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Bootlegging, politics and corruption: state violence and the routine practices of public power in Gujarat (1985-2002)
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This study explores the nature and practice of state power in ordinary times, as it developed in Gujarat from the 1980s, in an attempt to understand how the communal harnessing of the state that manifested in large parts of Gujarat in 2002 was possible. In particular, it examines everyday expressions of public corruption around the politics of bootlegging. In the context of systemic corruption at the local level in routine times there was little difference between violators of the law and its purported guardians, such as state law-enforcement mechanisms and politicians. From the 1980s, practices of public power in Ahmedabad, infused by routine forms of corruption, became entwined with deepening ethno-Hindu politics and a strong anti-Muslim bent, thus readily enabling the communal harnessing of state power in 2002.

Keywords: bootlegging; corruption; communalism; state violence; police

Independent evidence suggests that state authorities and government officials aided the systematic persecution of Muslims in Ahmedabad and in large parts of Gujarat in the post-Godhra violence of 2002. The reports on the violence show that as the attacks on Muslims began, state authorities in many places did not take responsibility for stopping the violence. Instead, some police and high-ranking government officials participated in the violence and overtly assisted in creating an enabling environment for the killings.¹ In many instances the police led Hindu rioters in their onslaught. There is evidence that senior politicians ‘were seeking to influence the working of police stations by their presence within them’.² On February 28, the day the post-Godhra violence erupted, two senior BJP leaders and members of the Gujarat government cabinet reportedly took over supervision of the police control room in Ahmedabad, presumably to direct the police action to their own ends.³ Some policemen who prevented anti-Muslim violence were transferred by the state government in the midst of the riots.⁴ About 2000 people were estimated to have been killed; some estimates put the death toll at closer to 5000.⁵ The victims were overwhelmingly Muslim.

The swift and blatant anti-Muslim harnessing of law enforcement of this magnitude that appeared to be a display of a state of lawlessness was, in fact, largely a state-controlled disorder. The complicity of state officials in the pogrom was not a result of a sudden collapse of law and order, nor did the anti-Muslim bias of the state emerge overnight.⁶ This study explores the nature and practice of state power in ordinary times, as it developed

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in Gujarat from the 1980s, in an attempt to understand how the extreme and barefaced communal harnessing of the state was possible. The study explores the relations between state violence, as it manifested in large parts of Gujarat in 2002, everyday expressions of public corruption at the local level and the latter's effects on practices of public power in the socio-political context of Ahmedabad. It examines, in particular, the politics of bootlegging and its linkages with state corruption and public violence, using the legacy of the Ahmedabad riots of 1985 to illustrate the implications of these processes within the body politics of Gujarat.

Everyday practices of the state form a useful lens through which to understand the relationship between the state and its citizens. Corruption – the abuse of public power for private gain – represents an arena for interactions between public officials and citizens. The perceived proliferation of corruption is conventionally regarded as a marker of state failure. In a widely cited study, corruption in India is placed at the core of people's discursive construction of the state.

From the 1980s practices of public power in Ahmedabad, infused by routine forms of corruption, became entwined with deepening ethno-Hindu politics and a strong anti-Muslim bent with the rise to power of the BJP, thus readily enabling the means of communal harnessing of the state in 2002. This study advances the proposition that routine workings of the state, particularly the regime of various state resource allocations and the establishment of political power at the local level in Ahmedabad, operated on the basis of the extraction and utilization of resources derived from systemic corruption. In the context of systemic corruption, as manifested in the modus operandi of politicians and police at the local level in routine times, there was little difference between violators of the law and its purported guardians. Long established, such everyday patterns of power surfaced and were extended into times of crisis.

This essay is divided into three parts. The first part examines the relations between entrenched forms of corruption experienced by ordinary people in their everyday lives and communal violence in the 1980s. It discusses the political economy of corruption that developed at the local level around the trade in illicit alcohol and how it surfaced in the context of communal riots. The analysis shows how the system of corruption around illicit alcohol permeated into socio-political arenas far beyond the corrupt transaction around liquor, and informed the governing order at the local level. The second part discusses the effects of systemic corruption at the local level on the state law-enforcement mechanisms in ordinary times. It draws parallels between the everyday practices of state power and the exercise of state power, as it manifested in Ahmedabad in the context of social unrest from the 1970s culminating in the violence of 2002.

It is important to state that public corruption cannot fully explain the communal harnessing of the state. It is one among several underlying factors. Gujarat is also hardly unusual in its level of police corruption and politicization. Many other states – for example Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Bihar – that have bad police and administrative corruption were able to quell efforts to foment communal violence in 2002. The third part of this essay, therefore, discusses how patterns of public power at the local level were captured by an ethnically based regime in Gujarat from the mid-1980s.

