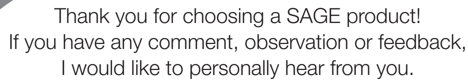
Being Muslim and Working for Peace



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Being Muslim and Working for Peace

Ambivalence and Ambiguity in Gujarat

Raphael Susewind

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
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Acknowledgements

> The anthropologist in the first world, regardless of her national or ethnic background, does not necessarily lack critical reflection or empathy or even responsibility; what she is divested of, crucially, is insecurity. (R. Robinson 2005: 15)

While pursuing this project on Muslim peace activists, I travelled through many disciplines, institutions and even countries. I learned a lot, and am indebted to many for their support and guidance. First and foremost, I would like to thank the 21 anonymous peace activists, who sat down with me in 2008 in Ahmedabad and Halol, shared their experience and urged me to voice their struggle in academic fora. It is their insecurity that I am divested of, while this study is based on their courage. I can only hope that I do them justice.

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(Susewind 2009b, 2011, in press); I thank the editors and readers of those for their comments and, where necessary, for their permission to reproduce.

Overall, it remains unusual for a young scholar like me to publish an academic book before he obtains his doctorate. In addition to all those named above, I am thus especially thankful to my editor at SAGE, Rekha Natarajan, for her encouragement and willingness to take a risk, and to the anonymous reviewer of the manuscript for his or her wholehearted endorsement of quality and relevance. Neelakshi Chakraborty and Dhurjjati Sarma steered me through the production process: thank you.

Since the self-doubts of the young remain, however, my last vote of thanks goes to those who accompanied me on my personal journey throughout these four years. My wife, Julia, and my parents, Angelika and Alexander, missed me for months in India, had to face the fallout of frequent frustration, joined in occasional jubilation and continue to support my academic passion in many, often less obvious, ways. I am forever grateful to them.

Despite all the help of so many people, however, I am the only one to blame for the shortcomings that remain. If I learned one thing from the various transformations of this project, it is that mediocrity in retrospect is the fate of all research. I thus sincerely wish that future contributions de-construct and re-construct my arguments in exciting new ways, and I am curious to hear about those.

Raphael Susewind
Lucknow, April 2012

1

Religion in Conflict

> go, the mob assembles the mob assembles
> go and throw the bomb (Children rhyme)

Child's Play

Godhra, Panchmahal district, India—here it all began six years earlier: the violence, the activism and the stories told in this book. Nearby, in Halol, I was transcribing interviews when I overheard a group of children joyfully playing hide-and-seek on a sunny spring afternoon in 2008. Halol was one of the small towns in the state of Gujarat which I visited to explore Muslim civil society and Muslims in civil society. More specifically, I came to talk with those Muslims who engage in peace activism; my wider aim was to understand better how their beliefs, their sense of belonging and their political agency influence each other. Embroiled in my work, it took a few rounds of the children's game until I became aware of the rhyme they used for counting whose turn it is: 'go, the mob assembles, the mob assembles, go and throw the bomb.'

Neither did I speak to them nor did I look more closely to gauge their age or the community they might belong to. By the time I deciphered their heavy dialect, the group had already disappeared around a corner. Little did I know at the time that I would be writing a book about

ambivalence and ambiguity, and I had barely begun to comprehend the various meanings of 'being Muslim and working for peace' after major anti-Muslim violence. It was thus only much later that I understood the significance of this children rhyme, which crept from background to centre stage for a brief moment that day: what they were singing, and what disturbed my lavish academic endeavours, was post-conflict reality in its utmost traumatic and absurd way. The sun was shining and the kids were counting mobs and bombs. In this very moment, in these few lines of a game deprived of ease and innocence, the terrible ambivalence of living in contemporary Gujarat came to the fore—an ambivalence which is most acutely felt by the state's minorities, but should concern us all.

Once, Gujarat was a very different place. The state is the former home of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and it was from here that the Mahatma set off on his historic Salt March with his promise not to return until India was liberated by non-violent means. But today, Gandhi's homeland is the state with the deepest religious divides in India, with entrenched communalist politics targeting the just below 10 per cent of the population vilified as the Muslim 'other'. While ruled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the worst riots in the country since the 1970s were orchestrated here in spring 2002; they constitute the backdrop to this book. During the pogrom, ordinary citizens, politicians and even the security services were involved in the killing of about 2,000 people and the displacement of tens of thousands others; many more applauded the mobs, and few dared to speak up against hatred and violence. The overwhelming majority of victims were Muslims: second-class citizens in the eyes of many, including, significantly, the state machinery. Latest since 2002, then, 'Gujarat retains the reputation as a bastion of Hindu nationalism in which religious minorities continue to face persecution and anyone speaking out against the officially sanctioned hindutva discourse is bullied and intimidated into silence' (Heitmeyer 2009: 104).

