rehabilitated’. When the government closed the relief camps in Gujarat (between July and October 2002), many refugees stayed on in the now-closed camps. According to human rights reports, this was ‘because they did not believe that their former homes were secure’. According to a local Muslim leader, it was (also) ‘because they saw the town and they realized it would be a good place for them: they could make some business there’. To accommodate the refugees who remained, special housing societies were constructed by various groups, including NGOs, community associations, and religious organisations. These aimed at the most destitute among the new arrivals, who did not have the means to organise housing by themselves. Eight such relief societies were built in Anand town, housing 1,049 people in a total number of 205 houses.

Conversations with residents of three colonies indicate that they originate from villages and towns in the direct vicinity. Residents include the former residents of Ode and other nearby villages, and from urban areas, including some from within the urban conglomorate of Anand itself. According to a survey by the NGO Jan Vikas, the average income of the internally displaced families had still not recovered to pre-2002 levels in 2011. Moreover, many colonies still face infrastructural problems, a lack of (government) facilities, and ownership of the


32 As outlined above, Muslim property was severely damaged in parts of Anand, for example in the campus areas of Vallabhbhai Vidyaganagar where Muslims are a 2% minority (Census 2001, appendix A.3.3).

33 Among the residents of the six colonies in Anand, 41% was in ‘labour’ or ‘service’ before the riots, 22% was occupied with ‘business’, a ‘shop’, a ‘lari’ (cart), or ‘parlour’, and 16% worked as a ‘driver’ or ‘rickshaw driver’. On average they had suffered a loss of income of 33% since the riots. The current average family income is Rs. 2,580 per month. *Gujarat’s Internally Displaced: Ten Years Later. The 2012 Survey of Gujarat’s IDP Colonies* (2012). Ahmedabad: Jan Vikas.
houses is not always clearly organised. These poor circumstances may be one of the reasons why some of the initial residents left the relief society within a few years. The departure of the refugees is not reported in the available records, but my own visits to three housing societies indicate that not all residents are riot victims. Those I spoke to included residents who had bought or rented the houses a few years later, when the original residents moved out. What took the original residents away, back to their village or perhaps elsewhere, could not be assessed.

The rapid growth of Anand town is not only due to poor and destitute refugees. Large stretches of newly constructed housing societies, with spacious free-standing two or three storey high bungalows, suggest the arrival of an incipient middle class of Muslims. Riot victims from relatively more well-to-do families moved to Anand by living with relatives for a few years, then finding their own houses in the town. These people faced financial loss after (part of) their properties in the villages were destroyed but still had the means to invest in a house in Anand using their own financial assets. Anand also attracted Muslims not directly affected by the riots who had been interested in moving to town for other reasons. Some of these newly arriving middle class families made the move because they were tempted to invest in the newly developing housing societies, or because Hindus sold them houses at affordable prices:

We came to Anand because of education, for the future of our children. Before 2002, this housing society was a Hindu society. The residents were Patel. Now, only one Patel family remains. We don’t know exactly what happened, but we know that this housing society was attacked during the riots. To be honest, it is only because of this that we could afford to buy this house at a relatively cheap price. The residents were in a hurry to get out. They moved to another part of town.34

The woman speaking here is a mother of four children, all of whom are enrolled in private educational institutions in or around the town. For her, moving to Anand was a golden opportunity because here her children have easy access to English medium schools and higher education and she herself is more mobile and free than she has ever been in the village. After her move, she has started to take an interest in Islamic education and in studying English.

Today, the area to the northeast of Anand stretches a long way along the main road leading into the town. The influx of so many people, poor and middle class

34 This quote has been published, somewhat shortened, in Verstappen and Rutten (2015, 243).
alike, has caused Anand’s land prices to rise extremely rapidly, attracting investors who have started to build housing societies and apartment blocks in the town, advertising them along the road on large billboards. Many people bought a plot of land or a bungalow in Anand not to live there but merely as an investment, with the intention of simply reselling it at a profit after a few years. The local government has been slow to catch up with developments and most of the new buildings are not yet accessible via cemented roads.
The process of immigration has been paired to a process of increasing residential segregation, as indicated in the quote above. The old Anand town was characterised by a pattern of social ‘clustering’ in residential neighbourhoods on the basis of caste and occupation (Harris-White 2005, 11–12). The residents included Brahmins, Patidars, Ksatryas, artesans, Rabari, and Muslims. This older residential pattern has been replaced by increasing socio-spatial segregation on the basis of religious identity. Where Muslims moved in, middle class Hindus moved out, although poor Hindu labourers remained in tent-like houses near the construction sites and along the roads and railway tracks. The visibility of their shacks in slum-like patches on both sides of the ‘overbridge’ seems to further highlight the marginalisation of the area: these urban poor and travelling labourers are just as much outsiders to middle class Hindu society as Muslims are. There are Hindu and Muslim merchants in the bustling market place called the ‘supermarket’ too, but these Hindus are not from locally powerful Hindu groups, they are Sindhis, immigrants from Sindh in what is now Pakistan, and Punjabis, immigrants from the Punjab (table 3.6).

### Table 3.6. Shop owners in Anand’s central market area, ‘Supermarket’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification of shop owners</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Subtotal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vohra</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadiodi Vohra</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Muslims</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sindhi</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total respondents</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: This record was established by research assistant Sajid Vahora, who did a survey of 100 shops on the ground floor of ‘Supermarket’, the central market place of Anand town.

The area continues to be of special significance for Christians because of Gamdi, the local centre of the Mission even if Christians also gradually moved out. Muslims offer good prices for their houses, enabling some of them to resettle elsewhere, in a newer suburb a few kilometres further off, away from the still-arriving Muslims and the sound of the 

azan
that can now be heard five times a day from all directions in the old Christian neighbourhood. Today, the Christian schools and colleges provide education to many Muslim children.

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When asked why they moved to Anand, many Muslim families say that the main reason was better education for their children and to have a better, urban, lifestyle. While the violence of 2002 and the idea of safety can also be reasons for the move, it is important to understand this within the wider context of urbanisation and the growth of the town as an emerging centre of secular and religious education. In the following sections, I further explore the desire for safety and education among the residents.
Safety

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

Why is it hard to live in a Hindu area?
Well, we have riots you see. For a long time everything can be fine, but when election time comes, riots can happen, and at that time we are not safe in a Hindu area (retired university professor).

What is it that makes Anand a safe place? Are relations between Hindus and Muslims somehow more peaceful here than elsewhere? Most of my neighbours do not think so. Their sense of safety is derived from their numerical majority in their neighbourhood. They find safety in numbers. That some Hindus rarely dare to visit them anymore since the riots indicates a sense of lost trust, but it is also a source of safety.

Next, I explore experiences of sociality and space in the town and its relation to the recent history from the perspective of Majestic Housing Society, where I lived during the research. In the evenings, after dark, I regularly accompanied my female neighbours on their walks in the neighbourhood. On 100 Feet Road, my neighbours pointed out that the road is the ‘division’ between Hindus and Muslims in Anand: on one side is a Hindu residential area, on the other side is the Muslim area. With a temple on one side of the road and mainly mosques and churches on the other side of the road, this distinction was observable, even if no material boundaries hint at such a rigid division between Hindu and Muslim areas. Before 2002, neighbours told me, the division had not been so clear. But during the 2002 riots, police stood guard on this very road to make sure nobody crossed the line. Afterwards, the middle class Hindus who had lived on the ‘Muslim side’ had left in a hurry and the division, which some called ‘partition’, was complete. Still, some Hindus and many Christians remain in the neighbourhood. When I spoke to them, some said they were happy to live in the area while others indicated that they wanted to move out but did not (yet) have the means to do so.

36 In this section, I approach this question from the perspective of Muslim residents of Anand. For academic discussions on why some places remained peaceful while others did not, see Berenschot (2009, 234–268; see also Dhattiwala and Biggs 2012).
The following statements were made by my neighbours in Majestic Housing Society:

Anand is safe because so many Muslims are in Anand. We are one group, a big group. The railway station and bus stop are ours. If there are any difficulties, we are safe here.

We are strong here. Hindus know that Muslims will fight back if they are attacked.

We are safe here. Because on that side [pointing left] there are the butchers. On the other side [pointing right] there is Ismailnagar. So nothing can harm us. *What do you mean, how do the butchers make this area safe?*
They have knives. People don’t dare to pass.

Safety is provided for Muslims in Anand not by concrete walls or material fortification (as observed in Kutch by Simpson 2006b, 331), but by the fear of the Muslim Other itself. While the butchers have knives, the people of Ismailnagar are believed to have *talwars* (swords), and are locally (in)famous for their role in the 2002 riots. The statements of ‘we are safe here’ and ‘we are strong here’ are not empty phrases but lived experience, and this is illustrated by the fact that it is normal and respectable for women to walk about here at night without male patronage.

The story of Ismailnagar, a housing society a fifteen minute walk from ‘Majestic Housing Society’, is instructive and deserves some further explanation. Hindus and Muslims both know ‘Ismailnagar’ – Hindus use the term to indicate the entire ‘Muslim area’, Muslims consider Ismailnagar a specific housing society within it. Both affirm that Ismailnagar can be a ‘dangerous’ place. They say that ‘not even the police dares to enter’ Ismailnagar. Ismailnagar is one of the areas where refugees arrived in 2002, and it appears that the police tried to enter the area but were prevented from doing so by angry stone-throwing residents. It is said the police used tear gas, and that the police van was attacked. A young Muslim (a resident of a housing society adjacent to Ismailnagar) told the story of the violent confrontation between the police and the residents of Ismailnagar:

*Ismailnagar is very dangerous. [In 2002], Hindu people were beating Muslim people at the village. Hindu people [set] fire [on] Muslim people’s homes, vehicles, shops. Fire everything. In Ismailnagar and in my society, Muslim
people made one big camp. Village people came here and we are helping. We are giving food, tea, everything.

So Ismailnagar... when police came, they are throwing to police. Police throwing to peoples. Tear gas. This is all Muslim area.

*Why is Ismaelnagar dangerous?*

That means all are fearing. Ismailnagar [made a] name in Delhi parliament. Because all people are very angry at that time. They are doing dangerous things. Anand police told to Gujarat government, government told to Delhi government: ‘Ismailnagar is very dangerous’. All Hindus fearing to pass this area. That time, not now.\(^{37}\)

As a result of the ‘dangerous’ image of Ismailnagar, residents of it observe that ‘after the riots, my Patel [Hindu] friends don’t dare to enter our area anymore, even though they have known me for many years’. Throughout the research period, this was confirmed by middle class Hindus whenever I met them. Their stories of ‘Ismailnagar’ involved rape and more horrific dangers. A couple I befriended made serious efforts to change my mind about visiting ‘Ismailnagar’, telling me it would be better to do research among Muslims in a place where there would be ‘not so many of them’. When they realised this would not happen, they followed up with a series of well-meant warnings about what to do and not do in the area: ‘never go out after dark, never ask a stranger for directions, never trust anybody.’

The residents of Ismailnagar are not the only ones who receive limited visits from (middle class) Hindus. As mentioned previously, outsiders are usually unclear about where exactly ‘Ismailnagar’ begins and ends, and equate this particularly renowned housing society with the entire stretch of land near the railway tracks where Muslims live. In Majestic Housing Society too, where I lived myself, bringing over Hindu acquaintances caused some anxieties. An effort to bring a Hindu acquaintance to my house ended up in disaster as darkness fell and she panicked: ‘How can you live here?’ My remarks that the area was perfectly safe were met with disbelief or with praise over my bravery. A different kind of anxiety arose when I gave a Hindu man a lift on the back of my scooty and made the mistake to take the short-cut along the butcher street, exposing a vegetarian to the stench of meat and the sight of blood. These and more anxious reactions towards Muslims have also been observed by other scholars of Gujarat, who have analysed these more in-depth then I can do here. Ghassem-Fachandi argues that ‘fear surrounds the “Muslim” as she invokes the possibility of terrorism and calls for heightened

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\(^{37}\) This is a shortened fragment from an audio-recorded conversation. In the conversation, it was also noted that ‘some Hindu people stay here individually, not by society’.
security measures’ (2010, 557), and discusses the exaggerated perceptions of the supposed unruly character of Muslim areas in Ahmedabad (2008, 71) in connection with the disgust for meat among Hindus (2010). Simpson notes in Kutch that ‘many Hindus simply do not have relations with Muslims to disabuse them of the impression that all Muslims are bootleggers, polygamous and gorge on beef’ (2006, 335). He argues that the misrepresentations of Muslims are brought into existence for reasons other than to represent the truth, that is, ‘re-imagining’ the state as a “Hindu” entity personified by elite and non-elected intermediaries’ (Simpson 2006b, 333).

Muslims distance themselves from the image of the Muslim goonda (criminal) who supposedly lives in Ismailnagar, but they also derive some benefit from Hindu fear of entering the area, which shields them, protects them from harm. The myths serve as a safety precaution. The other side of this is that the police and some other state actors do indeed refrain from entering the area. The elected municipal councillor representing this area explained that ‘there are no facilities whatsoever in Ismailnagar. No water, no drainage, no streetlight. There is no playground for children, no bank, and only one government school.’ An Anand municipality bureaucrat explained that Ismailnagar is the only part of Anand where no town planning is intended.38 The suburban territories of the Muslim middle class generally have more facilities than Ismailnagar, such as street lights and gutter. Metalled roads are rare across the ‘Muslim area’, although some roads were constructed towards the end of my research period in 2012.

Hindu fear of entering the ‘Muslim area’ does not stop Muslims from entering into ‘Hindu areas’. Shared rickshaws and local buses are available within a few minutes walk from most locations within the area, on the main road. Muslim students daily go into ‘Hindu areas’ for their higher education. Vallabh Vidyanagar, where only 2% of residents is Muslim (table 3.7) is also a popular place for entertainment for young men and couples, who venture out here to the fun fair, to restaurants or to window shop. Venturing into other parts of the town occasionally causes anxiety over safety, as explained by a grandfather, who was relieved every time his granddaughters returned from their coaching classes in Vallabh Vidyanagar: ‘you never know when a riot will break out.’ Still, these and other practices of travel are commonplace.

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38 This is because the implementation of a town planning scheme in Ismailnagar would ‘create problems. It is a congested old area. You cannot plan in there’. A former member of the municipal council explained that there is also considerable confusion about the layout of the plots.
Confidence inside, marginalisation outside

From my observations, I draw that, besides safety from violence, there is a second sense of ‘safety’ related to living in such a neighbourhood: the comfort of not having to deal with the stigma of being Muslim, the comfort of being Muslim within the space that is ‘ours’. This was evident when I talked to neighbours about their experiences in education and in the professional sphere. For example, when one of my neighbours tried wearing a burqa for a while, then quickly abandoned the practice, I asked her why. She explained how she had tried to be a good Muslim after her Haj, but also wanted to continue her studies at Sardar Patel University, for which she undertook regular trips to Vallabh Vidyanagar on her scooty. When visiting Sardar Patel University for her exams, she felt very uncomfortable wearing a burqa: ‘Everybody is looking at me!’ For students, traveling into Vallabh Vidyanagar can thus generate experiences of being ‘othered’ as Muslims, which they do not experience when they are in the neighbourhood.