Bootlegging, politicians and the police: ‘communal’ violence and corruption in the 1980s

Militant Hindu nationalism gained power in Gujarat from the mid-1980s, with recurring communal violence occurring in the state, and especially in Ahmedabad. Although there
was a large-scale communal conflagration in Ahmedabad in 1969, this did not immediately lead to the construction of a Hindu–Muslim divide as the primary axis of politics in the state.\textsuperscript{13} The social tensions and violence in the early 1970s revolved around issues of scarcity and price-rises that were widely viewed as resulting from corruption; from the 1980s caste conflicts took place over reservation policies.\textsuperscript{14}

In 1985, 7 months of severe communal violence engulfed the city of Ahmedabad and other parts of Gujarat. The violence of 1985 in Ahmedabad marked the rise of Hindu nationalism to power in Gujarat. It began as caste riots between forward and backward caste Hindus over the Gujarat government’s new reservation policy for the benefit of the backward castes. Within a month, these caste riots escalated into communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. This happened despite the absence of religious disputes between Hindus and Muslims in the city prior to the riots. About 220 people lost their lives in the riots, Ahmedabad’s residents suffered long periods of curfew and large-scale destruction of property.

The roots of the conflict did not simply originate in Hindu–Muslim antagonisms. A close examination of the violence showed that more than caste reservations and communal riots were at work in the riots of 1985. Disparate conflicts emerged within the riots.\textsuperscript{15} In interviews with participants, aggressors and victims of the violence of 1985 in Ahmedabad, some incidents, defined by police officials as ‘communal violence’, were actually frustrations related to forms of corruption experienced by ordinary people in their everyday lives.\textsuperscript{16} There is evidence to show that the politics of bootlegging was a crucial, if understudied, factor.\textsuperscript{17}

One of the incidents that heightened violence in the Dariapur area of Ahmedabad during the riots of 1985, and that was registered as a case of communal violence, was caused by the local tension between the police and residents over extortion and graft around the trade in illicit liquor. Gujarat has been a ‘dry’ state since its formation. Despite the prohibition of alcohol in the state, there is significant trade, production and consumption of alcohol. Residents and business people in the city frequently make comments along the lines that the illicit liquor trade is ‘one of Gujarat’s most flourishing industries, generating revenue and employment for thousands of people. But not one paisa of it is legal’.\textsuperscript{18}

Illicit alcohol, which is sold outside the official government revenue system and is not subject to any health or quality control, is estimated to account for about half of the total consumption of alcohol in India.\textsuperscript{19} The revenue from the legal alcohol industry contributes substantially to the state exchequers: an estimated 170 billion rupees annually, or ca. $3.5 billion at current exchange rates.\textsuperscript{20} In Gujarat, unlike other states, the entire consumption is illegal. According to senior police officials and the prohibition department in Gujarat, despite prohibition, ‘liquor smuggling business is worth nearly Rs. 200 crore in Gujarat and there are at least 1,500 habitual offenders (in prohibition) in Ahmedabad city alone’.\textsuperscript{21} Moreover, prohibition is not enforced. In a close study of 50 heavy drinkers in Ahmedabad, composed of tribals, labourers and unskilled workers, 95% said that they mainly drank in bars; and only 16% reported problems with the police over the 3 years prior to the survey.\textsuperscript{22} The extent of the large-scale and open illegal consumption of alcohol in Gujarat can also be inferred from a health official’s admission that ‘alcohol abuse accounts for 50 per cent of liver failure cases in the state’.\textsuperscript{23}

Recalling some violent incidents in the riots of 1985 in the Dariapur area of the old city of Ahmedabad, residents from all social groups explained that they were not responsible for starting the riots. The responsibility for triggering the violence was a combination of police complicity, bootleggers (traders in illicit alcohol) and politically involved persons who had incited the people for the sake of their own ‘wars’.
On 8 May 1985, a police sub-inspector, Mahendrasingh Rana, was shot dead in Bhanderipole, one of the narrow-lane neighbourhoods that make up the old city of Ahmedabad. Police testimonies to the State Commission of Inquiry into the riots of 1985 suggested that he was a victim of communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims. Local residents, however, claimed that 'the local bootleggers were pressed by the local police to increase their baksheesh payments. So, to thwart police’s demand, both Hindu and Muslim bootleggers created riots and initiated stabbing incidents'. Senior and local politicians were also involved in the dynamics of relations between the police and bootleggers. Residents in the area elaborated further on this during my meetings with them:

The local bootleggers were free to run their business of illicit liquor and brown sugar (hashish), under the eyes of the police. In fact, the police were forcing them to run their business, since otherwise they would lose their main income. There is a nexus between bootleggers, police and politicians. Sometime prior to the riots of 1985 a Police Inspector at Dariapur police station was replaced by another person, who [allegedly] bribed a Minister (it was said that he paid Rs. 3 Lakh), in order to get that post. It is common knowledge among policemen and residents in the area that in Dariapur station policemen received high baksheesh (hafta) payments from the bootleggers, in exchange for their ability to conduct their illegal businesses. As revenge and with the hope of regaining his office, the out-going Police Inspector, who lost the post but had very good connections with the local liquor dealers, incited them to create social havoc. Residents in various areas explained that some anti-social elements – the term, which state authorities regularly used when referring to bootleggers – also received protection for their anti-social activities from local politicians. Several people corroborated this view: ‘The illicit liquor people work for politicians when needed, and they [politicians] protect and support them. . . the politicians gave advantage to their bootlegger friends and made them stronger; giving them information about government land that is about to be sold and changes in the land use’. Political parties, mainly the Congress were using anti-social elements in elections, using their services as muscle power. Muslim anti-social elements were given patronage under Congress rule, protected by the police. The oft-repeated name among those ‘anti-social elements’ was the underworld don Latif. He was killed in one of the infamous police ‘encounters’ at the outskirts of the city in November 1997 at the time I conducted research in Ahmedabad. Soon thereafter a councillor of Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation explained that ‘Latif was murdered because it would have been a disaster for the politicians if he would have told about the jobs that he had done for them’.

Referring to the eruption of communal violence, some people, explicitly cited the role of the police in the escalation of the violence and its link to corrupt malpractices:

The local police not only joined, but later they started their own agitation. If police wanted, they could stop it, but they did not because of their personal selfishness, because they were not getting their hapto [bribe]. It is a result of deterioration of politics. Even the British government was better.

Some people described in detail the minutiae of the deals between the police and bootleggers. A few interviewees suggested that ‘It is said that the agreement between Latif and the police on his revenue was 40:60 – 40 per cent to the police’. ‘Latif was made goonda by the police’. Indeed, a resident of the Dariapur area recalled that ‘in 1987 some local Muslim leaders talked with Latif, convincing him to stop his business. He agreed and made a vow-like ceremony. After a while he told them that he cannot, as the police forces him to continue.'
The Bhanderipole incident was one of numerous incidents of violence throughout the city. In the official parlance, it was categorized as communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. According to accounts of the events at the local level by those who participated in the violence, it actually stemmed from a local crisis in the local system of corruption. Some residents emphasized that Hindu and Muslim bootleggers collaborated in their struggle against the police at that time. The labelling of the violence as communal enabled the police to cover up their own complicity.

The Commission of Inquiry into the riots of 1985 discussed a similar incident in another part of the city, Ambedkarnagar, where it concluded that the violence, which was met with police inaction and was registered by the police as an incident of caste-reservation riots, was actually related to tensions between local bootleggers, who had the patronage of both the police and politicians.34

Several sources confirmed the stories of people in the locality about the links between local-level corruption and the involvement of police and politicians. Some of the findings of the official Report of the Miyanbhai Commission of Inquiry on Prohibition Policy in Gujarat of 1983 produced similar evidence and sheds more light on the dynamics involved.35 According to the Miyanbhai report, bootleggers ‘play an important role in the state’s political life, especially in the local unit, or state or central government elections. By spending huge funds for religious and social activities, they have expanded their circle of influence among the voters of their own areas . . . candidates standing for elections vie for favour from these persons, so that they would promote them and urge the voters to elect them’. Furthermore, ‘the police are hand in glove with the illicit liquor businessmen’, and ‘bribery and corruption prevail in the executing agencies’.36

More evidence came from within the high ranks of the police. The director general of the Central Reserve Police Force, Julio Ribeiro, took command over the Gujarat police force in July 1985, a month before the violence subsided. He stated at the time that ‘the police force here has been ruined due to heavy politicisation. Every transfer used to take place at the behest of politicians. Police officers were pressurised to do what politicians wanted’.37 He even identified bootleggers as the ‘main troublemakers’.38 In his autobiography, Ribeiro claimed that corrupt police officers in Ahmedabad regularly received large sums of illegal money from bootleggers. At the station level, police officers were reluctant to carry out Ribeiro’s orders to arrest bootleggers who ‘were friends of different ministers and [the police officers] would have to face their wrath’.39

In the small locality of Dariapur in 1985, narratives of both residents and more official voices revealed the nature of relations between police, politicians and so-called anti-social elements: bootleggers paid bribes to both politicians and local police to conduct their illegal activities without undue harassment. On the basis of their influence in their localities, they also secured electoral support and provided sponsorship for the politicians. The latter, in turn, prevented police intervention in the bootleggers’ work by intervening in the posting and transfer of policemen in the city. Some policemen competed over postings in what were known to be ‘profitable areas’ to supplement their income. They were willing to pay fees to politicians and government officials to that end. A lucrative posting was an incentive for them to maintain good relations with politicians. Politicians and policemen, in this context, abused their public power for private gains. Pressure by politicians politicized the force. Ordinary people in this area, mainly the poor, were citizens/subjects of police, labour and clients/customers for bootleggers and voters for local politicians. Rather than attaining basic civic amenities directly from the state, their welfare and security needs in the locality were to a significant degree provided by those whom the state authorities defined as anti-social elements.
Some residents referred to bootleggers and to some of the politicians as ‘social workers’. People explained that some ‘anti-social elements’, as well as local corrupt politicians, acquired influence in their localities through their ‘social work’ for the benefit of the people. According to various residents in the old city of Ahmedabad, both Muslims and Hindus, the then underworld don, Latif, and his associates started charitable work during the communal riots and distributed essential goods to poor people. ‘Latif himself brought aid. He came at the gate and brought money, food, and even fresh milk, which was a scarce product during that time. He also supplied medicines’. Particularly for Muslims in the old city area, he became a local Robin Hood. ‘He donated money for widows and the unemployed, and helped people with dowry to marry their daughters’. To the government and some politicians, Latif was an ‘anti-social element’, or ‘the dreaded underworld don’. Latif nonetheless gained recognition and legitimacy from the people in the old city of Ahmedabad when 2 years after the riots, in the 1987 Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation elections, he was elected as an independent candidate.