And years later, Gujarati children, who might not even have been born by 2002, continue to embody the riot's cruel logic, and transfer it upon a new generation. How could I study peace in this context?

I asked myself and was challenged by others. Many activists I spoke to were uncomfortable with my focus on peace, with my focus on religion and above all, my intention to speak about peace with Muslim activists, some of whom were victims of violence themselves (a revised version of parts of this critique can be found in the commentary by Gagan Sethi at the end of this book). My research questions were far from what they thought a serious student of the Gujarat riots should be interested in. Hakim, one of my interview partners from Ahmedabad, for instance pointedly remarked:

> This whole peace activism is a huge drama, a huge drama. We have no food in the relief camps. And the NGOs parade in to impart an understanding of peace. Well: tell them that if you like to make peace, then have the stamina to go to the oppressors, arrange meetings about peace with VHP leaders and BJP leaders [two key Hindu nationalist organizations]. Give *them* a training about peace! Otherwise shut up. (Hakim: Interview with Author)

Like all names used in this book, Hakim is a pseudonym; where necessary to preserve anonymity, I also changed demographic or other details of my informants which might lead to their identification. But I cannot interfere with what they told me, and what Hakim told me surely complicated my endeavour early on. Declared by someone undoubtedly more involved and knowledgeable than me, his harsh comment highlights that communal violence has to be explained, especially if it happens in a context that gave inspiration to one of the world's most astonishing freedom struggles almost a century earlier. What is more: justice needs to be fought for, and perpetrators need to be held accountable—and the fact that this has rarely happened yet in Gujarat surely warrants scholarly examination.

However, it is not as if scholars would shy away from this task: while one can assume that violent outbreaks of such magnitude may possibly never be understood in their entirety, quite a few studies have been published about the genesis and dynamics of communalism in Gujarat, about the events of 2002, and about the aftermath (a good overview of all these aspects can be found in Wilkinson 2007, while the first and only ethnographic account of the riots themselves—and a compelling

analysis—has been written by Ghassem-Fachandi 2012). Similarly, we have engaging studies on the long-term effects of violence on victims; for Gujarat for instance the work of R. Robinson (2005). Beyond the case of 'Gujarat 2002', too, the task of explaining conflict, and the support religion often lends to it, has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Various models have been developed to analyse the dynamics of 'fascist' identity hardening, the instrumentality of communal rioting and the relative relevance of religious factors in either process.

What marks such studies of religion and conflict is, however, that they tend to be caught up in explaining violence rather than peace—and that they tend to explain away religion as a serious factor in conflict. Too often, the role of religion in either violence or peace is discarded as a superficial guise for material concerns. Equally often, the relation of religion and politics is being reduced to one of religion and conflict and even further to one of religion and violence. This latter tendency is especially pronounced in the case of Islam and Muslims, which are frequently portrayed as inherently religious and, by extension, inherently violent. If such black and white pictures are rejected, they are frequently replaced not by more detailed studies, but by ones which ignore religion and its ambivalences altogether.

Many studies on communalism in India for instance reconstruct in detail how 'othering' Muslims—or any out-group, for that matter—facilitates the formation of Hindu—or any in-group's—identity, and then go on to describe how this identity is being exploited by politicians for their own instrumental goals. While focusing on Hindu identity formation, they, however, tend to treat Muslim identities as monolithic as the Hindu nationalists do, achieving the opposite of what they hope to. This arguably does injustice to the complexities of both religion and conflict, and also to Muslims and Islam. Often, such narratives thus end up simultaneously over- and underestimating the role of religion in conflict.

To come back to Hakim's challenge, merely talking to and writing about the oppressors and perpetrators and otherwise 'shutting up' was therefore, for me, no appropriate reaction to kids counting mobs and bombs. The children playing hide-and-seek in Halol did not commit any crime—but they are undoubtedly in desperate need for peace. Since this

peace is not the mechanical opposite of violence, however, all we now know about the violent agents of religion—about fundamentalists, rioters or terrorists—does neither provide us with insights into the motivations of their peaceful counterparts nor helps to encourage them. While physical security and absence of assaults might constitute the core of peace, its emergence or production should be explained as a process *sui generis*. Likewise, measures countering communal riots should not just be designed by inverting those factors leading to violent activism. The story of peace is more complex. This complexity needs to be unfolded, I would strongly argue, in its own right as well as with respect to the fact that until we study communal peace, we will not be able to really understand communal conflict.