I have noted earlier that the availability of educational opportunities is an important reason for rural families moving into town. Ambitions are high but are tempered among Muslims by the fact that the more prestigious institutions for elementary and higher education in the town openly pursue discriminatory policies of enrolment. The openness with which these policies are discussed by teachers and trustees of educational institutes is striking. Some popular private schools accept Muslim students, but others are selective and openly acknowledge they have a policy of discriminating at enrolment on the basis of religion. Private

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39 For an extended table, which shows these numbers in the context of the overall population of Gujarat and Anand district, see appendix A.3.3.
and semi-government schools and colleges managed by Hindu trusts tend to give priority to Hindu students, schools managed by a Christian trust give priority to Christian students, and some of them have a policy of only accepting exceptionally bright Muslims from good families.

The overttness of these policies became clear during a research visit to one of the more prestigious schools in Anand, revered among Muslim families as a ‘good school’ but also known for its discriminatory policies. The school is managed by a Hindu trust and most of the teachers are also Hindu. In a vigorous group discussion with almost all the teachers and the director of the school, they gave their reasons for supporting the school’s policy of only accepting exceptionally bright Muslims from ‘good families’. They felt that most Muslim families are ‘backward’ and ‘uneducated’, and therefore hard to teach and discipline. They also found it hard to communicate with the parents. Further reasons given were the alleged violent nature of Muslims and the desire to keep the classroom a vegetarian environment. While the teachers hastened to say that they had also seen ‘exceptionally bright’ Muslim students and that it had been a pleasure to work with them, they supported the school’s policy of allowing only a limited number of Muslim students.

My neighbours in Anand know that these policies exist and often talked about them. Stories of rejection are discouraging, but schools known to discriminate are still considered desirable places to send one’s child to, partly because enrolment here indicates acceptance by the majority society. The reasoning among Muslims is that if a student was accepted to such-and-such school, he/she must be extraordinarily brilliant, or perhaps his/her family is well-connected, or has paid a large ‘donation’ to secure entrance. Once inside the school, students are confronted with mainstream ideas about Muslims among peers, which leads to feelings of being different as ‘Muslim’, sometimes for the first time in their lives. When their peers find out the student is a Muslim, they fall silent in wonder, unable to hide their amazement, or respond in well-intended phrases like: ‘You are so kind, I would never have thought you are Muslim!’40 At school, Muslim children hear, for the first time, that others refer to their neighbourhood as ‘mini Pakistan’, which is quickly understood to be a ‘bad name’.

After school, the quest for employment begins. The tragedy is that the economic growth of Gujarat since the mid-1990s has not led to an increase in ‘decent employment’ (Hirway 2012b, 10). Formal employment in the most desirable public sector has declined in absolute terms, while organised or formal employment in the private sector has increased slowly but gives less job security (Hirway 2012b,

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40 These experience were narrated to me by young men and women participating in higher education institutions in Anand.
Failure to get a job results in complaints of discrimination, although these are always hard to prove. Here is a statement illustrating the feeling of despair that can result from discrimination, made by a young man just after he heard that a friend had been rejected for a job as an English teacher at a semi-government school in Anand:

Where can we go? We are not treated as Indian citizens, where can we go now? Muslims are not killed in Gujarat anymore. Riots are abolished. But now they are doing social exclusion. In the schools, students are discriminated. Hindu students get more attention, Muslims are neglected, and many of them drop out and don’t get highly educated. If they graduate, they can’t get a job. Nobody hires them. [About his friend:] They told him ‘We cannot hire a Muslim.’ Openly! They are not ashamed to say it!

Confidence is easily damaged outside. All of this shows that there is a tension between, on the one hand, experiences of strength and confidence within the neighbourhood and, on the other hand, concerns about safety and experiences of marginalisation outside. As a researcher, I myself became aware of this tension between the inside and the outside when Muslim informants tried to teach me the skills of moving in a Hindu area. Here is the advice of a professor for my excursions into the campus area of Vallabh Vidyanagar:

I want to advise you, don’t tell people that you are studying Muslims. Not in Vidyanagar. If you do, they will respond differently to you and keep distance. Just tell them ‘Charotar’.

For my neighbours, apart from social workers and some politicians, discrimination and exclusion are not subjects to be discussed at length or to try to change, but rather facts of life one has to learn to deal with. These skills are not taught in school but are very much part of the everyday life. Discussions revolve around practical solutions to known problems: getting one’s children into the right school, getting one’s son into a good job despite discrimination. Those who succeed in finding a job in Hindu-majority professional environments say that trust gained and maintained was key to their professional success.

Looking at the five major characteristics of a ‘ghetto’ outlined by Gayer and Jaffrelot (2012, 22; on the basis of Wacquant 2008), I conclude that the ‘Muslim area’ of Anand fits the first three of the five outlined criteria of a ‘ghetto’:
... an element of social and/or political constraint over the residential options of a given population; the class and caste diversity of these localities, which regroup individuals of different social backgrounds on the basis of ethnic or religious ascribed identities; the neglect of these localities by state authorities, translating in a lack of infrastructure, educational facilities, etc.; the estrangement of the locality and its residents from the rest of the city due to lack of public transportation as well as limited job opportunities and restricted access to public spaces beyond the locality; the subjective sense of closure of residents, related to patterns of estrangement from the rest of the city’ (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 22).

The first two criteria apply, and most residents would agree with the third criteria by pointing at the absence of metalled roads in most parts of the area and at the limited presence or low quality of government services in education and health care. But the criteria of estrangement and sense of closure do not precisely fit the case study of Anand town, since travel into ‘Hindu areas’ on public buses and scooties is a normalised and everyday affair. It is true that there is the experience of being othered when traveling outside the neighbourhood, which could be seen as a form of estrangement. However, people still travel, send their children to school in ‘Hindu areas’, do business with Hindus, learn how to deal with obstacles and discuss how to overcome them with each other. As this deserves more discussion than above, I will return to the notions of estrangement and closure in Chapter 4, where I show in greater detail how mobility beyond the neighbourhood takes shape.

Social distinction through education and religious reform

If status loss is a risk of venturing outside, there are still small and bigger ways in which Muslims can affirm a high social status inside, as long as they stay within the own neighbourhood, safe and on top of things. While the internal distinctions of community, class and religious difference go noticed by outsiders, they make all the difference in the social life of the neighbourhood. I now turn to these internal processes of distinction.

Education

We now enter a street that leads to an extended neighbourhood of spacious free-standing two to three storey high bungalows, freshly painted and surrounded by
low walls and terraces, interspersed occasionally with empty, yet-to-be-developed plots. We take a look into the living room of a spacious bungalow in ‘Majestic Housing Society’. Morning starts here with the sound of the majids calling for prayer from every direction. This is followed by the loud thumps of housewives and their servants washing clothes by hand behind the houses. Next, men and some women leave their houses to attend business or work, youth travel to school, housewives prepare lunch and dinner, clean and care for their houses. In the evenings, men gather in small groups in front of the paan shops on the streets, women visit each other in their homes, go for walks, or enjoy the daily ritual of watching TV dramas.

The most popular TV drama series during my stay here was Diya aur Bati, in which the main character is an educated young woman married into an uneducated family. The main character has countless problems with her in-laws as a result of her education, hiding her knowledge to prevent her in-laws from finding out she is educated but failing at the most basic household chores such as producing round chapattis. Such themes are recognisable for these women, for whom the benefits and drawbacks of education are a daily subject of conversation. ‘Watch and learn’, the eldest woman in the room instructed a younger woman as we watched: ‘You may have BCom (Bachelor of Commerce) but your mother-in-law will love you for your cooking!’ Though the characters of the drama are Hindus, their actions are followed with the attentiveness of a close relative and their dilemmas are recognised.

‘Education’ was on everyone’s lips throughout my stay in Anand, and I started to think of education as a symbol of community (Cohen 2000 [1985], 19), more particularly, a symbol of an urban middle class community that derives its prosperity and social standing from social and cultural capital acquired through education (van Wessel 2001, 52–92). Among the first things exchanged when two new people meet each other here is the educational level of their children. Education is also among the first things mentioned in local gossip, in the sense that criticism directed at some common acquaintance is almost inevitably accompanied by the qualifier that he/she is ‘not educated’.

Overall, Anand has been particularly attractive to Muslim families who value education, that is, who feel that their children should attend college. As I have mentioned, Anand has been an important centre of education in the region. In 2014, Sardar Patel University alone had more than 25,000 students spread over 26 postgraduate departments and 87 affiliated colleges. Besides that, there are more than 125 secondary schools and high schools in the urban conglomerate of Anand and its surrounding villages (Verstappen and Rutten 2015, 234). According to a Muslim leader,
Many people came to Anand because it is close to Vidyanagar [the campus area]. There, they can provide their children with top class education. That is why people have migrated there, not only because of the riots.

For many families I met, the choice to move to Anand town was directly or indirectly connected to their desire to send their children to higher education. I found it interesting that education has caught the imagination here so much even though only a proportion of the parents are ‘educated’ themselves – as indicated in the household survey for the head of households. In this housing society, while 33% of the heads of household holds a bachelor’s degree, 29% is not educated above 10th standard (table 3.8). In the overall survey of six housing societies, the percentage of heads of households with education at or below 10th standard is even higher, 41%. The emphasis on education is aimed at the next generation, the children now growing up in Anand town.

| Table 3.8. Educational level of heads of household in 'Majestic Housing Society' and in the other surveyed households |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Total families in housing society                   | Majestic Housing Society | Percentages | Total houses surveyed | Percentages |
| Total families in housing society                   | 24               | 100%          | 147             | 100%         |
| Illiterate                                          | 1                | 4%            | 1               | 1%           |
| SSC or below (10th pass)                            | 7                | 29%           | 60              | 41%          |
| HSC or below (12th pass/old 11th pass)              | 3                | 13%           | 22              | 15%          |
| Practical degrees (e.g. i.T.I.)                     | 0                | 0%            | 7               | 5%           |
| Engineer                                            | 2                | 8%            | 8               | 5%           |
| Graduate (BA/BCom/BSc/BE/Ed/LLB/etc)                | 8                | 33%           | 36              | 26%          |
| MA/MCom/MSc/ME/Ed/etc                                | 0                | 0%            | 4               | 3%           |
| PhD                                                 | 1                | 4%            | 1               | 1%           |
| Unknown                                             | 0                | 0%            | 4               | 3%           |
| Closed house                                        | 2                | 8%            | 4               | 3%           |


I have spent some time asking why my neighbours want their children to be educated. Their explanations are partly economic and partly social. It is obvious that education serves various economic purposes. One strategic reason to send a child into (higher) education is the hope that he or she may be able to go abroad on student visa. The presence of transnational migrants is very important in the neighbourhood, a subject to which I turn in Chapters 5 and 6. Another reason to
send children into (higher) education is that it is seen as the main venue to achieve upward mobility within India: through education, they can access white collar jobs. This is of particular importance in Anand, where the public sector has expanded considerably when Anand became the district capital of the new Anand district in 1997, leading to an increase in jobs and businesses catering for the public sector. Government jobs are seen as the most secure and profitable source of employment in the region, and these lower government workers were quite prominent among my neighbours. They were numerically not the largest group (6 out of 22 heads of household, plus 2 engineers, table 2.1), but they were prominent in the sense that they were noticeably among the more well-to-do households, with large bungalows, sometimes air-conditioning, or maids to help do the housework.

For families with capital and a profitable business, education is not directly an economic necessity to achieve wealth, although education can be a strategy to get into ‘better business’, bigger business, or a more high-tech kind of business than they have been traditionally engaged in. Education can also be a strategy of diversification, so that some of the sons can continue the family business while others can get into paid employment or go abroad. This diversification strategy can be linked to the history of riots. A Vohra businessman explained:

> Education plus business is progress. Many families nowadays believe that one son can continue the business and the other can go into professions, or maybe he can try to go abroad. This change occurred after 2002.

**How does education protect against violence?**

Business brings risk. Many shops were burnt and our business for example, we lost 10 lakh\(^41\) in properties. Among Muslims there was a total loss of business. And every so many years there are riots. After each riot we have to think where to start the new shop, and you have to invest and for one year you have no income. But those who are working in government, in professions, have an income. Their monthly income is safe.

Besides the economic reasons of anticipated wealth and social security, social reasons are given to explain the emphasis on education. Degrees have become an important marker of status and, among the middle class, education is now often a requirement in the marriage market. Education gives, in the words of a teacher in a local government school, ‘awareness’, ‘understanding’, ‘civilisation’. As

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\(^{41}\) A lakh is Rs. 100,000: the amount lost equals € 13,710. Conversion through http://themoneyconverter.com/EUR/INR.aspx, accessed October 7, 2015.
elsewhere in Gujarat, such as in the city of Vadodara (Baroda, van Wessel 2001, 62-92), English medium private education is emphasised and has become an important mark of social distinction. Parents are prepared to pay hefty school fees and even large ‘donations’ in order to send their children to English medium primary and secondary schools, which are thought to provide better access to higher education and which bring the children in contact with other middle class children. Education is more than a means to get a job, it is part of a practice of social distinction to attain self-worth. This distinctive function of education has been described as important for the Indian middle class, the class that is most dependent on cultural capital (Deshpande 2004; cf. Bourdieu 1984; see also Dicke 2012).

The politics of education in the neighbourhood are such that it is not enough to educate one’s own children, it is deemed necessary that the entire community takes up education. Some prominent educated families said that they feel the need to ‘set an example’ for others ‘in the community’, and to take on a leading role in this matter. A Vohra man explained:

Even those people who are building houses [manual labourers] nowadays send their children to school. And we, the Vohra community, provide help to people from other communities to become educated. We are helping their children to study.

This stress on education is confirmed by the presence of five primary schools managed by Muslims in Anand town (three of which by a Vohra trust), offering education to the local poor at very cheap rates or even for free. The emphasis on educating the poor is in line with the values of the organisers, and can also be seen as a response to nation-wide discussions about the ‘backward’ position of Muslims, which have revealed a lack of (access to) education of Muslims in India. The trustee of one school explained: ‘the riots made us realize that the government is not doing anything for us. We have to take care of ourselves: uplift our own community.’ The efforts are comparable to efforts to ‘uplift the community’ in Ahmedabad (Turèl 2007; Jaffrelot and Thomas 2012, 77).

All of this is in line with the analysis that

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42 Enrolment and continuation rates at elementary level are lowest for Muslims, compared to other religious groups (Sachar et al. 2006, 244). Between the 1999-2000 NSS round and the 2004-05 one, the decline in illiteracy has been much higher in the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) (9-6%) than among Muslims (4.8%).