The cartography of the workings of corruption in the Dariapur area is representative of a broader phenomenon. There were illicit liquor distillers’ and bootleggers’ dens in almost every neighbourhood of Ahmedabad. The Dariapur residents’ experiences of ongoing forms of corruption at the local level were not unique to Ahmedabad or Gujarat. Evidence about the connivance of police and politicians in corruption at the local level is found in other studies of communal violence. For example, in Vadodara in the early 1980s a ‘communal riot’ was actually violence that resulted from a conflict between Muslims and Kahars Scheduled Castes (or Bhois) bootleggers over control of the illicit liquor business. Asghar Ali Engineer, who investigated these riots, argued that ‘the well known communal parties and organisations had no role to play in this conflict’. In the meanwhile, senior local and state politicians and police officials, rivalling over patronage, were embroiled in the riot. It was alleged that politicians of the ruling Congress party were taking a cut in the haftas given by the bootleggers, and that ‘the group rivalry between the ruling party politicians Mr. Ashok Bhogilal Patel (who is very close to the Chief Minister Madhavsingh Solanki) and Mr. Sanat Mehta has become proverbial’. The stakes were high: it was suggested by some official social workers in Vadodara at the time that ‘hafta totaling [sic] Rs. 60 lakhs per year is paid to the police officials and political bosses’. Twelve years after the riots of 1985, during the time I conducted fieldwork, I witnessed similar patterns in the use of public power in the socio-political context of the old city of Ahmedabad. With some reluctance, but admittedly with far greater curiosity, I climbed the stairs of the house of a senior politician in Ahmedabad, who was alleged to be involved in corrupt malpractices. From his house in the old city, he arranged various civic services for residents in the area. He lay comfortably in bed, surrounded by phones, with assistants at his bedside, receiving people from the locality. Among them was a Muslim woman holding two babies, who sought help for an unresolved issue with the Municipal Corporation. Thus, it was from his bed, rather than from his formal office, that he arranged favours for his constituents. It was this politician, among others, whom people in the area referred to as their ‘social worker’, when they recalled the riots of 1985.

These accounts of daily practices of public power around ongoing corruption at the ground level disclosed that they took place in the context of attempts to purchase on state resources and could be characterized as a bridge for gaining leverage over them. Such resources may have been votes for politicians, supplementary earnings for policemen or basic needs and welfare for the poor and ordinary citizens, which the state failed to provide. Thus, systems of corruption at the local level had implications, beyond the specific corrupt transaction – in this case the trade in illicit liquor – permeating broader domains of
life. Some of the externalities resulting from everyday corruption could even appear to be positive.\textsuperscript{46}

Corruption formed, to some extent, the means of mediating between contradictory governing orders. On the one hand, politicians were corrupt; on the other hand, they were ‘social workers’. At one level, people whom the state designated as criminals were the saviours who addressed needs that the state did not meet; and at the same time they remained anti-social elements on the wanted list. Although corrupt practices enabled disadvantaged groups to get a firmer hold on the state, these dynamics also perpetuated the dependence of these disadvantaged groups on local patronage.

Below the state, then, an informal sub-governing order prevailed, which connected and enabled politicians to assume authority over social networks at the local level. The dynamics of everyday governance, resting on systemic corruption, had direct effect on the nature of the workings of the state and its practices of power.

\textbf{Law and order, corruption and the state}

The mapping of corruption and its wider subsidiary networks around the trade in illicit alcohol in the old city of Ahmedabad sheds light on the mechanisms of law and order in ordinary times. Basic autonomy, which the police require to assert authority on behalf of the state, did not properly exist. Through the dynamics of routine corruption in the localities, the police became heavily politicized. The functioning of the police was largely determined by local power struggles and their contingencies. It was strained by political intervention in local policing and the threat of redeployment. Hence, the official meaning and purpose of the rule of law was apparently distinct from everyday practices of the police in the localities. During routine times, then, a clear distinction between lawmakers, law protectors and lawbreakers did not always exist.

When, for example, a senior politician exercised his public power from his bed, even from a reclining position, he shattered the distinction between public and private spheres, between state and society. The vested interest of some policemen in the perpetuation of lawlessness for example, in competition over posts in a ‘profitable area’ such as Dariapur was known to be, had a similar effect.