That this book shifts the focus away from violence is therefore a strategic choice. It does not imply that I shy away from blaming the perpetrators; they—and not those subjected to their ire—are responsible for their doings, and it is our duty to hold them accountable. Children who now count mobs and bombs can never be made responsible for the fact that their parents' property, lives and agency were destroyed in riots; this inculpable objectification might indeed constitute the very drama of victimhood. Focusing on them should, therefore, not be misconstrued as a twisted way of claiming that, somehow, 'they were the problem' in the first place.

However, there is also a reason beyond strategic considerations to focus on the victims: most of them do not remain victims forever, and restricting them to this tag alone would risk depriving them once more of the chance to regain their lives. Many victims of the Gujarat riots managed to regain their agency against all odds, and some even began to work for justice and reconciliation. Their story is not merely one of violence, but also one of peace. And their story does not end in 2002—so neither should ours.

What struck me in this tense post-conflict context was therefore precisely this: that peace develops despite widespread violence and that justice—not just revenge—is fought for by civil society. Moreover, I found the very existence of peace activism among victimized Muslims intriguing precisely because the same can morally not be demanded of

them. How did they muster the courage? How did they overcome obstacles? How did they approach their task? And what did their work do with them, with their sense of being, believing and belonging? My study tries to answer these questions. Over the later chapters, I will introduce inspiring personalities who are very active for peace and who link their activism to their beliefs and belonging in diverse, often ambivalent or ambiguous ways.

In doing so, I ultimately also hope to contribute to wider ongoing debates about religion and conflict, both by focusing on peace rather than violence, and also by taking religious factors in their complexity more seriously. More specifically, I wish to contribute to a debate that began with Appleby's (2000) seminal study on the 'ambivalence of the sacred'.

At least in the discipline of peace and conflict studies, it was largely due to his intervention that a growing part of academic discourse began to assess religion as an independent factor in conflict—irreducible to political instrumentalization—and as a factor which is fundamentally ambivalent towards violence. Whenever this ambivalence was previously taken into account, it was usually explained away with a compromise between 'ideological consideration' and 'compulsion of living' (Madan 1981:58); religion was either a violence-provoking ideology restrained only by context or a harmless traditional way of living, viciously exploited by identity politics. After Appleby (2000), however, researchers began to remember again that religion itself oscillates '*between Eden and Armageddon*' (Gopin 2000) that ambivalence finds its roots in the core of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (shaking yet fascinating mystery) (Otto 1917). Appleby himself formulates this insight as follows:

> Most religious societies, in fact, have interpreted their experience of the sacred in such a way as to give religion a paradoxical role in human affairs—as the bearer of peace and the sword. These [...] reflect a continuing struggle within religions—and within the heart of each believer—over the meaning and character of the power encountered in the sacred and its relationship to coercive force or violence. [...] The ambivalence of religion toward violence, toward the sacred itself, is actually good news for those who recognize, correctly, that religion will continue to be a major force [...] indeed, religions, despite the shameful record of a minority of their

> adherents, are strikingly accomplished in developing their own traditions of peace-related practices and concepts. (Appleby 2000: 27, 306)

The acknowledgement that religion is first of all not irrelevant and secondly neither violent nor peaceful by default, is an important first step towards more clarity in the debate on peace and conflict. Among scholars, this first step above all inspired a closer look at religious motivations for peace—the potential for violence having received so much attention already. Appleby's work itself is an elaborate reminder that 'religious tolerance outside the bounds of secularism is exactly what it says it is. It not only means tolerance of religions but also tolerance that is religious' (Nandy 1998: 344).

However, his approach has its problems, too. For one, speculation about the essence of the sacred does not help to comprehend the social specificities of its experience; additional factors mediate the transformation of ambivalence into political strategies. And while the emerging literature which builds on Appleby's insight takes religion much more seriously than before, many authors still ignore the micro-level of religious identity and personal agency. I in contrast contend that this micro-level houses an important set of mediating factors; my overall intention with this book is to use a typology of 'being Muslim and working for peace' to stir the debate about the ambivalence of the sacred towards further micro-level enquiry.