43 To clarify, I refer here to schools offering secular education.
... education is a particularly attractive development idea because it offers marginalized groups a model of *achieved* status distinct from *ascribed* definitions of respect. This is especially important for communities such as Muslims (...) who have been the victims of social and spatial exclusion based upon their religion (...). Nevertheless, (...) Muslim young men's definition of themselves as educated people occurs largely within the terms set by rural elites. In forwarding notions of education as development, these educated young men did not seek to undermine established principles of hierarchy, but alter the terms upon which backwardness are defined (Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery 2004a, 975).

In sum, education is the talk of the day in many households in Anand town, where distinctions are drawn between the 'educated' and the 'uneducated'. The emphasis on education entails educating one's own children in English medium schools but also starting or supporting Gujarati medium primary schools, which offer affordable education to the local poor and employment for young school teachers. The emphasis on education also explain the urgency in the discussions about discrimination in English medium private schools in Anand.

All of this is rather different from the situation described in Mahemdabad: Heitmeyer says that Vohras have traditionally downplayed the importance of formal schooling in lieu of vocational training or apprenticeship, even if she also observes a rise in educational level (Heitmeyer 2009a, 80–81). In Anand, this ‘traditional’ attitude towards education can be observed among some very wealthy business families, who have achieved their status without degrees but, as I have explained, even they are discussing the pros and cons of education for the next generation. Overall, ‘education’ seems to be an important value for the residents of Anand. Middle class families describe the move from the village to Anand as one that enabled them to attain education, urban professions, and a more modern or urban lifestyle.
Students at the Sardar Patel University (2011)

Students on the way to the campus area, on a local bus (2011)
Religious reform

Besides secular education, religious education is an important feature of the urban experience. Religion is also an important means of making internal distinctions in the everyday social life of the neighbourhood. Residents identify two main religious groups in their neighbourhood, ‘Tablighis’ and ‘Sunnis’. The term ‘Tablighi’, sometimes used interchangeably with the term ‘Jamati’, refers to the religious reform movement of Tablighi Jamaat popular in South Asia. In this section, I explore how residents talk about religious distinctions and contextualise my findings in relation to anthropological literature on Islamic reform elsewhere in India.

Most residents of Majestic Housing Society identify as ‘Tablighi’. My neighbour Shahinben is one of them. She feels the Tablighi Jamaat fits in well with her lifestyle because it encourages people to educate themselves and to read and think on their own. The advantage of the Tablighi Jamaat is that ‘you don’t need a religious teacher to tell you what to do’, how to pray, how to celebrate festivals, or how to behave. The ability to read books independently, books available in the market place in Gujarati, Hindi and English, clearly installs a sense of social worth. This religious empowerment is enhanced by the ‘de-hierarchising’ discourse of the Tablighi Jamaat, which offers common people, both men and women, the opportunity to become teachers and preachers (Jasani 2008, 449). Shahinben is not a preacher and in fact rarely prays, but, as one of the more highly educated women in the neighbourhood, with a Bachelor’s degree in English, another degree in Education and working as an English teacher in a local school, the possibility of independent religious learning professed by the Tablighi Jamaat appeals to her. Her feelings are congruent with those of middle class Muslims, Hindus and Christians elsewhere in India, for example in Kerala, who ‘associate religious reformism with a self-consciously “modern” outlook; the promotion of education; rallying of support from the middle classes’ (Osella and Osella 2008b, 317).

Shahinben often explained to me what she thinks of ‘Sunnis’ people, the other prominent group of Muslims in the town. Sunnis are locally referred to as ‘bapuwallahs’ (the followers of bapu) or as ‘Suni bapu’. This is because they are guided by a bapu, whom Shahinben describes as a phoney religious teacher, who makes a living by extracting money from his followers. Bapu can be found in...
dargahs (shrines of deceased bapus) and they sometimes visit the houses of the bapuwallahs ‘to get more money’. Their ‘business’, Shahinben explains, is performing ‘magic’ and other rituals that have ‘no Islamic purpose’. Their followers, she feels, are ignorant, uneducated, misguided. At the festival of Moharam, when young men passed our house in noisy processions, striking themselves on the chest on the rhythm of chants memorialising the death of Imam Hussein, Shahinben and the other women in our neighbourhood stood to watch the spectacle in silence and made disapproving comments afterwards. This practice of Taziya processions during Moharam is common among Sunnis in Anand, but my Tablighi neighbours perceived it as a practice of the poor and uneducated. The proper way of mourning Imam Hussein during Moharam, Shahinben explained to me, is not to feast but to fast.45

An overview of mosques in Anand shows that the Tablighi Jamaat is the dominant religious group among Muslims in Anand town: a research assistant counted 51 mosques, 34 of which are connected to the Tablighi Jamaat, while he labelled 16 mosques as ‘Sunni bapu’ (table 3.9). There are only two dargahs in Anand while some nearby villages and smaller towns have many more. Visiting these shrines associated with Sunnis was taboo for my neighbours. Having read about dargahs in Gujarat I was keen to visit the dargahs of Anand, and kept asking around if someone was going and could take me along, but most women I knew were uninterested. When I found a woman to take me to the main dargah, I was subsequently subjected to questions by laughing neighbours about what I had seen and how much money I had paid to the bapu. This situation is extremely different from descriptions of the smaller town of Mahemdabad, which is ‘dotted with dargahs and mazars’, and where such sites ‘remain a socially-acceptable and popular venue for worship amongst many Mahemdabadis’ (Heitmeyer 2011, 489).

Table 3.9. Mosques in Anand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Constructed before 2002</th>
<th>Constructed after 2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tablighi Jamaat</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Sunni bapu’ mosques</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other mosque</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: This record was established by a research assistant, who went around Anand town on a motorcycle and asked about all the mosques he knew of. In addition to the mosques, two dargahs were counted. Shia mosques were not taken into account.

Despite all the talk about ‘Sunnis’ and ‘Tablighis’ as two clearly distinguishable categories, it soon became evident that divisions run within families. One day, while I was in the living room of Shahinben, her maternal uncle arrived, clearly upset. Talking agitatedly and rapidly, he explained about a row he had just had with his brother: he had been performing prayer for his deceased parents when his brother had suddenly left the house, saying he did not want to be part of it. Shahinben offered tea and listened, trying to provide some comfort. After her uncle had left, she turned to me and explained that the uncle was a ‘Sunnī’, and that his brother was ‘Tablighi’. She felt that the Tablighi brother had been right to leave the house, as the Sunni prayer had been inappropriate. She concluded that her uncle was ‘uneducated’ and ‘ignorant’, and seemed to pity him. This scene was one of many observations that showed that the divisions between ‘Sunnis’ and ‘Tablighis’ run within the families themselves. Later on, Shahinben admitted that her husband had called a bāpu to their house, when their family had been going through a crisis. She did not believe in the ‘magic’ but in that crisis situation she also did not stop her then desperate husband trying.

These descriptions of religious orientations among Muslims will not surprise the reader familiar with the rich literature on Islamic reform movements in South Asia. Reform movements are as old as Islam itself, were particularly spurred in the eighteenth and second half of the twentieth century (Robinson 2008), and have emerged in very diverse forms in different localities across South Asia (Jasani 2008; Osella and Osella 2008a; Osella and Osella 2008b; Osella and Osella 2011; Simpson 2003; Simpson 2008; see also Gardner 2001 [1995], 229–268). Anthropologists have observed that their informants tend to broadly distinguish between two versions of Islam: on the one hand a ‘traditional Islam’, a mystical form of Islam in which saints act as intermediaries between people and God, and, on the other hand, a ‘reformist Islam’, in which people develop a more direct relation with God through study of the Islamic texts, prayer and reflection, and ritual sobriety (Gellner 1969, 7–8; Gellner 1992, 9; in Simpson 2006a, 14).

The binary view on Islam, narrated by my informants and a recurrent theme in academic representations of Islam in South Asia, has been disqualified as a valid theory for understanding religious practices: what people do is more complex than what they say they do, and even what they say is often more multifaceted and dynamic than can be contained in a binary worldview (Osella and Osella 2008a, 250; Simpson 2008; Gardner 2001 [1995], 236). If the two strands of Islam exist in the minds of people as a rhetorical device, they should not be seen as mutually exclusive realities or as properties of distinct sectarian groups, but rather as
‘potential courses of action’ available to an individual (Simpson 2006a, 108–109). Individuals selectively appropriate and denounce aspects of the spiritual repertoires available to them, and their choices may vary over time and within families. In Anand too, families are literally divided by religious discussions about which potential courses of action to take.

In terms of class, Islamic reform has been described as a device for the rich to reinforce their economically dominant position through expressing religious superiority and modernity (Gardner 2001 [1995], 236–237) and as a means of upward mobility for lower-and middle-ranked caste groups (Jasani 2008, 453). Religious reform has also been associated with rural-urban distinctions, as observed by Heitmeyer when visiting Anand with her informants from the smaller town of Mahemdbad. Vohra Muslims in Mahemdbad observe purdah and Islamic tenets such as the five daily prayers less strictly than their urban relatives in cities such as Anand and Ahmedabad, and they associate manifestations of piety with a more ‘Islamised middle-class urban lifestyle’ (Heitmeyer 2009a, 174). My neighbours in Anand confirm this view. They observe that new arrivals who lived in a village before settling in town tend to fall ‘under the influence’ of the religious atmosphere in Anand town after some time, and then gradually reform their religious practices. They see this as a normal part of their process of adaption from a rural to a more urban and modern lifestyle.

There has been some discussion over whether reform should be seen as a break with tradition, or as an allegedly ‘foreign’ influence on Indian Muslims (Osella and Osella 2008a, 251). In Anand, as in Ahmedabad (Jasani 2008), one could pose the question of if and how reform is related to the process of reconstruction in the aftermath of the 2002 riots, as the aftermath of the riots has been linked to renewed proliferation of religious institutions. The survey of mosques (table 3.4) in Anand shows that the number of mosques almost doubled after the riots. However, this growth is not only due to the reform movement: the number of mosques of both groups, Sunni and Tablighi, doubled. Besides, the survey shows that 18 of the 34 Tablighi mosques in town were already established before 2002. Religious reform therefore has a longer history.

Overall, my findings suggest a long-term local embeddedness of religious reform in Anand and in the wider region of central Gujarat. Religious reform can be seen as part of a long-standing tradition of reform in the region, a tradition cherished today in a newly constructed impressive white madrassa towering over the main road, which is the new residence of the older educational institute founded around 1920 in Anand town, offering complete religious education from kindergarten to post-graduate studies, a government-supported school with a
secular curriculum, and 124 small madrassas that offer primary religious education to the rural youth in the surrounding villages. As I show below, local Vohras have been implicated in the long-term efforts towards religious reform in the region.

I have merely scratched the surface here and there are many more questions to be asked about the varied and dynamic religious practices of Anand’s residents. While the Tablighi Jamaat is important in Anand’s suburbs and provides a modern approach to religion that fits the ‘educated’ outlook and urban lifestyle of the middle class residents, it is also not hegemonic, and religious practices are as contested here as they are among Muslims elsewhere in India. What I have shown in this section is merely that religious practices are a marker of social distinction for the urban middle class in Anand. To be ‘educated’ is to have a degree, to have access to good jobs, to have knowledge and manners, and to be religiously educated.
Makka of Vohras

At a community meeting organised by the Charotar Sunni Vohra community association in Anand, guests take the occasion to share their views about the Vohra community with me. A man, a big smile on his face, declares good-humouredly that: ‘Anand is the Makka of the Vohras!’ At my puzzlement, he gets serious and explains: ‘Previously, Vohras were happy in their villages. They had some small business there. But since the riots in 2002, Vohras want to be in Anand. Some are buying houses here; others are still living in the village and just doing some business here. Nowadays, everybody wants to invest in Anand town.’

Charotar Sunni Vohras (in everyday conversation referred to as Vohras) are the single largest Muslim community in Anand. Residents I spoke to, irrespective of where in Anand they lived, estimated at least 50% of the Muslims in the town are Vohra. Other Muslim surnames frequently heard of here are Sheikh, Diwan, Pathan, Memon, Malek, and Saiyed; there are also some Momin, Khojas, Dawoodi Vohras and Baruchi Patels. My own household survey in the town shows that 66% of the households are Vohra (appendix, table A.3.4). A very significant majority of those who settled in the housing societies constructed in Anand to accommodate riot victims is from the Vohra community. These findings confirm an earlier description of the town as ‘the centre of the Charotar Sunni Vohra community’ (Heitmeyer 2009a, 81).

When discussing ‘community’, I broadly follows Cohen’s views (2000 [1985], 12–15; see also Barth 1998). Now mainstream in anthropology, the idea is that ‘community’ is a relational notion best explored by looking at the creative process of drawing boundaries between self and others (Cohen 2000 [1985], 37). The task of the academic, Cohen argued, is to capture people’s experience of community and the meanings they themselves attach to community boundaries (2000 [1985], 38). In Anand, while ‘community’ is a much-used word, it is used in a variety of ways: to delineate a Hindu from a Muslim ‘community’, and also to describe specific groups within the Muslim community, such as the Charotar Sunni Vohra Samaj (community).

In scholarship of South Asia, debates about ‘community’ have been linked to the concept of ‘caste’ and to questions of social stratification and hierarchy. A long-
term scholarly debate on the question of caste among Indian Muslims has revolved around two opposite positions, one that says Hindu and Muslim social configurations in South Asia are quite similar (Misra 1964, 132/139; in Simpson 2006a, 89) and one that ranking among Indian Muslims is more fluid (Barnett, Fruzetti, and Ostor 1976; in Simpson 2006a, 89) or occurs at the individual level rather than at the level of communities (Mines 1975; in Simpson 2006a, 89). A distinction often referred to in the literature on caste among Muslims is between Ashraf groups (or nobles) and non-Ashraf groups (or commons): Ashraf communities are, or claim to be, the descendants of immigrants, Arab traders and saints, and are considered an elite, while non-Ashraf families are seen as the common people with an acknowledged Indian origin, who have turned to Islam through conversion (Dumont 1970, 207).

In central Gujarat, hierarchical ideas about a sacred genealogy among Muslims do play a role in assessing differences between communities, but this strategy of assessing status generally remains secondary to more instrumental approaches to obtain prominence, such as ‘local politics, financial wealth and, (…) consumption and lifestyle patterns associated with the middle classes’ (Heitmeyer 2009a, 82). The majority of Muslims in central Gujarat belongs to non-Ashraf communities and there is no clear hierarchy among these groups (Heitmeyer 2009a, 83). Vohras are a non-Ashraf group. The Ashraf nobles among the Muslims in the region are believed to be the Saiyeds, a group of saints who claim ancestry from the immigrants who brought Islam to the region in the distant past. Although Saiyeds are connected to households in Anand as religious experts, they are not prominent as a group in the town. They have their own centres elsewhere, in nearby villages such as Hardgod.