In the experiences of mundane corruption in Ahmedabad, state agents, like politicians and the police, by embodying both private and public power, broke down these boundaries.\textsuperscript{47} An a priori differentiation and a notion of a boundary between the state and the society is a precondition for effective, impartial and just law enforcement.

Paradoxically, although the distinction between state and society is necessary for the state to exist, in the everyday reality of Ahmedabad, external subsidiary benefits derived from corrupt transactions at the local level, like assistance with social welfare or employment, fulfilled functions that were indispensable for the very existence of the state. This paradox was reflected in people’s views of the state. Some people in the old city of Ahmedabad expressed frustrations over the state’s lack of accountability and its failure to provide security during the riots of 1985. They saw themselves as victims of ‘wars’ among anti-social elements, politicians and the police. These same people also acknowledged that the systems of corruption and the informal sub-governing order for civic provisions and personal social needs often improved their well-being in ordinary times. This was precisely what made the systems of corruption at the local level so resilient.

Consequently, routine practices of public power were to a large extent contingent upon the extraction and employment of a range of resources derived from systemic corruption. In effect, everyday corruption around illicit liquor in the ‘dry’ state of Gujarat produced
a large, reliable pool of financial, institutional and to some extent social resources, which politicians could exploit to their advantage. It also embodied deep and wide-ranging forms of illegality, which underlay public power.

Practices of public power built around routine corruption were characterized by the interference of politicians in police work. Their power to redeploy policemen at whim resulted in a politicization of the police force. The police acted with impunity in their and the politician’s interests. In breaching the distinction between the public and the private spheres, public officials were harnessing resources of the state for their private interests. These characteristics gradually became ingrained in the governance of everyday life.

The weak distinction between the makers, protectors and breakers of the law in the context of daily forms of corruption persisted in times of crisis. During riots, various local disputes, like the one in Bhandari pole in 1985, between bootleggers and the police, assumed the overtones of communal violence. Communal violence sometimes became an opportunity for both state officials and social groups to settle scores and gain a firmer hold on each other. The underlying patterns or practices of public power in ordinary times continued at times of violence, becoming even more transparent.

There were parallels between the underlying practices of public power in ordinary times and those that manifested during the violence of 2002. During the violence against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, police were under political pressure to turn a blind eye to the killing of Muslims. It was not exceptional for policemen to take orders from politicians. This was, after all, the practice of routine law-enforcement work in ordinary times in the context of local corruption.

During the 2002 events, police officers that tried to keep the peace, acted against the rioters or made efforts to stop attacks on Muslims were promptly transferred. The practice of politicians bending the police to their will during ordinary times was readily employed to ensure that attacks on Muslims were not interrupted. The way the police became instruments in the hands of politicians and government officials during the violence of 2002 can be seen as an extension, as well as a cumulative effect, of the everyday patterns of public power at the local level.

Some political leaders and police acted during the events of 2002 as if they had reason to think that they could get away with their misconduct. This was, at least in part, because of the sense of the immunity they experienced in the everyday life. During ordinary times, some public officials and police harnessed state resources for pecuniary and narrow political gains. During the 2002 violence, these resources were used for the political and ideological interests of militant Hindu organizations and the BJP.

Inserting the ‘communal link’: corruption and ethnic politics

From the mid-1980s, during times of violence the premeditated lawlessness of everyday life was mostly directed against Muslims. But persisting malpractices of public power, both in routine times and during social unrest, had deeper historical roots in post-independence Gujarat and were not always deployed on the basis of religious partiality. The dynamics around illicit liquor was already widespread in the 1960s. A study of the 1969 communal riots in Ahmedabad mentions, as one source of tension, that ‘some Congress leaders protected the goondas [who worked with bootleggers] as they earlier secured votes for them’. A voluminous study of Gujarat history suggests that in ‘order to win the 1971 and 1972 elections, the party [Congress] obtained the support of smugglers, bootleggers, as well as rich peasants’.
In December 1973, a mass social protest and agitation against food price-rise and corruption, the Nav-Nirman movement, that was led by students, started in Ahmedabad and spread to other parts of Gujarat. The price-rise, particularly of groundnut oil, was attributed to the corrupt politics of the Congress government. A prevalent perception and charge was that Gujarat chief minister, Chimanbhai Patel, made money from the oil dealers by allowing the price of groundnut oil to rise. The police’s swift response to the student protests was described as a ‘police carnage’ and became a cause for the perpetuation of the violence. In one incident, police entered student rooms in hostels by ‘breaking open the doors, beat the inmates severely and damaged the furniture . . . after the brutal police storm, cash and valuables belonging to the student were found missing’. About 184 people, among them some of the student leaders, were arrested under the Maintenance and Internal Security Act (MISA), an anti-terror law. Over the 73-day agitation, the police shot and killed 88 people, 61 of them students under the age of 30. This police brutality preceded the abuses of the Emergency by 2 years.