With my study, I thus wanted to understand the various ways in which spiritual beliefs, religious practices and dynamics of belonging influence Muslims who work for peace—and to see how their activism in turn shapes these dimensions of their religious identities. I wanted to take religion more seriously at the micro-level of individual experience—without losing track of its deep ambivalences. And I wanted to turn away from violence—not to deny it or negate its terrible consequences, but as a strategic intervention to counter a biased discourse on Islam, Muslims and religion in politics more broadly.

As a result, this book does neither add another factual account of the 2002 riots, nor an explanation for why they happened. Rather, I change

perspective and portray four ideal–typical ways of 'being Muslim and working for peace' in the aftermath:

Faith-based actors draw strength from their in-group, from comprehensive moral beliefs and from orthodox ritual practices. They interpret their activism through dogmatic foils and experience themselves as collective subjects. Still, this uniform facade hides considerable variation in religio-political orientation, including a minority of fundamentalist actors. *Secular technocrats* are to the contrary neither influenced by religious beliefs nor by group identification; they share a relaxed secularism. Being Muslim but religiously unmusical, they are an interesting blind spot of both religious actors and non-Muslim civil society. *Emancipating women* overcome the passivity of their own victimization through peace activism, but increasingly struggle against religious patriarchy. They initially rely on Islamic feminism to support their activities, but ultimately discard religion—to the extent possible. *Doubting professionals* finally emphasize the complexity and ambivalence of religion in communal conflict. They embrace an aesthetic spirituality, feel responsible for their in-group without identifying strongly and begin to challenge their earlier certainties about the assumed irrelevance of religion in development and about their own being Muslim.

This typology uncovers how the ambivalence of the sacred can unfold as a personal dynamic. The stories contained therein demonstrate that one need not look at rioters at all to discover this ambivalence; they also emphasize a crucial diversity in how the sacred is experienced by Muslims in contemporary Gujarat. The journeys of emancipating women and doubting professionals in particular help to formulate an important (if stylized) distinction of ambivalence proper and ambiguity: in the former dynamic, belief and belonging play out as both very good and very bad—in the latter as neither clearly good nor clearly bad. The narratives of faith-based actors and secular technocrats, in turn, force us to rethink the debate on Indian secularism—and to reconsider whom we think of as a 'political Muslim' more generally.

Before I begin to unfold this typology in detail and present the arguments flowing from it, however, the following three sections of this introduction summarize the events of 2002 for those unfamiliar with it

and briefly introduce both prevalent strategies and the institutional landscape of peacebuilding in Gujarat. Together with the next chapter—'why individuals matter'—this should serve as a backdrop to the heart of my research: a micro-level exploration of 21 personal struggles with the ambivalence of the sacred in quest for justice, reconciliation and peace.

Gujarat 2002

While peace is not sufficiently defined as an absence of violence alone—as argued earlier,—widespread violence is what endangers peace and, in the context of this study, violence often played a significant role as a trigger for peace activism. Not by chance, this book began with the terrible embodied legacy of violence as well, in the form of the children rhymes of Halol. What prompted kids to count mobs and bombs—and me to write a book about peace activism and the ambivalence of the sacred as a personal dynamic?

The following overview can and should not be exhaustive—an updated, and very detailed summary of the events themselves and the findings of various governmental and non-governmental commissions can be found in Mander (2009) and Nampoothiri and Sethi (2012). In addition, the account and interpretation of Ghassem-Fachandi (2012) deserves special mention, since it contains the only available ethnographic recollection of the violence itself. Many more primary sources have also been compiled by Engineer (2003), and a sensible introduction to the victims' perspectives has been written by R. Robinson (2005). But let me discuss at least briefly what happened in 2002.

Since several decades, Gujarat suffers from deep communal divides in many of its districts; since the seventies, Ahmedabad alone has seen minor or major clashes almost every year (Nampoothiri and Sethi 2012: 9–20). On Wednesday, 27 February 2002, 59 people were burned alive in a train in Godhra, close to the town of Halol where this book began. Most of them were Hindu nationalist pilgrims returning from a journey to Ayodhya, where they celebrated the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992 and campaigned for the construction of a Ram temple at its site

(a controversy which marks a turning point in the post-independence Indian Hindu–Muslim relations; the events are aptly summarized and boldly interpreted in Nandy et al. 1997).