Throughout the thesis it will be evident that there are different ideas about what the Vohra community is or should be. These different ideas exist both ‘in the field’ and in academic representations of the community. There is remarkable variety in how earlier scholars have described Vohras. In terms of Vohras’ economic background, in particular, different sources contradict each other. Misra (1964, 122) says that ‘the majority of the Sunni Vohras of all regions are cultivators but an increasing proportion is taking to trade for its livelihood’; Engineer (1989, 30–31) calls Vohras ‘peasants’ and ‘tillers of the soil’; Rajyagor (1977, 185) describes them as ‘engaged in business or employed in Government or semi-Government services. Some of them are lawyers, doctors and engineer also’. Heitmeyer described Vohras as a ‘business community’ (Heitmeyer 2009a, 32).

When I describe Vohras, I describe them from the specific perspective of (mostly
middle class) residents of Anand town and from that of Vohras in the UK and USA. This generates some commonalities and some differences in my account with the earlier scholars who have described Vohras. Key to all descriptions of Vohras is their existence as an endogamous community. It is through their distinctive marriage practices that they set the boundaries vis-à-vis other Muslims and maintain their identity as a separate community. My analysis confirms the analysis of Heitmeyer that endogamous marriage practices ‘are central to encouraging unity within the wider Sunni Vohra regional network and are closely linked to the samaj’s strong sense of identity within the local landscape’, even if my analysis spatially extends from the local network to the transnational family network of Vohras. I also confirm that Vohras profile themselves as a community with a regional identity and distinguish themselves from other Muslims by speaking the Gujarati language in the home, thus aligning themselves with Gujarat, while most other local Muslims speak Hindi in the home, thus aligning themselves with the ‘national language’ and with north India (Heitmeyer 2009a, 87).

In economic terms, my findings partly confirm the earlier descriptions of the Vohra community as a ‘business community’ (put forward in Heitmeyer 2009a) but also suggest that Vohras in Anand are probably more oriented towards education and (white collar) jobs than elsewhere. In Anand, the ideal of education and ‘finding a good job’ has a firm hold on the career choices of Muslim youth, which is reflected in the marriage market where ‘being educated’ has become almost a prerequisite to finding a spouse. This inclination for ‘education’ and ‘service’ is a reflection of the development I sketched earlier, that Anand attracts Muslim families interested in education and urban professions.

There are different marriage groups within the Vohra community, the ‘Chaud’, ‘Arsad’, ‘Makeriya’ and ‘Dewataja’. The Chaud (in Gujarati: ‘fourteen’) group is considered a relatively privileged high-status group of fourteen families (or groups of families), who have traditionally been powerful in business, with ‘land and property’ in their villages of origin, and traditionally less interested in education (Heitmeyer 2009a, 105-111). After migration to Anand, they maintain the family-owned land and property in the villages and simultaneously use the town to extend their power base, accessing education and urban business while still cultivating social relations in other towns and villages (comparable to the situation of local Patels, Verstappen and Rutten 2015; and comparable to the situation of rural elites in north India, described by Jeffrey 2001, 228, 231).

Other families who derive their income and status not from business but from (government) service have used education, non-agricultural employment and rural-urban migration to experience a process of economic and social upward
mobility (comparable to the strategies of local Christians, and comparable to the situation described by Jeffrey for marginalised groups in rural north India, Jeffrey 2001, 226; Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery 2004a). This strategy is associated with the Arsad and Makeriya marriage groups in the Vohra community. In Anand, these are described as families without traditional capital who have made considerable economic progress through education and (government) service. The women of the Arsad and Makeriya group are thought to be more highly educated than the women of the Chaud group. The Makeriya group in particular stresses education in their self-presentation and in the events they organise, such as an annual ‘awards’ ceremony for students who receive a degree that year. Some neighbours have said that the families of the Arsad and Makeriya group are catching up so fast that they are now surpassing the Chaud families in status and wealth and that this would be a major impetus for Chaud families to send their children into education too. Overall, my findings confirm business is important among Vohras, but suggest in Anand people are more oriented towards education and (white collar) ‘service jobs’.

To understand the prominent position of Vohras in the town, we need to look at the local interest in both secular and religious education. In the past, during the establishment of religious institutions in Anand, Vohras have been at the forefront of religious reform. The oral history of the ‘Big Madrassa’ has it that it was a Vohra, Gulammabi from the village of Tarpur, who started the development to ‘bring light’ to the Muslims in the region. This is confirmed in a local history book. In Anand today, it is common to find Vohras working as maulanas or to see groups of young Vohra men dressed in white kurta pyjamas walking around the neighbourhood to meet nominal Muslims and invite them to (more) faithful adherence to Islamic teachings (cf. Metcalf 2003, 136). Their zeal is noticeable, but not appreciated by all. One man (Malek and Sunni) found the visits of the Vohra preachers so bothersome that he forbade them to come to his house again.

The Vohra-supported tradition of reform questions the relevance of the oft-described Ashraf/non-Ashraf hierarchy in which the role of religious service provider is attributed to Ashraf communities, as here members of the non-Ashraf community of Vohras can take on the role of preachers and teachers (cf. Jasani 2008, 449). It has been noted elsewhere that reform can be used to reinterpret...
religion in such a way that traditional authority is attacked, so that an emerging economically powerful group can establish religious superiority (Simpson 2006a, 87–109). In Anand too, the religious teachers of the Vohra community are in competition with the Saiyeds, who are verbally abused time and again by being called cheating bapu who steal money from the pockets of innocents (comparable to descriptions in Simpson 2006a, 104; also Jasani 2008, 453), even if categories are not fixed and a bapu may still be called upon in times of need (Simpson 2008).

Vohras are recognised in Anand, by themselves and by other Muslims, as the single most prominent and powerful Muslim community in town. They take on a leading role in the Muslim community by organising facilities for poorer and less fortunate Muslims in the town: several primary schools, two hospitals, and a charitable association, all managed by trusts consisting of only, or mainly, Vohras, and all open to all residents of the neighbourhood, including other Muslims and the Hindu poor. The prominence of Vohras is also signified through language. Vohras speak Gujarati, most other Muslims speak Hindi but, significantly, my non-Vohra neighbours switch automatically from Hindi to Gujarati when conversing with Vohras, even when visited by Vohras in their own homes. It is here, in Anand’s ‘Muslim area’, that Vohras have come to establish themselves as a dominant community among other Muslims and sometimes try to dictate even what and how they pray. The description of Anand as ‘the centre of the Charotar Sunni Vohra community’ (Heitmeyer 2009a, 81) seems an apt one to me.

Conclusion

Muslims have moved to Anand for two reasons: to seek safety and to achieve upward mobility through rural-urban migration. In this chapter, I have described the migration of Muslims to Anand against the historical background of the violence and aftermath of the violence in Gujarat in 2002 and in relation to other processes of urbanisation and rural-urban migration in the region. I have shown that Anand has become an important centre for local Muslims, particularly to those that value (secular and religious) education. Within the town, Charotar Sunni Vohras are the single largest Muslim community and have become a clearly visible group among the educated and religiously reformed Muslim middle class.

The situation of Muslims in Anand can be compared with the situation of Muslims in other Indian cities and towns, specifically with the nearby city of Ahmedabad and with the nearby town of Mahemdabad. Ahmedabad has been

51 In addition, a trust of the Memon community manages a primary school, and there is a student hostel for Muslim students in Vallabh Vidyanagar.
described as an emblematic case of the process of ‘ghettoisation of Muslims in Indian cities. In many parts of India, Muslims have been relegated to ‘neighbourhoods of exile’ in response to communal violence, concerns over safety, marginalisation and exclusion (Chaudhury 2007; Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012; Mahadevia 2007; Sattar 2012; Shaban 2012), sometimes as a result of voluntary self-segregation and, at other times, as a result of the ‘forcible relegation of a negatively typed population’ (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 21). Surrounded by physical and metaphorical ‘borders’ (Mahadevia 2007, 379) that reduce opportunities for social interaction with members of other communities, these neighbourhoods tend to be shunned by middle- and upper-caste Hindus and are referred to by them as ‘mini-Pakistan’, reproducing the nation-state at the neighbourhood level and alienating residents from citizen rights (Shaban 2012, 219–221).

The case of Anand indicates that the trend of ‘ghettoisation’ of Indian Muslims, described so far mainly in larger Indian cities, is also taking place in a town in a rural region. The ‘Muslim area’ of Anand fits the description of an ‘enclave’ (Wacquant 2008; in Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 21) as it houses residents of various social-economic backgrounds, is almost homogeneously composed of Muslims as a result of self-segregation in response to communal violence, and is the result of a residential regrouping of people on the basis of ascribed religious identities that has occurred because of social and political constraints. Sometimes residents feel estranged from wider society, for example, when they experience difficulties in getting access to good schools, to decent jobs, or when they experience othering while traveling into ‘Hindu areas’.

In spite of the above, the neighbourhood is not experienced by the residents as an ‘open air prison’ (Shaban 2012, 223). This contrasts with descriptions of other ‘Muslim areas’, where a lack of mobility has been observed and residents seem almost locked into the neighbourhood. In Ahmedabad, Muslims cannot easily leave the Muslim area partly because of the absence of infrastructure or public transport and partly because residents are socially barred from venturing into other parts of the city (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 324). This results in estrangement from the rest of the city and a ‘subjective sense of closure of residents’ (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 21-22). In Anand, Muslims are not confined to their neighbourhood. Although there is segregation, this does not stop Muslims from having regular contact with the outside world: students go to school, women enjoy (window) shopping in Vallabh Vidyanagar, and men continue to be economically involved in ‘Hindu areas’.

Participation in wider society is, however, not always easy. Self-confidence can suffer as a consequence of experiences of discrimination or stereotyping when
people venture into other parts of the town. There is a tension between experiences of strength and confidence within the neighbourhood, and experiences of marginalisation and exclusion outside. On the one hand, the emergence of a neighbourhood in which no (middle class) Hindu wants to live, in which many middle class Hindu do not even dare to enter, sets Muslims apart as different. Outsiders know the place as a ‘Muslim area’, and this label is enough for them to believe the place is dangerous and filled with poverty and crime. Residents are aware of these outside labels. On the other hand, for them, living in a neighbourhood they can call ‘ours’ is also a source of confidence and comfort, particularly for the upwardly mobile middle class that derives confidence from the fact they are part of a wealthy and relatively educated elite within the larger ‘Muslim area’. It is within the neighbourhood that other processes of social distinction become visible and that a Muslim elite can manifest itself. Within the ‘Muslim area’, one’s social standing is dependent on economic position, educational level, and religious practice.

If the situation of Anand is rather different than the situation in Ahmedabad, it is also different from the situation in the nearby town Mahemdabad, where segregation has not taken such pronounced forms (Heitmeyer 2009a, 45-47). The old qasbah town of Mahemdabad seems to have been immune to ghettoisation. Vohra merchants live among Hindus in the central market area. Their livelihoods and everyday existence depend on harmonious relations with local Hindus. This is so even though there was more violence in Mahemdabad than in Anand during the riots. The violence in Mahemdabad included five deaths, approximately Rs. 33 million in damages by local Muslims, armed men shouting abuse and throwing rocks at the houses of prominent Muslims and of anyone else opposing the Hindutva agenda, and finally a backlash of violence against low-caste Hindus in the town (Heitmeyer 2009b, 109–110). These atrocities shocked the residents but are explained by them as intrusions by ‘outsiders’, not of the town, who came in groups numbering the thousands to wreak havoc (Heitmeyer 2009b, 110). Through the trope of the ‘outsiders’, previous modes of relations and continued co-existence of Hindus and Muslims are cultivated within the town.

Insofar as Heitmeyer (2009a, 87; 2009b, 106) does note segregation, this is instigated by the upper classes and upwardly mobile middle classes who move out from the central part of the town into suburban Muslim ‘housing societies’ at the outskirts of Mahemdabad. My data suggests that some of these upwardly mobile families have not stayed within Mahemdabad but have moved into Anand town, along with many others from smaller town and villages in the vicinity. In Anand, these new arrivals from non-segregated towns such as Mahemdabad do settle in ‘Muslim areas’.
The comparison between Anand town and Mahemdabad is all the more interesting because Charotar Sunni Vohras are a large Muslim community in both towns, and the residents of the two towns are connected through economic and kinship ties. Vohra merchants in Mahemdabad profile themselves as culturally closer to local Hindus than to other Muslims in the region (Heitmeyer 2009a, 76-77). Vohras in Anand presented themselves to me rather differently. They try to take on leading roles within the Muslim community, for example in the field of primary education (through the establishment of charitable schools to educate the poor) and religious reform (though the Tablighi Jamaat). Heitmeyer observed that Vohra Muslims in Mahemdabad associate Anand with a more ‘Islamised middle-class urban lifestyle’ than their own (Heitmeyer 2009a, 174), and my neighbours in Anand confirm these and other urban-rural divisions. I see the differences between Vohras in the two towns as an outcome of the recent process of migration to Anand and the formation of an urbanised Muslim middle class in Anand, which is linked to a reorientation in outlook and lifestyle.

I have used the term ‘middle class’ frequently in this chapter because my neighbours also talked about themselves as ‘middle class’ people. There is an extensive literature on the emergence of an Indian ‘middle class’ (Batnitzky, McDowell, and Dyer 2007; Fernandes 2006; Sridharan 2004; Upadhya 2011; Varma 1998), which is partly a response to the fact that people in India themselves find this social category relevant as a tool of distinction between themselves and others (Dickey 2012). Studies of the middle classes in other places in India describe similar strategies of upward mobility through education, (sub)urbanisation and improved morality (van Wessel 2001, 34–61; Säävälä 2001). It has also been noted that participation in higher education enables people to affirm a status as ‘educated’ and that this is a way to attain self-worth in contexts of marginalisation, particularly for Muslims and Dalits (Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery 2004a; Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery 2004b). A politics of religious reform has been noted both among aspiring middle class lower-caste Hindus (Säävälä 2001) and among urban educated middle class Muslims distinguishing themselves from the ‘rural ignorant’ through a modern religious outlook (Osella and Osella 2008b, 322–323). The families I lived with illustrate these patterns described elsewhere: they affirm they are part of an Indian middle class, live in a (sub)urban neighbourhood, and education is the talk of the day.
Map of central Gujarat
The description of Anand as the ‘Vohra head quarters’ or as a ‘centre of the Vohra community’ indicates a perspective of Anand as a key node within a wider social network and a self-image of the Vohra community as a regional community. This represents a challenge to the notion of the insulated Muslim ‘ghetto’ and deserves further exploration. In this chapter, through ethnographic explorations with Vohra residents of Anand town, I describe Vohras as a regional community with significant ties to the predominantly agricultural area of central Gujarat.