Thus, patterns of routine public power, related to corruption, have not led inexorably to communal violence. From the end-1960s until the mid-1980s, while the Congress was dominant in Gujarat, it appears that bad practices of governance, infused by systemic corruption, were driven by competition over political power and influence, mainly between some senior and local Congress politicians. Some rivalries, for example over patronage for bootleggers in Ahmedabad in 1985, and in Vadodara in the early 1980s, resulted in violence. Only some of these incidents assumed communal overtones.

From the mid-1980s, the BJP, which came to power in 1995, became a leading political force in Gujarat. The state became a nerve centre for the Hindu nationalist movement, which defined itself in opposition to Islam and Muslims and sought to redefine India as a Hindu state. Senior members of the Sangh Parivar even declared Gujarat to be their laboratory of Hindutva ideologies. Narendra Modi, Chief Minister of Gujarat during the violence of 2002 (to the present), was brought into this position by the central leadership of the BJP in October 2001 as ‘a defender of the Hindu Faith’. Let us now consider how the entwining of everyday patterns of public power with deepening ethno-Hindu politics helps to explain the communal harnessing of state power.

I have argued elsewhere that the making of Islam and Muslims in the 1980s into a viable threat to India and to its Hindu majority, as well as the sudden political success of this notion, had little to do with the changing nature of Islam or of Muslim politics at the time. Rather, it was related to growing caste tensions, particularly to the class and status anxieties of the minority of upper castes among Hindus over the growing assertion of the lower and backward caste majority, which threatened to upset the Hindu moral order. At the centre of my account of the rise of Hindu nationalism from the 1980s lay the caste dynamics, their relations to the state and the political economy in post-independent Gujarat. What my analysis at the time did not look into were the mechanics and resources that ethno-Hindu political ideologues were able to harness to their narrow political ends.

In this study, I have tried to highlight two factors that need to be more fully researched to better understand how the extreme anti-Muslim harnessing of state power that took place in 2002 was made possible. By exploring the relations between everyday forms of corruption and state violence this study has indicated the types of the local resources – financial, institutional and to some degree social – that the BJP was able to exploit towards its ethno-Hindu political ends. This study also offers a fuller understanding of the underlying dynamics and significance of the making of political leverage over law enforcement. The capturing of both material and institutional resources and the instruments of law
enforcement in particular by a single and highly exclusionary political ideology may better explain the kind of deterioration of public life that manifested itself in Gujarat in 2002.

Systemic corruption around illicit liquor appears to remain strong. In July 2009, in what was called the Hooch tragedy, 136 people died after consuming tainted liquor in and around Ahmedabad. The initial investigation of the case allegedly pointed to connections between some of the bootleggers and BJP politicians. The president of the Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee claimed that the BJP ‘fielded at least three bootleggers in Junagadh Municipal Corporation elections’. The communalization of illicit liquor in Gujarat can apparently be traced back to the mid-1980s. A witness to the riots of 1985 claimed that ‘after 1985 the underworld in Ahmedabad was divided along communal lines. It was not before’. The extent to which routine forms of governance, which rested on systemic corruption and on subordinated social networks that were pegged to them at the local level (as illustrated in the cartography of corruption in Bhadripole), became organized along communal lines since the rise of Hindu nationalism needs to be further researched.

Although illicit liquor has been the primary case of this chapter, it is evidently not the only source of corrupt revenue for politicians. Gujarat liberalized in the 1980s and 1990s. Its economy has grown at well above the Indian average for the past two decades. A Congress councillor of Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation alleged that after the BJP came to power in the municipality in 1987 during the first spell of liberal economic reforms, ‘plots of Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation land were sold to builders, mafia and BJP supporters. Whoever gave the higher bribe won the best tracts of land’.

Some recent studies show the extent to which militant Hindu organizations have been able to penetrate into various tiers of institutions of governance in Gujarat since the BJP’s rise to power in the state. Members of the Sangh Parivar were appointed to various state-owned boards and advisory committees, like the Police Advisory Committee and the Social Justice Committee. The BJP refined the politics of patronage, which already existed during the time of the Congress, to distribute state benefits to Sangh members and Hindu religious sects. One study argues that the ‘Sangh parivar has set about “re-imagining the state” by edging power away from formal office through the privatization of state authority and the simultaneous outsourcing of state functions’. Although the capture of these institutions for political ends also generates revenues and strengthens the hold of dominant political parties, the particularity of the illicit liquor trade is its nexus with law enforcement.