The whole train journey back to Gujarat was tense, with several minor scuffles wherever the train stopped on its way. However, what precisely happened on this Wednesday morning, when coach S-6 went up in flames at signal Falia in Godhra, remains shrouded in speculation. Some argue that the fire was set by a Muslim mob after heated exchanges of words and fists; others—including the State Forensic Laboratory and a high-level inquiry commission of the Railway Ministry—assume a technical problem with the train itself (Nampoothiri and Sethi 2012: 23–6). As often in cases of mass tragedy, even careful forensic work cannot wholly reconstruct the chain of events to the extent we wish it to, and even those 'facts as recorded in history in cold letters, written or printed, do not reveal the whole truth. Perhaps the truth may never be known' (Engineer 1995: 273). Surely not the last twist of this tale occurred in spring 2011, when—after dodgy proceedings—a court in Ahmedabad found 31 people guilty of setting the fire and acquitted 63 other accused; appeals are pending from either side.

Anyway: the aftermath of the fire of Godhra is arguably more important than the exact chain of events that lead there (even though many in Gujarat argue otherwise and take alleged arson as a justification for killing people who have nothing to do with the suspected arsonists in the first place—other than sharing the same religion). Detailed accounts of the unfolding riots have been published elsewhere (again, Nampoothiri and Sethi 2012 provides a comprehensive summary based on their work for the National Human Rights Commission), but the bottom line goes somehow like this: immediately after the incident, Hindu nationalist activists from the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal, two right-wing movements, called for a state-wide general strike for the next day and for all-India action the day after that; the call was supported by the ruling party. Local as well as national BJP politicians took every effort to publicize the event and to stir communal hatred, and the 59 bodies were taken to the state capital Ahmedabad under full media coverage. First among those inciting hatred was Gujarat's chief minister Narendra Modi,

who allegedly told his administration to let people vent their ire freely for some days before clamping down on those causing a 'disturbance'. Mainstream media, too, explicitly and implicitly encouraged and condoned 'revenge', published unsubstantiated reports, inciting op-eds and gruesome pictures of the victims of Godhra.

However, what followed was by no means a spontaneous eruption of violence, on the contrary: the wave of ensuing riots by and large resembled a pre-planned assault on the state's Muslim communities, using Godhra as a pretext: 'detailed documentation of the violence suggests that the attacks were not merely a spontaneous outburst of injured Hindu pride as alleged by many Hindu nationalist politicians [since] considerable forethought and planning had, in fact, preceded them' (Heitmeyer 2009: 111; cf. Nampoothiri and Sethi 2012: 40f).

The resulting violence claimed over 2,000 casualties (1,169 of them acknowledged by the Gujarati state) and left well over a hundred and fifty thousand Muslims temporarily, and several ten thousands of them permanently displaced. Many Muslim-owned properties and shops were subjected to arson and looted by both the poor and the middle-classes, who arrived on the spot in their flashy Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs) to carry away what they could. Besides businesses and homes, places of worship were targeted, too. Over 300 shrines and more than 200 mosques were destroyed while murder and looting engulfed most parts of central Gujarat (Nampoothiri and Sethi 2012: 52ff), and even according to official sources, 154 out of 182 assembly constituencies in the state were 'affected'. Nussbaum (2007: 101) and others reported that 'one of the most horrific aspects of the Gujarat massacre was the prevalence of rape and sexual torture'; in one particular gruesome and well-publicized event at Naroda Patia, the womb of Kausarben, a pregnant woman, was allegedly slit open before she was burnt alive. Even if this particular incident remains disputed, the central role of female bodies in the phantasm of nationalism, a more general and widespread objectification of women and, most importantly, the misogynist disgust central to *Hindutva* gender constructions culminated in horrific acts of barbarity in Gujarat (Nampoothiri and Sethi 2012: 48). Four years after the riots,

a comprehensive survey conducted by academics and activists from the Behavioural Science Centre, Ahmedabad, concluded:

> Almost all observers agreed that the violence in 2002 was planned and qualitatively different from earlier riots with its spread in rural areas, especially tribal belt; form of violence (burning alive, killing pregnant women); pattern of violence (tools used like LPG cylinders, arson, looting); State-sponsored supported with active or passive actions by Hindus (by and large middle class, urban); and use of hired killers or cadre of unemployed youth belong to tribes, economically and socially backward castes, who were outsiders to the local areas. (Ganguly, Jowher and Dabhi 2006: 26)