My argument here is that Vohra residents of Anand town cannot be seen in isolation from the region. This leads to a modification of the perspective of ghettoisation, which has guided recent authorship on Muslims in Indian cities, particularly in Gujarat (Chaudhury 2007; Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012; Ghassem-Fachandi 2008; Jasani 2010; Patel 2006a; Mahadevia 2007; Rajagopal 2010; Sattar 2012; Shaban 2012). As I have shown in Chapter 3, the ‘Muslim area’ of Anand fits the description of an ‘enclave’ (Wacquant 2008; in Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 21), and the case study confirms that the process of segregation, described so far mainly in larger Indian cities, is also taking place in towns. However, since the process of segregation in Anand is not characterised by a subjective ‘sense of closure’ of the
residents, it is an interesting counterexample to the recently studied Muslim ghetto of Juhapura in Ahmedabad, where residents cannot easily leave the area due to a lack of public transport and due to being socially barred from venturing into other parts of the city (Jaffrelot and Thomas 2012, Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 21-22). While Juhapura has been called ‘the only Muslim ghetto of the subcontinent’ (Thomas 2015, 4), it has also been presented as ‘the most emblematic’ case of ghettoisation in Indian cities (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 324) and as characteristic of the isolation of ‘many other Muslims of Gujarat’ (2012, 324). It was tempting for me to also use the rhetoric of isolation and immobility to understand the lives of Muslims in Anand town, but the ethnography has led me to a different understanding.

What strikes me as obscuring our view is that the urban studies are themselves somewhat ‘insulated’, seeing people only within the confines of the urban area, and mapping only the connections between the neighbourhood and the rest of the city. By ‘scaling up’ from the town into the region, this study asserts that ‘the linkages between urban centres and the countryside, including movement of people, goods, capital and other social transactions, play an important role in processes of rural and urban change’ (Tacoli 1998, 147). This regional perspective leads away from guiding notions of isolation and closure, and opens up an awareness of connections between the enclave and the wider area beyond the city. Such a perspective is particularly relevant in the context of small and medium-sized towns in India, which can play a key role in creating a ‘regional fabric’ (Koskimaki and Upadhya 2013, 14).

Anand has been described as an example of a town that is intimately connected to the rural hinterland (Patel 2006b, 26) through dense economic and social networks, regionally dispersed networks that encapsulate key relationships for the town’s residents. The district capital of Anand district within central Gujarat and forming the centre of a typical ‘rurban’ or ‘peri-urban’ region in which town and wider rural environment are closely connected, Anand is a hub that provides services to the rural hinterland and a node of transport in a network of villages and other towns. It is therefore characterised by a large in- and outflow of people from the region on a daily basis: commuters and students travelling from nearby villages to work or school in Anand, villagers who come to visit relatives and friends, to do business, to buy goods or to visit the restaurants or cinema halls. The town is also well-connected by roads, highways and railway lines to the large cities of Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and Mumbai, so forms a node in a wider network of villages to the larger cities.1

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1 This description of Anand’s connectedness has been published, somewhat shortened, in a journal article (Verstappen and Rutten 2015, 233).
The Vohras who settled in Anand before and after 2002 have thus become part of a town that is well-connected to the wider region. As a result, they have been able to maintain their own ties to villages and other towns in the region with ease. Since these urban families continue to straddle the rural-urban divide by their maintenance of cherished kinship relations and economic ties across the region, looking at these urban residents only within their urban context would not do justice to reality. As I argue next, their continued embedding in the region is of practical and symbolic importance to Vohra residents of Anand town, and their regional attachments are an important aspect of their sense of ‘community’. This chapter thus argues that regional belonging persists along with memories of victimisation and displacement in the wake of 2002.

How do Vohras think about and perceive the region? How have violence, rural-urban migration and segregation affected regional identities? Has traveling changed? There is no single answer to these questions. Social dynamics of class, age and gender inform how individuals relate to the region. Using different perspectives on the region has helped me to ‘see’ this. While regions can be thought of as ‘imagined’ (Anderson 1991), they can also be thought of as a ‘matrix of movement’ (Ingold 2005 [2000], 217), as a network of ‘coming and going’ (Ingold 2005 [2000], 235). In this chapter, I use both analytical lenses, the lens of imagining and the lens of mobility, to explore how the region is seen and perceived by Vohras of Anand town. The work of imagining is shown through an exploration of community history and local marriage circles, and experiences of mobility are described through an exploration of dispersed kinship ties and business ventures. This opens multiple perspectives of the region, as understood by different kinds of people. At the end of the chapter, I compare my findings with existing descriptions of the regional affiliations of the economically, politically and socially dominant community in the region, the Patidars of Charotar.

The Charotar Sunni Vohra association

In a small office in Anand I meet two elderly men, who introduce themselves as board members of the ‘Charotar Sunni Vahora Samaj’, the community association of Vohras in the region of Charotar. They explain about the events they have organised for the community in the past years, the goals of the association, and the publications they have produced. The office is managed by a paid employee, who shows me the pictures of events stored on the computer.
The Charotar Sunni Vohra association is a good starting point to explore the regional identity of the Vohra community. Although the office described above was closed by the end of my research (after a member confiscated the computer because of a dispute over money), the community is still active and has continued to organise events after my departure. The main purpose of the association is to unite the community by encouraging the maintenance of endogamous marriage practices (within the Vohra community), an ideal ‘closely linked to the samaj’s strong sense of identity within the local landscape’ (Heitmeyer 2009a, 32). Community endogamy is encouraged through social events, publishing books, and providing support to poorer members of the community. The leadership consists of sixty board members from various villages and towns in central Gujarat. They consider Anand their ‘head office’ and joint events tend to be organised here, although members also organise activities in their own towns and villages or in specific sub-sections of the community.

How has the idea to organise as ‘Charotar Sunni Vohras’ come about? Here I provide an overview of attempts to organise the Vohra community here, showing that the word ‘Charotar’ has been contained in the names of the organisations, publications and activities for a long time, almost 100 years.

Vohras have profiled themselves as a regional community based in ‘Charotar’ since at least the 1926 publication of the ‘Charotar Sunni Vahora Anjuman’ (Charotar Sunni Vohra Assembly). Since then, the name ‘Charotar’ has been added to the name Vohra/Vahora in various attempts to organise this specific, regionally based, Muslim community. The attempts to organise the community include two mini conferences (1926 and 1928, in Uttarsanda and Anand) and two conferences (1938 and 1940, in Anand and Sarsa) ‘under the auspices of Charotar Sunni Vohoras’. Among the issues discussed were the promotion of education in the community, the propagation of simple weddings and group marriages to counter ‘wasteful expenditure in the community’s weddings’, the ‘menace of divorce in the community’ and the ‘encouragement of community spirit’.

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2 Vohra Darshan, by Haji Ismailbhai Sabanbhai Vahora (Borsadwala) Karanchi, Mumbai (undated, no known publisher), 78-90. Although the year of publication is not stated, the date of death of the author is given: 22-10-1404 according to the Muslim calendar (22 July 1984). For the purpose of this research, the book was translated from Gujarati into English partly by Rashid Vohra in London and partly by Mayur Macwan and Monica Macwan in Anand. I copied the book and sent it to members of the UK Vohra Association, who scanned it and made it available online through their Facebook page.

3 The Gujarati script for the name of the community name is: ચરોતર સુન્ની વહોરા. There are different ways to transcribe the Gujarati word Vohora in English. The spelling ‘Vohra’ is more often used in Gujarati, and is also found in the USA. The spelling ‘Vohra’ is preferred in the UK and used in academic descriptions (Heitmeyer 2009b; Heitmeyer 2011). The spelling ‘Bohra’ seems to be the prevalent spelling in Karachi. The spelling is not considered a marker of distinction within the community, except that it can sometimes indicate one’s residential base.

4 Vohra Darshan, 177-182.

5 Vohra Darshan, 78-110.
Vahora Young Men’s Association was registered in 1936. Concrete results were the establishment of a higher education institute, the I.J. Kapurwala commercial school (in Anand) and the establishment of two student hostels (in Vadodara and Anand) in the early 1940s. After independence, although the educational institutions were closed,7 conferences continued to be organised to discuss community affairs. A ‘Charotar Sunni Vohra Panchayat’ (Charotar Sunni Vohra village council) was established in Pedlad in 1954 and a ‘Charotar Sunni Vohra Tarahija Mandal’ (association of the Tarahija sub-community) was established in Chaklasi in 1979. I draw these insights from a rare unpublished and undated book entitled ‘A glimpse at Vohra’ (Vahora Darshan), the only source that I have found that provides information about the origins of the Charotar Sunni Vohra community. I stumbled upon the book at the end of my research period, in London, and later discovered that a school teacher in Anand also owned a copy. The book is presented as a history of all Vohras in India and the Middle East, but the history of the Vohras of Charotar is the most extensively covered, and the informational focus in the book indicates that the author was well-connected to, and informed by, Vohra residents of central Gujarat and Bombay. The author was a Vohra and says that he lived in Mumbai, his name indicates ancestry from the town of Borsad in central Gujarat: Haji Ismailbhai Sabanbhai Vahora (Borsadwala) Karanchi.

Interestingly, the book suggests that those who started to organise the regional community did not live in the region itself. The idea of a regionally specific Vohra community appears to have first been raised not in central Gujarat but in Bombay, where migrants from the region started to organise themselves as a specific community of Muslims from ‘Charotar’. The organising association, the ‘Charotar Sunni Vahora Young Men’s Association’, was registered in Bombay in 1936. Though the events they organised took place mostly in Gujarat, these appear to have been organised and probably sponsored from Bombay. Ten years after its registration, the association moved office to Anand, and a bylaw was introduced in the governing body that ‘instead of only residents of Bombay, all Vohras from Baroda, Charotar region, Anand and Ahmedabad are permitted as office bearers of the association’.9 This confirms the idea that a ‘heimat’ can be born by moving away from it, an idea proposed by Anderson (1998). While this idea has been considered relevant mainly

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6 The association is sometimes referred to as the ‘Sunni Vohra Young Men’s Association’, without the prefix ‘Charotar’ (Vahora Darshan, 78-100).
7 Various reasons are mentioned for the ‘downfall’ of the Vohra community in the late 1940s and 1950s. Among these are conflicts amongst the leaders, the death of some of the founders, and the lack of enthusiasm among the younger generation (Vahora Darshan, 91-100). Some of my informants in Anand explain the closures by the departure of rich Vohras from Mumbai to Karachi, which deprived the institutions of donations.
8 The author explains that the name ‘Vohra’ has been adopted in different contexts for different reasons. It is unclear whether these disparate ‘Vohra’, ‘Vahora’ or ‘Bohra’ groups are historically related to each other or merely share a name.
9 Vahora Darshan, 100-110.
in studies of transnational migrants (Safran 1991; Cohen 1996; Axel 2002; Morawska 2011), these findings show a comparable process in the context of ‘internal migration’.

Today the Vohra association in central Gujarat operates independently and Vohras of Charotar in Mumbai have established their own separate association. The main purpose of the association in central Gujarat is to bring the community together and to encourage endogamous marriage (Heitmeyer 2008, 131) through ‘Vohra meetings’, which are organised regularly so that families living dispersed across the region can meet each other. A regular event is the ‘group weddings’ (samuh lagn), one of which I witnessed myself in a community hall in Anand town. Other events organised by the Charotar Sunni Vohra community association in Anand town include ‘singles’ events to facilitate interaction between unmarried young men and women in the community and ‘award ceremonies’ for students.

In the office of the Charotar Sunni Vohra association in Anand, there were also printed materials of interest. I collected seven copies of the newspaper ‘Vohra Reformation’ (Vahora Sudharak), subtitled ‘Pamphlet for the reformation of the Charotar Sunni Vohra community’ (Charotar Sunni Vahora Sudharak Mandalnu Mukapatr), dated between 2005 and 2011, which had been distributed by the association. A more informal source of information was a folder that lay on the table of the office, containing pictures and handwritten information of Vohra young men and women, all of whom were of marriageable age. My hosts encouraged me to look through these files, which lay there especially for visitors to flip through when arranging a marriage within the Vohra community.

I also collected four books with detailed demographic information about Vohra families in the region. These books (produced between 1986 and 2006) list the marital status of each member of a family and contain further demographic information. Heitmeyer earlier collected three such books on town- or city-specific Vohra groups: Mahemdabad 1998, Thasra 2000, and Ahmedabad 2004 (Heitmeyer 2009a, 111-112). The four additional books I found are different: rather than being town-based, they focus on a sub-group within the Vohra community that is dispersed over different villages and towns in central Gujarat (three books of the Makeriya⁰ sub-group and one book of the Dewataja¹¹ sub-group). The Makeriya group has been particularly active, producing a new update of the book every decade since 1986. The three editions of the book list all known Makeriya families in Gujarat by town, as in a telephone book. The main purpose of these books, Heitmeyer argues and my informants confirm, is to facilitate marriage within the

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community. The books make it possible to assess a family’s socioeconomic position and sub-group within the Vohra community.

A key feature of the community association is thus to encourage unity within the community. This entails maintaining the boundaries of the community vis-à-vis other people, including other local Muslims. This is done first through the name of the community, Charotar Sunni Vohras. The prefix ‘Charotar’ marks the community off as a local community, distinct from Vohras of Gujarat with whom there is no intermarriage: Baruchi Vohras, Surti Vohras, Ahmdabadi Vohras and Kathiawari Vohras. These regional boundaries between different Vohra communities are not only drawn locally by Vohras of Charotar but are also recognised in literature about Muslims in Gujarat: Misra (1964, 123) for example distinguishes four ‘regional sections or independent communities’: Patani Vohras, Kadiwal Vohras, Charotar Vohras and Surati Sunni Vohras. This regional differentiation is in addition to the prefix ‘Sunni’, which distinguishes them from Muslims with a different (Shia) religious tradition, such as the Dawoodi Bohras.

The regional Vohra community, promoted by the active board members of the community association, is widely recognised by Vohras in Anand town. This is illustrated in the following quotes from different residents of Anand:

Baruchi Vohras are different from us. They have different customs, different language. I’m not exactly sure what the differences are, because we don’t socialise with them (quote from a middle-aged woman).

We wouldn’t marry our daughter to a Baruchi Vohra family. The family customs are different (quote from a middle-aged woman).

The Sunni Vohras from Charotar are different from the Sunni Vohras in Ahmedabad. I used to live in Ahmedabad, so I know about this. We speak Gujarati, they speak Urdu. We are also different from Dawoodi Bohras. They are a separate group (quote from an elderly man).

These quotes confirm that distinctions are being drawn between different Vohra communities on the basis of their different regional backgrounds.

The distinct identity of Charotar Sunni Vohras is also recognised by other Muslims in Anand, who are aware that their Vohra neighbours only marry among themselves. The specific local identity of Vohras was a reason for derogatory remarks among some of my non-Vohra neighbours, such as a Diwan neighbour,
who asserted that ‘only in Charotar, people know what is a Vohra. Only here they have power. Outside of Charotar, Vohras mean nothing.’

In summary, the self-naming of the community by the name ‘Charotar’ has a history of almost 100 years and continues to be an important marker of community boundaries among Muslims in central Gujarat. A more in-depth historical analysis would be needed to fully understand how and why Vohras started to organise themselves at that time in Bombay, and how the concept of a regional community travelled ‘back home’ to Gujarat. The historian is likely to comment that caste/community formation in the colonial period was related to transformations in the organisation of society under colonialism and would possibly draw attention to the colonial state’s representational politics (van der Veer 1994, 25-27) and to social classifications used for the distribution of entitlements among colonial subjects (Risley in 1891, Wallace 1896, in Pinney 1997, 62-63). A historical study would also be likely to further explore how statehood and unequal power relations have produced regions (as in Simpson and Kapadia 2010), and how this relates to the case of ‘Charotar’. Here, however, I base myself on fieldwork in Anand town in the period 2011-2012, and look at ‘Charotar’ from a town-centred perspective. How do residents of Anand town perceive of the region and of themselves as part of a regional community? What does ‘Charotar’ mean to them as a symbolic marker of community?