Some documents and cases that were submitted by various organizations in Gujarat before the prime minister’s High-Level Sachar Committee on the Muslim Community of India demonstrate how everyday administrative corruptions, similar to patterns of systemic corruption at the local level, were directly linked to the ethno-Hindu capturing of the state. In 1978, the Baxi Backward Classes Commission in Gujarat recognized and included in the state list of the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) a few Muslim groups, among them groups defined as ‘belonging to the caste called ‘Muslim Julaya’, and ‘Muslim Ghanchi’. The District Social Welfare Officer in Ahmedabad issued certificates of SEBC for them between 1981 and 2002. On this basis, members of these groups were admitted to universities on reserved seats. This policy changed from 2003 when the director of Developing Caste of the Welfare Department rejected their certificates when these came up for approval. The director insisted that the certificate holder produce records mentioning the word ‘Julaya’ or ‘caste’ dated before 1978. The director would have known that a government commission only recognized these groups as Julaya and Ghanchi castes in 1978, and that documents pre-dating that year did not therefore exist. In another example of administrative abuse, the Ghanchi submission claimed that ‘till today the department
of Development Caste welfare [sic] cancelled more than 200 admissions in professional degrees and diploma courses on various grounds’.65

One more example: a trust that manages the Anjuman High School Bhalej – a minority school with non-Muslim students – applied in 1991 to the Gram Panchayat to allot waste land for the expansion of the school. The request was approved and signed by Anand Collector on 5 December 2000. An application for a stay order, justified on the grounds that the land was in a predominantly Hindu area, cancelled the transfer. The trust appealed to the Gujarat High Court. On 18 July 2001 the court ordered, with some detailed directions, to allot the land to the trust. ‘But instead of allotting the land our order was cancelled off by the government’.66 In an increasingly ethno-Hindu regime, politicized administrative authorities no longer feel encumbered by judicial decisions. Impunity combines with pecuniary interests fed by daily administrative corruption to serve politico-ideological ends.

Just as the discourse on communal violence obscured a crisis in a local system of corruption in Dariapur in 1985, a localized case of the dynamics of everyday forms of corruption masked a sub-governing order that extended far beyond the use and trade in illicit liquor. It was, in part, the implications of this parallel governing order for the state mechanisms of law and order in the everyday life that enabled the complicity of the state in the Gujarat violence of 2002.

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Notes
1. See, for example International Initiative for Justice in Gujarat (IIJ), Threatened Existence, 37–9; Human Rights Watch, ‘We Have No Orders’, 4–6, 15–6, 23, 48; People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Violence in Vadodara, 6–8, 132–8; People’s Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR), Maaro! Kaapo! Baalo!; People’s Union for Civil Liberties, Vadodara and Vadodara Shanti Abhiyan, At the Receiving End, 4; Women’s panel from the Citizen’s Initiative, How has the Gujarat Massacre Affected, section II; Varadarajan, Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy; Shani, Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism, 168–73; Khetan, ‘Conspirators and Rioters’, 14–5, 20, 40–1, 43, 51–3.
4. See Pathan, ‘Modi Ties Hands of Cops’. This seemed to be the case at least till May 2002, when the Election Commission publicly announced its unhappiness with the law and order situation and first indicated that scheduled state elections may be postponed. This was followed by a reshuffle of senior police officers in Ahmedabad and the appointment of K.P.S. Gill as security advisor to the chief minister.
5. Official Government of India figures, according to the Ministry of Home Affairs Annual Report 2002–2003, put the death toll at 763 with another 2400 injured: Quoted in Mehta, ‘Modi and the Camera’, 396. In May 2005, the government informed the Rajaya Sabha that 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed, 223 more people were reported missing and 2548 injured: ‘Gujarat Riots Killed’. Voluntary agencies and human rights groups, however, put the death toll at close to 2500. See, for example Human Rights Watch, We Have No Orders, 4.
6. State violence against its citizens was not wholly new, nor unique to Gujarat. State officials and police had played a part in the violence against Sikhs in Delhi in 1984, and in the violence against Muslims during the 1980s and early 1990s in Bhagalpur, Meerut, Ahmedabad and Mumbai, for example.
7. A growing literature on the Indian state over the past decade approaches the state through an examination of its everyday practices. See, for example Fuller and Harriss, ‘For an Anthropology’; Gupta, ‘Blurred Boundaries’; Parry, ‘The ‘Crises of Corruption’; Chandavarkar, ‘Customs of Governance’.
For an analysis and typology of corruption see Galtung, ‘Criteria for Sustainable Corruption Control’.


Gupta, ‘Blurred Boundaries’, 376. Also see Visvanathan and Sethi, Foul Play, 8.

The term ethno-Hindu recognizes the socially constructed, as opposed to ontological nature of the political category of Hindu.


In the 1972 Gujarat Assembly elections, the Jana Sangh Party (JS), the predecessor of the BJP, won three seats, 9% of the vote. In the 1975 election, the party contested the Gujarat election as a member in the Janata Morcha coalition (together with Congress (O)), and gained 18 seats with 9% of the vote. The Janata Morcha’s campaign emphasized issues of democracy and corruption. In the 1952, 1957 and 1962 elections in Gujarat, the JS did not win any seat. In the 1967 election, the party won one seat. See Shah, ‘The 1975 Gujarat Assembly Election’, 276. Shah argues that ‘no Muslim political organisation, such as the Muslim League or the Majlis, has a large following in the state’, and that after 1969, Muslims united behind the Congress. See Ibid., 280.