Regional community history

Throughout my research, Vohras consistently presented themselves as a regionally based community, based in Charotar. In this section, therefore, I analyse the community narratives of the Vohras of Charotar I was told in the field, and explore how they themselves present their historical role in the region. I explore how a narrative of conversion and a narrative of long-term embeddedness in the local economy contribute to their sense of being a local community. Their view of history is a story of long-term commitment to the agricultural economy of central Gujarat. This section is based mainly on the accounts of elderly men who, for different reasons, were appointed by my neighbours or by themselves as knowledgeable about the Charotar Sunni Vohra community.

In local and academic descriptions, ‘Charotar’ is roughly located in the relatively affluent agricultural area between the two cities of Ahmedabad and Vadodara (Baroda), on the two sides of the main road and railway track between the two
cities, with the towns of Anand and Nadiad as regional centres. Its external borders are unclear and probably irrelevant for most residents. ‘Charotar’ is translated as a beautiful or pleasant (charo) land (Rajyagor 1977, 1; Pocock 1972, 5) with a fertile and well-tilled soil (Rajyagor 1977, 1), particularly suitable for the cash crops of tobacco and cotton (Pocock 1972, 6), where land has been very valuable (Hardiman 1981, 263). The region is characterised by a high population density and a well-developed rural sector based on a long-term process of agricultural commercialisation, industrialisation and diversification of the rural economy. The rural economy has been commercially oriented since before the early nineteenth century, with tobacco and cotton as important crops, and, since the late nineteenth century, has exported tobacco, cotton and diary products to markets far beyond the direct vicinity (Rutten 1995, 73). After Independence, an acceleration of this early process of economic development took place when the so-called Green Revolution resulted in further increases in productivity in agriculture and agro-industry. The region then became a centre of dairy production, of engineering companies that manufacture and repair agricultural machinery, industries for irrigation works and the building industry, and mechanical and electrical engineering companies (Rutten 1995). Agriculture has thus gone through a gradual process of intensification of production, initially due to irrigation and small-scale development of agro-industry and, after Independence, through government-supported industrialisation of agriculture and mechanisation of the agricultural process (Rutten 1995, 79–86).

The regional/local character of the Vohra community is affirmed both through a narrative of conversion and through a narrative of long-term embeddedness in the local economy. Vohras consider themselves a local community who, once upon a time, converted to Islam from Hinduism. They thus claim to be descended from local Hindus. This claim is important in local ideas about distinction among Muslims because it sets them apart from the Muslim saints, the Saiyeds, believed to be descendants of the Prophet who landed in Gujarat from outside the subcontinent (Simpson 2006a, 88–92, see also Misra 1964, 118-122, and Chapter 3 of this thesis), and, at the same time, it aligns them with local Hindus. Various ideas circulate about this ancestry from local Hindus, two of which I mention here.

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12 Parts of this paragraph have been published in Verstappen and Rutten (2015, 233).

13 It is possible that converts took on the name ‘Vohra’ (trader) to signify their conversion to Islam. Conversion to Sunni Islam is said to have taken place during the rule of Sultan Muzafarshah I in the period 1377-1411 (Rajyagor 1977, 185), was concentrated in rural areas and took place among various local groups, including but not confined to those who actually traded. In contrast, Shia Islam seems to have been more concentrated in the cities of Gujarat (Engineer 1989, 30-31). Karim Mohammad Master says, in the chapter ‘Muslims of Gujarat’ of the Bombay Government Gazetteer (1938, 66-69): ‘The common word Vohra has been used for Shiya traders settled in cities and Sunni farmers in villages. It was believed that all the 'Vohras' were Daudi Vahoras from Shiya community but that later on in Gujarat during the reign of early sultans, the Shiya Vahoras in villages were converted to Sunni Islam. There is not enough evidence in support of this belief that Sunni Vohras from villages were reconverted’ (referring to Mirate Hmedi, 87).
Some claim that the Vohras are derived from lower Hindu castes and that their conversion was motivated by a desire to ‘escape from caste oppression’. These stories are accompanied by contrasting Hindu hierarchical ideas about caste with notions of equality within Islam, and thus highlight differences between Muslims and Hindus while simultaneously affirming a connection. Other informants draw connections between Patels (or Patidars) and Vohras, by explaining that both are vanyas (merchants), speak the same language, share many customs, and have lived together in the villages of Charotar for a long time. This story highlights similarities between Vohras and Patels, who were, in one case, lumped together as ‘the two dominant communities in the region’. The idea that Vohras were derived from the Patel/Patidar caste is also mentioned in a Gujarati book on the Charotar region, which refers to cultural similarities between the communities: ‘Their marriage customs [of Vohras] were like Patidars. Their dresses were like Patidari turban and ladies wore Patidar dresses.’ Clearly, there is no way of assessing the truth of these histories, the point instead is to assess what these circulating stories teach us about the present.

The second narrative through which a regional/local character of the community is affirmed is through a narrative of long-term embeddedness in the local economy. A common view of history among Vohras with whom I spoke in central Gujarat is that those who converted to Islam in the region used to be traders and agro-industrialists. The first version of this narrative, the narrative of trade, presents Vohras as an economic link between the agricultural economy and the outside world. Vohras sold products from the outside world to farmers, and bought produce from the farms to sell elsewhere, or were hawkers, selling products door-to-door, sometimes on foot, carrying their loads on their backs, sometimes using a push cart. Today, many Vohras are still specialised in selling clothes and textiles, either in shops or door-to-door (feri). At the higher end, there are the bigger business families, who bought the produce of the local farmers (mainly of the Patel and Kshatriya communities), to send to Mumbai or elsewhere to sell at a profit. At the auction market of Nadiad, which I visited with a former trader, it was claimed that 30% of the wholesale traders there used to be Muslims.

A second version of the narrative is a narrative of agro-industry, which highlights Vohras as having been embedded in the region in a very different way. Some of my older informants shared personal memories of how Vohras used to grind oil

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15 This traditional occupation of Vohras, selling vegetables door-to-door, was, in the past, also carried out by some members of the Patidar caste who had been driven to do so by economic pressures. The occupation was considered of inferior status in the Patidar caste (Pocock 1972, 38).
(ganchi) in the village, or processed cotton. With the increasing industrialisation of agriculture after Independence, and the emergence of an incipient middle class trying to move upward in life through education and ‘service’ jobs, most of these traditional occupations diminished in importance. Even so, small processing workshops can still be found in the local bazars across the region, and the legacy is continued by the big Vohra trading families, some of whom own factories, mills or cold storages related to the processing and trading of agricultural products. The link to agricultural trade and agro-industry is shown in the additional surnames of some of these Vohra business families, including Limbuwallah (in lemon wholesale business), Chanawallah (processing and trading chickpeas), Dudhwala (in dairy) and Fruitwala.

While Vohras have traditionally been linked to the agricultural economy in their self-narratives, one element of the story is not agreed upon by different narrators: the question of land ownership. There are clearly some major landowners among Vohras in Anand as well as families with smaller plots of agricultural land in their home villages. Although this land sometimes continues to be maintained even after migration to Anand town, as a researcher based in Anand, it was not usually possible for me to assess the significance and histories of landownership. Misra (1964, 122) claims that ‘the majority of the Sunni Vohras are cultivators’ (1964, 125), while Engineer (Engineer 1989, 30–31) calls Vohras ‘peasants’ and ‘tillers of the soil’. Some of my informants also claim that many Vohras were initially farmers, losing their land due to ‘all these riots’. However, other informants argued that Vohras were derived from modest backgrounds and that most of them had no land: only those among them who were successful merchants became (rural and urban) landowners because they were able to invest profits in land. These stories of land acquisition highlight the intermediary roles of Vohras as contractors and brokers in land deals and through small-scale investments rather than an ancestral claim on land. The different views reflect the diversity of economic backgrounds in the community.

A third way in which local ancestry is affirmed is through the ancestral villages of the Charotar Sunni Vohras, memories of which are maintained through their complex marriage system. To understand the Vohra’s relation to ancestral villages through ataks I need to explain a few aspects of the marriage system (for a full description, see Heitmeyer 2009a, 97-132). The main principle of the Vohra marriage systems is endogamy within four marriage circles (utaras). The two main marriage circles are ‘14’ (Chaud) and ‘68’ (Arsad), while two smaller groups claim a special position in the system, Dewataja and Makeriya. It remains unclear what the numbers ‘14’ and ‘68’ stand for. Some people told me that the Chaud (14) and Arsad
The list is based on Heitmeyer (2009, 106), except for the positioning of Dewataja and Makeriya, who are seen as separate groups by my informants but not by hers. Names with * are not included in Heitmeyer's list, but were mentioned by my informants. My Kanjeriya informants disagreed with Heitmeyer on their position in the system: they placed themselves in 14.

Heitmeyer argues that the Vohra marriage system is ‘a consequence of their status as a mercantile community which entails the heavy intertwining of business and kin alliances and ensures that notions of trust are key to both professional and family networks’ (2009a, 32). My informants confirm the existence of this system, although some disagree about the details. Though some men felt uncomfortable when I asked questions about ataks and utaras and denied that it was important, referring to ideas of equality in Islam, their wives answered my questions about this with patience and in detail. They explained that they prefer their children to...
marry within the community, even if it was not particularly easy to find a suitable match within the right marriage circle.

The Vohra marriage system is a combination of endogamy (within the community) and hypergamy (in which a lower-status female is married to a higher-status male). The Chaud (14) group is considered a relatively privileged high-status group of mostly ‘business families’ who have traditionally been powerful, having ‘land and property’ in their villages of origin. They are known to prefer marriage only among themselves, and ‘are seen as “ekla kutumb” (“a single family”) that have established ongoing relations and mutual viswas (trust) over several generations’ (Heitmeyer 2009a, 108). The families of the Arsad (68) and Makeriya group are considered the ‘lower status’ group but may enter into marriages with families of the Chaud group. The Vohra marriage system thus ‘emphasises unity within the community while also allowing for hierarchical divisions between wife-givers and wife-takers to be replicated across generations’ (Heitmeyer 2009a, 110).

What interests me here in the context of the regional community narrative is how the marriage system contributes to the affirmation of local ancestry. On many evenings, I have witnessed women exchanging details about a certain boy or girl for their matchmaking. They exchanged information about the wealth, educational level, religious affiliation (Jamati/Sunni), moral character of the spouse, about the spatial location of the boy, but also about his atak. A boy can live in Anand but be ‘Nepada’ (from the village of Nepad, in Chaud) or ‘Umretha’ (from Umreth town, in Arsad). Even if the boy has never been in the nominated town or village in his life, this ancestry can make a difference in the assessment of his suitability. Thus, even if many Vohra families have no family properties in the specific town or village of their atak, nor any other clear trails that lead back to the ancestral village, the name of the village still matters.

All our forefathers were given a name at that time by the mollah. Our forefathers were given the names of the village where they happened to live at that time. I am Dewataja, so my forefather probably lived in the small village of Dewataj at the time (banker in Anand town).

For this banker, his atak has become an abstract code, a memory of the fact that his forefathers once lived in a certain village, ‘probably’. This is remembered because this ancestry has a certain significance in the marriage arrangements of his family. Marriage arrangements are thus a different way through which regional identity of the Charotar Sunni Vohras is affirmed.
Having unpacked these self-narratives of the Vohra community, I have hopefully convinced the reader that these are regional narratives. The histories construct region through the recurrent theme of the agricultural economy of Charotar in which Vohras have been embedded through trade and small-scale agro-industrial endeavours, a narrative of conversion, and affirmations of ancestry in local villages and towns. On the one hand, the stories present a different view of belonging than is suggested by Hindu nationalist politics, which defines Muslims as not belonging in India; on the other hand, rather than opposing, they apply the logics of local ancestry as a way of identification in a context where claims of local belonging have become highly contested, entwined with existence itself.

Pathways

Regions can be analysed as ‘imagined’ but can also be thought of as a ‘matrix of movement’ (Ingold 2005 [2000], 217), as a network of ‘coming and going’ (Ingold 2005 [2000], 235) that emerges along pathways travelled. So far, I have only used the first analytical lens to uncover what the region means to Vohra residents of Anand town. This has led me to elderly men with some authority, who felt confident about talking about these matters in an interview-setting with the foreign researcher. Mainly through their accounts, I have described the self-image and community narrative of ‘the Vohra community’. However, ‘there are also other spaces of community or locality that unfold in a minor key: relatively undeclared, uncelebrated and un-symbolised in textual self-representations’ (Jain 2010, 49). Like Jain, I combine an interest in ‘imagined community’ with an interest in the ‘performance’ of locality. I treat the local ‘as an ethnographic as much as a textual object’ (Jain 2010, 53).

Although performances of locality can entail many different kinds of practices, in this research I have used Ingold’s idea of the region as a ‘matrix of movement’ to understand locality. Traveling along with informants has been a productive way of exploring the regional perspectives of men and women, old and young, those more and less skilled in verbalising community narrative. A photo collage of a trip I made gives an impression of the kind of trips I have undertaken with research participants to explore their perception of the surroundings of the town. This young woman lived in Anand and during the trip we visited the town where she grew up. We visited her parental home, a much-loved bakery, and the locally famous dargah. During the trip, I followed her pathways and by doing so learnt many things: the places she finds important in her home town, how (not) to behave there, what (not)
to wear, with whom (not) to talk and how to do so. During trips such as this, I learnt how different places were connected from the perspective of research participants. I learnt the local histories and hidden meanings of places: of buildings constructed, of walks made, of land sold, and of shops looted in 2002 and now rebuilt.

Every ‘region’ that emerges from these pathways comes about through individuals, each trip I made was in a way unique to the personal knowledge of the person I followed, and to his/her social position in the places we visited. Every ‘region’ also has a temporality: experiences and stories shared were unique to that moment, a direct response to what was encountered along the road. In what follows, I take the reader on two trips: first, a trip with a young mother I call Sajiya shows how a region comes about through kinship ties, and, second, a trip with a young man I call Javed reveals how zones of safety and risk emerge in the regional landscape, and how this relates to the recent history of Muslims and Hindus in Gujarat.
We depart from Anand in a car. I am in the back with two women and four children. In front of us, three men, one of them sitting suspended in the air between the two front seats. We are on our way to a wedding in Tarapur. We arrive at a mud road in an agricultural field, at the outskirts of the village of Tarapur, where we find a large tent (mandap) on an open ground. Here, approximately two hundred women are having lunch. Among the guests, we find out soon, there are many from Anand. Looking at the surroundings, Sajiya comments that she finds the place rather ‘deserted’ and ‘undeveloped’ in comparison to Anand: ‘I am from the city, my family is in Ahmedabad. After my marriage, I came to live with my husband’s family in Anand. I can manage in Anand, because it is a city. My sister is married in Thasra, it’s a small place. I wouldn’t like to live there!’ Sajiya gets bored soon after lunch. While the other guests hang around chatting to each other, men withdrawing to the madrassa and women in the homes of local acquaintances, Sajiya tells her husband to drive her to Khambhat, 23 kilometres further, where her mother’s sister (masi) lives since her marriage. They decide to take me along.

In Khambhat, we drink tea at the compound with masi. Then we take masi and her son out, who show us Khambhat in the car. The son guides us to Jamma Majid, a local dargah, St Xavier’s church and school, and the place that once was a port. We buy the sweets Khambhat is famous for.

On the way back to Tarapur, when we drive through a coconut (tadi) plantation, the children get excited about the trees: ‘How high they are!’ In response, Sajiya explains this particular area has a different soil than other parts of Charotar, suitable for different kinds of crops. ‘Do you know what is Charotar?’, she continues. ‘Fertile land. It is a good place for farming.’ We have dinner in in Tarapur, then collect as many people as can possibly be squeezed in the car before driving back to Anand. ‘What fun did we have today!’, Sajiya’s eldest daughter exclaims before falling asleep.

Women in central Gujarat are marriage migrants: due to the patrilocal marriage system, they move to their husband’s family after marriage. Their move from the pir (native village) into the sasru (husband’s village) ensures that spatial linkages emerge between women and their relatives, with whom they maintain contact after marriage. The women I met would, like Sajiya, at regular intervals quite forcefully insist that their husband to take them to their relatives, in a car or, more
often, on the pillion of a motorcycle. The move from pir to sasru also ensures that women and their families build new relations with the relatives of the husband spread out across the region. Sajiya’s observations about the ‘undeveloped’ scenery are a comment on Tarapur village as much as on the position of her husband’s relatives, with whom she is still in the process of familiarising herself.

What I draw from this trip with Sajiya is that a network of kinship ties guided our travel. Sajiya’s network can be drawn (see below) with lines connecting relatives in different towns and villages. On the right are the places where her own relatives live, on the left is the villages of Tarapur where her husband has relatives. I have indicated the pathway between Tarapur and Khambhat differently, because this pathway was travelled for the first time that day. The decision to travel to Khambhat from Tarapur was thus a creative act, an act of improvisation, a new pathway that strengthened the family’s interconnectedness, now that her husband and children have drunk tea in masi’s house for the first time. Apart from familiarising herself with her relatives and their homes, Sajiya also familiarised herself, and her children, with the wider landscape. When Sajiya reflects on the ‘city’ and the ‘village’, and when she explains what is ‘Charotar’, she draws abstractions from the encountered specificities of the landscape and offers this as an educational opportunity to her children and the researcher.
A sense of regional belonging is created here through kinship ties. The scene clearly shows how the maintenance of dispersed kin networks is an important aspect of urban family life, even for those living in a Muslim neighbourhood born of displacement and segregation. At the same time, the scene also shows how choices made while travelling reflect wider processes of in- and exclusion. All the places visited during the day were Muslim or Christian spaces. These choices were made of free will but were not discussed or consciously decided, they were merely the result of the fact that kinship provided the logic of travel. Access to unknown territory and a sense of familiarity was achieved through relatives, who guided the travellers to the places they knew, or thought were of interest.

Interestingly, the sites selected included the dargah of Sarkar Shah-e-Mira Miran Saiyed Ali, which was a remarkable choice considering this family’s firm rejection of dargah prayer, in line with a reformist approach to Islam. The dargah was clearly an unfamiliar space to them, although it was still recognisable in its otherness due to the regular occurrence of discussions about the disputed subject of dargahs in Anand town. The exotic character of the experience was shown in the ‘touristic’ attitude of the family. They took an attentive stroll around the dargah premises, lingered at the mela to buy roasted corn, put the children in the merry-go-round, and had a commercial photographer take a picture of all of us at the main gate. The tourist appeal of the place was magnified by the bustling spiritual and commercial activity in the dargah, as an unknown colourful festival happened to be on at the time.

If the territory of another Muslim community turned out to be quite exotic, the Catholic church and school of Khambhat presented a more familiar realm to them. The children happily pointed out the statues of Jesus and Mary to their mothers: the son of masi goes to school here, and Sajiya’s children similarly go to school in St. Xaviers in Anand, creating common ground. Both the Christian school ground and the dargah were recognisable in their otherness, reinforcing a sense of region in the sense that ‘differences are recognised and individuals are, to a greater or lesser extent, equipped with the skill to navigate through such differences’ (Simpson and Kresse 2007, 15).
Unfamiliar Muslim spaces visited that day in Kambhat.
Above, the Jama Majid, a fourteenth-century construction.
In short, it is through kin, business partners and other social relations that urban residents gain access to territory beyond the town. While traveling beyond the town, people select specific sites and ignore others, and they adjust their conduct and state of mind according to the zone they find themselves in. Their choices of travel, freely chosen, reflect wider structures of social in-and exclusion. I observe linkages between the neighbourhood and various ‘Muslim’ zones (as was suggested for Ahmedabad by Mahadevia 2007, 372–374), although not all ‘Muslim’ zones are equally experienced as spaces of familiarity. In the diversity among local Muslims, the dispersed spaces of Christianity are, in some cases, even more familiar than the spaces of another Muslim community.

This case study also shows that, because men and women's regional mobility is so different, gender is important in the perception of the region. Most of the women I knew in Anand do not own cars or motocycles of their own. Some working women and well-to do female students have their own scooty, but housewives are not expected to leave the house at all, as even for most of their shopping they can rely on door-to-door traders. Consequently, they rely on their husbands for transport. Demanding trips be undertaken, as shown in the case of Sajiya, was thus a regularly observed feature of social life in Anand's households. Other examples of women’s regional outlook are the occasional absence of daughters-in-law, taking leave from their duties in their husband's family to have a ‘holiday’ in the pir (town of origin), the happy memories shared by women of such visits and those of their children trailing along with them in summer, thereby acquainting themselves with the ‘village’. This continued mobility is important for women, whose region is produced by their duty to move house after marriage, from their native town to the town of their husband. Due to the patrilocal marriage system, most women travel after marriage so become ‘multi-sited’ in their spatial orientation. By maintaining dispersed kinship networks and by passing on the knowledge of their pir (home village) to the children, women play a key role in the (re)production of the regional community.

Javed: exploring region through business

Javed’s family is one of the more wealthy business families in the neighbourhood. Their current business is the construction of a shopping complex in a nearby town that I refer to (for reasons of privacy of the family) as ‘Nagar’. Javed is the oldest son and his father has instructed him to manage the business in Nagar. Javed spends five days a week there, waiting for potential investors who sporadically come to enquire about buying a shop, while his
father visits occasionally, to oversee the construction work.

Having invited me to see the site, Javed finds me on the dusty street of our neighbourhood in Anand town. He wipes the dust from the seat of his white scooty with an old cloth, puts a scarf over his nose and mouth to protect against the dust, and instructs me to cover my nose and mouth as well. We hit the road. The heat is soaring. Javed remarks that: ‘Normally I go on scooty, but from tomorrow onwards I’ll take the bus. Now that summer is coming, the heat is getting too much. My father has a car but I still haven’t learnt how to drive it’.

We cross the ‘overbridge’, Ismaelnagar, Ekta restaurant and Tip Top restaurant. Javed points to the latter and says: ‘This is a new restaurant. I am planning to open a restaurant myself around here, maybe next year’. The road then leads away from Anand and into agricultural fields. Javed points: ‘This is tobacco. This is banana’. He explains that his father used to be in agricultural business before: ‘In 1994, our family lost crores of rupees. It was a hard time for us financially. That time my father had gone into potato business. He took a risk because this was something new for him and he didn’t know all the tricks. He lost a lot of money and he had to sell some land. The plots he sold at the time are now worth twenty times more than what he sold it for! But that way he could start his business again’.

We arrive at the edge of Nagar, and stop in a largely uninhabited area with a noisy road, fences, and a few half-constructed buildings. Other than the construction workers and the traffic on the road, there are few people around. Javed remarks: ‘Now, this area is nothing. But in ten years it will be fully developed. Value will rise. We are building a shopping centre with two floors. If all goes well, we want to build a multiplex cinema on the third floor. At this point we are building and selling at the same time’.

Javed shows me the ongoing construction work of the shopping mall. He says that Nagar is ‘a good place for investment. Before, my father constructed several buildings in Anand. He planned to buy a new plot in Anand as well, but the price was so high he decided not to do it. Anand is already totally developed. The prices are so high that they can hardly rise further. We prefer investing in small places, villages that are growing, where you can still buy land at a reasonable price and then make profit at a lower risk. Nagar is cheaper than Anand, because it is still small. But it is growing. Many people from the surrounding villages come here to shop’.

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17 A crore is ten million rupees, so the amount lost would be above 137,000 euros (conversion through http://themoneyconverter.com/EUR/INR.aspx, accessed October 7, 2015).
During my fieldwork, I travelled with businessmen on five occasions, with men who showed me their dispersed economic practices in various types of ventures. Other than real estate business, these included a weigh bridge (for trucks to weigh their loads), a saw mill, a rice mill, various small shops. One form of land-related business entailed the conversion of uncultivated (kacca) land to land suitable for agriculture by clearing and ploughing it and building an irrigation system - when I returned in 2014, the land had already been sold. Another form is the conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural land. Along with their commercial ventures, many businessmen were engaged in some form of social work, in schools, charitable hospitals or other social welfare institutions.

The experience of travelling together with businessmen has helped me to understand what ‘regions’ they see and perceive. The pathways of business are different from the pathways of kinship, and can perhaps be best characterised as zones of opportunities, profit and loss. During the road trip from Anand to Nagar, a sense of space emerged in relation to business ventures in the past, present and future. Javed sees different business opportunities in different places. The urban landscape of Anand town evokes dreams about potential ventures in the restaurant business. The landscape of agriculture is also not unfamiliar and is shaped by memories of family activities in potato trade, unfortunately unsuccessful. It is the space in between, the peri-urban landscape at the edge of a growing town, in which Javed is groomed in the family business. Here, on the edge of ‘development’, his family expects to make a profit. The rurban landscape is patchy, dry and seemingly empty, lined by low concrete walls marking private properties off from each other, and dotted with widely dispersed and mostly unfinished buildings. It is what much of central Gujarat today looks like.

As many Vohra business families are currently investing in land, many of them show an interest in particular in investing in semi-urban areas at the edges of growing towns, which are typically administratively defined as ‘agricultural’. Converting the land to the status of non-agricultural is a difficult, expensive and lengthy bureaucratic procedure, usually involving the bribing of local officials, but can generate great profits because the land can then be resold at a much higher price. Both local businessmen and those from elsewhere (Vadodara, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, and abroad) are participating in this business (see Chapter 6). Moreover, besides the families that have traditionally been in business, even families in ‘service’ are now participating in land acquirement in urban areas, albeit on a smaller scale.

The spatial distribution of these land investments is of interest here. Today most Muslims only invest in land in Muslim-majority areas, and this is particularly true
for those who have no previous experience in real estate business and cannot afford to take risks. During trips, the landscape evoked memories of violence and assessments of risk, colouring experiences of travel. As one informant, himself resident of a village, said: ‘Since the riots, nobody wants to buy land in the village anymore. Everybody wants to invest in town only. Especially in Anand’.

For a fuller understanding of how a sense of belonging and exclusion coalesce in this regional geography, I now continue with another scene from the day with Javed. The shopping mall under construction is located next to a temple - Javed describes the space as a ‘Hindu area’. How does he move around in this ‘Hindu area’?

In the absence of customers in the office, we relax and talk. Javed asks questions about Amsterdam. Then we talk about the 2002 riots. He is very interested in talking about it: ‘Nowadays people forget, but the people who have lost their children, their houses, their business, how can they forget?’ In the middle of the conversation, he suddenly warns me: ‘Now stop talking about this, a Hindu is coming’. A man walks in, sits down and start chatting to us comfortably. When Javed goes to the other room to pray, the man turns to me personally. From his fast Gujarati I understand that ‘there is no Hindu-Muslim tension here’. He aims to convey that Hindus and Muslims are maintaining good relations with each other.

Javed later explains that this man is the person who arranges government certificates for the construction business: ‘He knows very well how to get things done around here. He used to be a bureaucrat with the municipality, until he got fired because of corruption. We pay him a lot for his service of dealing with government officials, but he does his work well’. As explained above, building in semi-urban areas such as this requires an administrative conversion from agricultural to non-agricultural land in the government records, a time-consuming procedure usually involving the bribing of officials.

Javed further explains that good collaboration with Hindus is a key to success in the real estate business, because of the strict residential segregation in the region. Javed: ‘This area we are building in is a Hindu area. On that side there is a mandir (Hindu temple), on the other side Hindus are building an apartment complex. The customers who come to inquire about buying a shop with us are also mainly Hindus. We are the only Muslims here. I can tell you, if we had been Hindus, all the shops would have been sold by now, not just 70 out of 110. People are a bit hesitant about buying from a Muslim. They don’t say so, but I can feel that I have to deal with a trust issue. That is why we collaborate
with Hindu partners. We put the names of two Hindu partners on the sign
board that advertises our shopping mall. They are not financially involved,
but they are giving their name. In the same way, we help them if they want to
do business in a Muslim area. My father has a lot of experience in this
business, he knows how to do all these things. The name of the shopping
centre is also chosen in this way. It is a combination of two words: the first is
a Hindu word, the second is a word from Islam’.

On the way from Nagar back to Anand, we pass a village that has been in the
news a lot lately because severe atrocities happened here in 2002, and a
recent court case has led to life imprisonments. While passing, Javed asks:
‘Have you been here? It is a major victim place. It happened everywhere here,
in every village. But they didn’t come to Anand. I was very young at the time,
only 14 years old. Me and my friends, we went to the refugee camp near our
house every day for four months. We went to help, distributing food’.

Javed is clearly at home in the region and is moving around with confidence. As his
family is one of the bigger business families in real estate in Anand town, they are
confident enough to invest in ‘Hindu’ spaces and collaborate with Hindu partners
to make this possible. As an apprentice in the family business, Javed is keen on
developing a business mind of his own, planning to build a future here, looking for
business opportunities all around him. At the same time, Javed shows a keen
sensitivity to how community distinctions shape the landscape, which disrupts a
sense of belonging. This is visible in his knowledge of the recent history of violence
in his direct surroundings, in a more general sense of spatial segregation along
community lines, and an even more subtle awareness of how to conduct himself in
interactions with others. Not speaking with Hindus about the sensitive subject of
the 2002 riots helps to build a harmonious spirit that is a necessary precondition
to successful collaboration.