During partition there was no violence in Ahmedabad or Gujarat in general. Yagnik and Sheth, The Shaping of Modern Gujarat, 223–5. Communal riots took place in Ahmedabad in 1941, and violent incidents in 1946 on the Rath Yatra day.

Shani, Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism.


See for instance, Spodek, ‘From Gandhi to Violence’, 769.

Diwanji, ‘Prohibition – Gujarat’s worst kept secret’. Also see Spodek, ‘Crises and Response’, 1631–2. For discussions of bootlegging in the context of the 1985 riots see, for example Spodek, ‘From Gandhi to Violence’, 769; Ribeiro, Bullet for Bullet, 256, 258; Engineer, ‘From Caste to Communal Violence’, 628–9.


Mohan, ‘India’, 149.

‘Cheers: ‘Malt March’ in Gandhi’s Gujarat’.


Sharma, ‘50% of liver failures due to alcohol in Gujarat’.


Interview with Sunil, Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 31 March 1998. This account was reiterated in interviews with Makbul, Sajjan Jamadar’s Moholla, Dariapur, Ahmedabad, 29 December 1997; Rasul, Naginapole, Ahmedabad, 30 December 1997.

Rs. 300,000 was about $23,000 at the time.

Interviews with Rasul, Naginapole, Dariapur, Ahmedabad, 30 December 1997; Makbul, Sajjan Jamadar’s Moholla, Dariapur, 30 December 1997. The claims made in the interviews reflect local understandings of the events of 1985.

Interview with Gaurang, Bapunagar, Ahmedabad, 6 December 1997.

Interviews with Karsenbhai and Inayat, Dariapur, Ahmedabad, 22 February 1998.

Interviews with Sunitaben, Rakhi, Ahmedabad, 30 December 1997.

Interview with Saurabh, Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 26 March 1998.

Interviews with Sudarshan and Karimbhai, Gomtipur, Ahmedabad, 6 January 1998.

Interview with Makbul, Naginapole, Dariapur, Ahmedabad, 30 December 1997.


Ibid., 30, 32.

India Today, 31 August 1985.

Quoted in Spodek, ‘From Gandhi to Violence’, 772.

Ribeiro, Bullet for Bullet, 258, 256.

Interview with Rasul, Naginapole, Dariapur, 30 December 1997. The same narration was repeated, for example by Makbul, Sajjan Jamadar’s Moholla, Dariapur, Ahmedabad, 30 December 1997; Parvin, Shahpur, Ahmedabad, 11 March 1998; Karsenbhai, Ambedkar street, Dariapur, 29 November 1997.

Interview with Karimbhai, Gomtipur, Ahmedabad, 6 January 1998.
42. Interviews with Ashok Bhatt (BJP), Khadia, Ahmedabad, 15 December 1997; Madhavsinh Solanki, the Chief Minister of Gujarat at the time of the riots of 1985, Delhi, 16 March 1998. This was also the language used in newspaper reports.


44. Ibid., 285.

45. Ibid., 282. For similar examples from communal violence elsewhere in India see, for example Hansen, ‘Governance and Myths of State in Mumbai’, 56; Brass, Theft of an Idol, 55.

46. For a discussion of externalities in corrupt transactions see Galtung, ‘Criteria for Sustainable Corruption Control’.

47. Also see Gupta, ‘Blurred Boundaries’ (especially p. 348). Gupta’s analysis discusses the ambiguity of the boundaries between state and society in the context of corruption and the difficulty to demarcate where the state ends and society begins.


50. Shah, ‘The 1969 Communal Riots’, 183. Shah suggests that middle-class Hindus believed that the distillers and their goondas were Muslims.


52. Shah, ‘The 1975 Gujarat Assembly Elections’, 270–1; Jhaveri, The Gujaratis, 112; Shah, Youth in Gujarat, 3; Dhar, Indira Gandhi, 244. The Nav-Nirman agitation ended with the dissolution of the state Assembly on 15 March 1974.

53. Shan, Youth in Gujarat, 12–3.

54. See, for example ‘This Was a BJP Lab Experiment’; Engineer, ‘Gujarat: Laboratory of Hindutva’; Dayal, Gujarat 2002; Human Rights Watch, We Have No Orders, 41; Vyas, ‘More at Stake’, 8 December 2002.


56. Shani, Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism.


58. Interview with Ravindra, Ahmedabad, 1 December 1997. Also see Engineer, ‘Communal Riots in Ahmedabad’, 1641; Spodek, ‘In the Hindutva Laboratory’, 30.


63. Sachar Committee Papers, File 59.


65. Ibid., p. 171. The Ghanchi memorandum explains that ‘the department in this recurring policy towards Muslim OBCs relay on a judgment of the Supreme Court from 1994 with reference to the case of tribal candidates not Muslim OBCs’.

66. Sachar Committee Papers, File 61.

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India Today, 31 August 1985.


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