Another way in which Javed maintains a low profile is through clothing. When
he is at home and in the neighbourhood, Javed likes to wear the white cotton attire
that is popular among men following the Tablighi Jamaat. Javed is active in the
Tablighi Jamaat and would prefer to wear his religious dress every day, but he feels
that ‘if I wear my white clothes (…), people look at me as if I am an animal. They
fear. They look at me… don or mafia, they think’. Unsure what to do, he is
experimenting with different clothes, sometimes coming in trousers, sometimes
in religious dress.

Javed’s attentiveness to the specific hurdles he faces in the region as a Muslim
exemplifies both a narrative of exclusion, and an eagerness to learn from his
business-wise father how to strategically manage some of the hurdles attached to their minority status. This is related to a dilemma also faced by many other businessmen: doing business in ‘Muslim areas’ may be safe but limits one’s profit margins, while doing business in other areas is considered more risky but, for those who can handle it, is also potentially more profitable. It struck me that young men dreaming of starting a business often dreamt of starting it not in the Muslim-majority areas, but in Vallabh Vidyanagar, the most expensive part of Anand’s urban conglomerate and a Hindu-majority neighbourhood. It is here that additional hurdles and risks may apply, but it is also where higher prices can be asked for almost anything one sells.
Multiple regions

This final section contextualises the findings and draws comparisons. In order to assess the case studies presented above, it is important to contextualise the social position of the informants. In the two cases, there are several indications that Javed and Sajiya are both from relatively privileged families within the Vohra community: for example, both travel by privately owned cars or motorcycles, which is not an option for all residents of Anand town. Both Javed and Sajiya belong to the Chaud (14) utara, which has been described as the ‘higher caste’ within the Vohra community. In Anand, the Chaud utara maintains a mercantile identity and is said to have been derived from a selective group of relatively wealthy landowners and business families within the Vohra community.

Due to their history of relative privilege, traditional forms of capital and land ownership, many families of the Chaud group in Anand still cherish concrete ties to other villages or towns. As this is not directly evident in the narratives of Javed and Sajiya, it is useful to clarify it here. Sajiya’s father-in-law and Javed’s father are both landowners, each in a different village near Anand. Sajiya’s in-laws, for example, are a Nepada family (from Nepad village). Sajiya’s husband lives in Anand and is a contractor, his brother lives in Nepad and farms a small tobacco plantain on family-owned land. He and his father remember the village of Nepad affectionately and frequently offered to take me there, although this eventually never happened. ‘It is because of that land that we can pay for the family’s living expenses’, Sajiya’s father-in-law explained. I have observed such ties mainly with families of the Chaud (14) group. This affirms the suggestion that this group originally came from families of a higher socio-economic background and traditionally consisted of relatively wealthy business families and landowners (Heitmeyer 2009a, 107). It suggests that the regional ties are particularly strong among this specific network of families, which is selective because, in many cases, marriages are performed within this sub-group of 14 ataks. In some of these families, such as Sajiya’s, attachment to the ancestral village remains of practical importance in their everyday life. In others, such as Javed’s, the attachment to the region is more mobile, not necessarily concerned with a place of origin but rather locating memories of land acquirement and loss on the regional landscape.

The other Vohra sub-groups, the Arsad (68) and Makeriya families, have a different background. For them, the mercantile background of Vohras is not that important. Those among them who belong to the wealthy middle class in Anand have, more often than not, acquired their wealth and social status in society through education, which has given them access to urban professionals and
government service. For the Arsad families I knew, who had been based in Anand for a long time, there was a different kind of metonymic relation between their atak and a particular village. If they were wealthy, they were likely to have land, but this was then urban or peri-urban, acquired recently as a source of investment rather than being inherited through family ancestry in a particular village. If they identify with a place, it was the village or town in which they grew up and where their relatives currently live – which was Anand town in these cases, which did not necessarily match their atak.

This unlinking of name from village is related to the gradual relocation into urban centres I have described earlier: rural-urban migration, the search for education and white-collar urban jobs. Having been a numerical minority in the village when they left - in some cases not even one relative remained in the ancestral village, it would have been unlikely that they claimed the village as their own. Still, even for Arsad (68) and Makeriya families who have worked their way up the economic ladder through education and white-collar jobs, their atak remains a way of being assessed by others in the marriage market, and the villages are still remembered in this way. Moreover, even these families maintain practical ties to villages. This was shown at weddings and dinner parties in Anand, when I would invariably be introduced to relatives visiting Anand from nearby towns and villages, and was also shown in the practice in some of these urban households to have a (poorer) cousin from a nearby village staying for several years during their education, relieving the rural family from the care of the child, giving the urban family companionship and help with household chores, and allowing the child to study in an urban school or college.

This contextualisation should help understand some of the class specificities of the case studies. To contextualise the findings further, I draw on earlier studies of another specific community of the Charotar region, the Patels or Patidars. Their marriage system, described by Pocock (1976) and Hardiman (1981, 41), bears strong resemblance to the Vohra marriage system. It has developed since the mid-nineteenth century and, according to Hardiman (1981, 43), affirms a strong ideological link between the village, land ownership, and the Patidar community: 'the Patidars of a village were the village, other castes were merely there to serve'. The aim was to make groups of villages (gols) endogamous units, with fines or boycotts imposed on those who married outside the gol. Remarkably, both Vohras and Patidars (Patels) have highlighted their attachment to specific villages in their kinship system, but this attachment has evolved differently over time.

For Patidars, the village seems only to have increased in importance. Recent studies
of Patidars report that even after migrating abroad, they maintain village associations and financially support the ‘development’ of their home village (Rutten and Patel 2004; see also Dekkers and Rutten 2011). The position of Patels as the dominant caste in most of their villages (in many cases, though not always, Pocock 1972, 26; Gidwani 2008) gives their relation to the village a collective meaning, resulting, for example, in village events such as an annual Village Day, during which donations are gathered for development of the village. These activities revolve around the concept of a village, while the participants tend to be, in overwhelming majority, from the Patel community (Dekkers and Rutten 2011, 13), making Village Day a community event as much as a village event. This reinforces a strong link between a specific sub-section of the Patel community and its home village.18

For Vohras, I have established that their endogamous kinship system is linked partly to villages and that the link to specific villages has remained a source of identification during marriage arrangements. For some families, particularly within the Chaud group, the atak is still important in a practical way as it relates to landownership and a sense of affection or belonging towards a certain village. For others, their atak has become an abstract code, though not as abstract as any surname. The fact that the entire Vohra community still carries these ataks and attaches value to them in marriage arrangements highlights a particular sense of being a local community. As a whole, the marriage system still establishes that Vohras as a community were derived from local villages and towns – from Charotar. However, even for Vohras who own family land in an ancestral home village, we may wonder if the village has been a source of community identity in the same way as it has been for Patels. In my research among urban families, I found that they experience their (past) relation with particular villages more as a personal affair than as a collective trait of an entire village-based community. Most of the Vohra’s ancestral villages are Patel-majority villages. This was already so in the past, and the recent history of violence and displacement in 2002 has reinforced this situation further. I have already mentioned that at the time sign boards had been erected claiming some villages were ‘Hindu villages’, discouraging Muslim villagers from staying. Various reports indicate Muslims have been forcibly evicted from the villages.19 I have not crosschecked such stories with Hindus in the specified villages, except in one case, through interviews of Dakxin Bajrange in a nearby village (February 2015). There, a group of Hindu (non-Patel) residents living

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18 Pocock remarked that the Muslim-majority village Napa was considered ‘not a good village’ among the Patidars and tended towards ‘an exclusively wife-giving position’. This was because ‘the Patidar there were in a minority to inferior, mostly Muslim castes’ (Pocock 1972, 136) and so I infer that they were unable to claim the village space as theirs.

on land previously owned by Muslims remembered that Muslims were forced to leave the village in 2002, and were then compelled to sell their land at cheap rates (according to them by Patels). Developments like these reinforce Hindu claims over the village space and devalue the relation of Muslims to their ancestral villages. The regional outlook and the rural-urban linkages maintained by the Vohras in Anand thus points to an active process of regeneration of the regional community, in which rather fluid and mobile attachments to places determine the regional experience.

Maps of Charotar, found online. The first map is taken from a website of the Patidar community. In this map, many village names are specified and a selected sub-group of six villages (Nadiad, Vaso, Dharmaj, Karamsad, Bhadran and Sojitra) is printed in larger letters. The second map is taken from a Facebook page of the Charotar Vora Samaj. It is a district map of Gujarat, without markers of specific villages.

Conclusion

Charotar Sunni Vohras are at home in a region where they are a minority, where they are regarded as not belonging, and where many have recently moved to a Muslim-majority urban neighbourhood in search of safety after communal violence. Even so, as a community they retain a sense of regional belonging, expressed through narrative and in everyday practices of mobility and exchange.

A region can be constructed in various ways: spatially, linguistically, economically, culturally, and/or historically (Cohn 1987). They can exist around market towns (Heesterman 1982), ecological zones (Gommans 1998), oceans (Simpson and Kresse 2007), and also around dispersed kinship networks or business ties. On the one hand, regions can be thought of through the processes of ‘imagining’ spatial identities (Anderson 1991) and through the self-images and community narratives told by people themselves. On the other hand, the region can be thought of as a ‘matrix of movement’ (Ingold 2005 [2000], 217), as a network of ‘coming and going’ (Ingold 2005 [2000], 235). Such an understanding of the region requires the researcher to explore the ‘social labour involved in establishing equivalences and connections across places (Turnbull 1996, 2, in Ingold 2005 [2000], 229).

Exploring the region through a narrative-based approach has uncovered the ideas about the region that circulate among the town’s residents. The idea of a regionally specific community of Charotar Sunni Vohras was probably first conceptualised and/or first became important in Mumbai, where Vohras started to organise as such and, from there, over time, imported the now institutionalised idea of a regionally specific Vohra community into the region. Key to the idea of the regional community is the local ancestry of the Vohras as a community, which is today remembered through a narrative of conversion, long-term embeddedness in the local agricultural economy, and through a system of village-based marriage circles. Overall, Vohra affirmation of regional attachments calls into question the dominant view of Muslims as ‘outsiders’ and instead (re)generates a strong sense of local ancestry and belonging. In a way, the affirmations reiterate rather than contest the logics of local ancestry and belonging utilised by exclusivist Hindu political discourses: in a context where claims of local belonging have become highly contested, to claim that we also belong seems to be a powerful way of maintaining self-worth. It is important, however, to highlight that these regional narratives are generally unknown by those outside the community. They are mainly recounted by the older generation, mostly by elderly men considered (by themselves or by others) to be ‘experts’ on these matters. In everyday interactions with my neighbours, these historical accounts did not usually emerge, except where people were directly probed.
For the younger generation, who have brought up in Anand, it is their ‘natural’ home town, from which they explore the region. As Javed explained, they ‘saw the refugees coming’ in 2002 and they have internalised the idea that Anand is a safe place for Muslims. From this safe place, they explore the region, in as far as places are open to them through their parents and/or dispersed kinship ties. Through traveling with them, their embodied knowledge and familiarity with the area beyond the town became accessible to the researcher. Their experiences affirm regional connectedness and also show a different side of the story: insecurity, risk, and communal tensions in the aftermath of 2002. These experiences sit somewhat uncomfortably with the regional histories told with so much enthusiasm by the elderly men.

Learning how to deal successfully with the stigma of being Muslim is an important aspect of traveling beyond the comfort zone of the neighbourhood. Learning these skills is important for Javed, for youth studying in Hindu-majority schools in Vallabh Vidyanagar, for middle-aged men working for the government or in banks, and also for the elderly men when they visit their cherished ancestral villages. During a village visit with on such elderly man, he sat down comfortably with an old (Hindu) neighbour to chat, but signalled to me to stay detached and not to ask any questions at that moment. He later explained in detail about the atrocities that had happened in the village and about his migration to Anand town. There is a tension here between the region of the past, which is remembered and, to some extent, relived while visiting the village, and the region of the present, in which Muslim claims on the village space are devaluated and sometimes lost.

It seems to me that this regional perspective offers a new view that is not in recent studies on Indian Muslims guided by the sociological notion of the insulated Muslim ‘ghetto’. Describing how regional affirmations take shape in the lives of urban residents can be a valuable addition to current studies of Muslims in India, which are mainly based in cities and ignore the rural-urban connections of urban Muslims (Chaudhury 2007; Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012; Patel 2006a; Jasani 2010; Mahadevia 2007; Sattar 2012; Shaban 2012). I suggest social scientists sometimes need to ‘scale up’, from the neighbourhood-in-the-city to the neighbourhood-in-the-region. This is useful because the rural connectedness of Anand town is not unique. In many towns and cities in India, as elsewhere in the world, ‘the linkages between urban centres and the countryside, including movement of people, goods, capital and other social transactions, play an important role in processes of rural and urban change’ (Tacoli 1998, 147). A neighbourhood-in-the-region perspective leads us away from guiding notions of isolation and closure, and opens up an
awareness of connections between the residential area and the wider area beyond the city or town.

Let me clarify: I do not wish to draw attention away from the realities of violence, segregation, marginalisation and exclusion that characterise the situation of Muslims in India today. However, if we want to understand how Muslims in Indian cities and towns have come to reshape their sense of space in response to these processes, it is relevant to show how experiences of residing in a ‘Muslim area’ are produced in juxtaposition to what is ‘out there’. This juxtaposition comes about through experiences of travel. I have shown how the own (Muslim) neighbourhood is defined against spaces defined as ‘Hindu’, but also that the ‘Hindu areas’ are diverse. They contain zones of omission, which are ignored, and zones of potential danger, where precaution is taken to avoid trouble, for example by refraining from land investments. While traveling, these potential dangers are drawn to the surface and become an object of conversation, more than when staying in the neighbourhood with the residents. When villages notorious for violence against Muslims are sighted, this immediately evokes stories of what happened in 2002. These Hindu spaces are not ‘no go areas’, but entering them requires a certain state of mind and skill. Marginalisation is anticipated, and learning how to successfully deal with the stigma of being Muslim is an important aspect of the spatial experience. Consequently, Hindu areas are also (in some cases) zones of desire: successful participation in social and economic life here signals acceptance and status in wider society.

If I were to draw maps of Charotar from the travels of the town’s residents, I would probably draw many different ones, each marking different sites as central and with different types of connections between them, depending on each person’s specific experiences. Individual journeys are related to specific embeddings in social and economic life in various places. Class is an important explanatory factor in the observed mobility, and the view of the region presented here is a view from an advantaged class of relatively wealthy families, owning houses and sometimes land, motorcycles and sometimes a car. Had I focused on the poorer families living in the relief societies of Anand, some located not within fifteen minutes walk from the nearest shared auto-rickshaw stand, this study would have produced a different view on Anand’s regional connectedness. Since age and gender are also important in the perception of the region, it is important to note that the regional narratives recounted here were mainly told by the older generation, mostly by men who had lived elsewhere in the region before moving to Anand and who remained somehow tied up with village life even now. For the younger generation, who have grown up
in Anand, the town is their ‘natural’ home town, from which they explore the region. During ‘interviews’ they had little to share about the region, but through traveling with them, their skills and familiarity with the area beyond the town became accessible to the researcher.