Given that the vast majority of victims were Muslims, and considering the systematic planning involved, some activists in fact find it more appropriate to talk of a pogrom or genocide. I, as a German, hesitate to use these terms, even though I understand why one might consider a mere 'riots' inadequate. Whatever the terminology used to describe these events of state-sponsored violence, the majority of Gujarati voters remained ignorant or even supportive to the violence and the state's involvement therein. Even after the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) found 'a comprehensive failure of the State to protect the constitutional rights of the people of Gujarat, starting with the tragedy in Godhra on 27 February 2002 and continuing with the violence that ensued in the weeks that followed' (Ganguly, Jowher and Dabhi 2006: 10; for the wider role and findings of the NHRC, see Nampoothiri and Sethi 2012, who both served as members of the panel reporting to the commission), the electorate remained in favour of the BJP government. Indeed the government was rewarded for its lukewarm stance, as Simpson notes:

> The Legislative Assembly was dissolved in July, some six months prematurely [...] the BJP-VHP-RSS combine presented the election as a referendum on the Government of Gujarat's post-Godhra stance and attempted to mobilize the electorate along religious lines. The choice they presented was a simple one: Hindu-BJP-Gujarat prosperity versus Muslim-Congress-Pakistan stagnation. (Simpson 2006: 342)

The following election campaign worked in the government's favour, and even though the Election Commission managed to delay the polls for some months due to the prevailing tensions and the chaotic situation in makeshift relief camps, chief minister Narendra Modi and his BJP party finally won a landslide victory in December 2002, securing over two-thirds of the seats in the legislative assembly. He was again re-elected in 2007, despite shocking revelations of his administration's involvement in the riots obtained in a sting operation by the Tehelka magazine briefly before the polls (Mander 2009: 49f). Meanwhile, the judicial process was severely tampered with to keep up a narrative of 'Gujarati pride' and developmental progress; most riot cases have not been addressed at all by the state judiciary even 10 years later (Jaffrelot 2012). Narendra Modi still rules the state as this book goes into print and actively flaunts his national, even prime ministerial ambitions: communal intolerance has reached a flash point in Gujarat, and the prospects are dreary.

In order to further justify this book's emphasis on peace in this overall context, it is useful to briefly summarize how most scholars engage with this and other instances of communal rioting in India—and to identify the gaps in this engagement, as I see them. In early (including colonial) research, communal conflict—and society at large—was understood in essentialist terms: religions clash because either violence *per se* or at least antagonism against each other is ingrained in what religions are. Such essentialist explanations still live on in some journalistic contributions in India and elsewhere, but they fortunately lost credence in academia: religion matters, but not that much.

Yet contemporary academic mainstream tends to fall into the opposite extreme by following a purely instrumentalist hypothesis which was made popular in India by Paul Brass (1974) and has since then been reiterated in many variations (Brass 1985, 1991, 1996, 2003 and 2006; cf. Hansen et al. 2006). Brass argues that 'riots [...] first and foremost persist because they are a [...] well-known and accepted [...] part of the general armoury of weapons used by activists and interested parties within both communities for personal, local, and political advantage' (Brass 2003: 356, 366f). In other words: riots are instrumentally useful to the extent

of institutionalization; the religious semantics around them is in Brass's opinion merely a guise for political goals.

Recently, this general instrumentalist argument was further refined in comparative studies by introducing additional variables that moderate the use politicians can make of exploiting religion, most prominently by Varshney (2002), who assessed the role of violence-preventing inter-communal associational networks in his city-level comparative study. Wilkinson summarizes these refinements:

> Perhaps the leading town-level explanation for communal violence focuses on the role of economic competition. [...] The difficulty lies, however, in deciding whether [this] represents the cause of the riot in the first place. [...] More recently, scholars and activists have [thus] begun to focus on the value of inter-ethnic engagement in reducing communal prejudice and violence. [...] [But] are successful inter-ethnic associations really a cause of peace so much as its effect? [...] I would argue that none of [these approaches] really provides the key to understanding why communal violence takes place. This is because a focus on the town-level [...] leaves out the critical role of India's elected state governments in deciding whether to prevent violence or quickly stop it when it does break out. [...] The most convincing explanation for why some state governments prevent communal violence while others do not, it seems to me, is one that focuses on state-level electoral incentives. (Wilkinson 2007: 8ff)

These studies' merit is the rebuttal of overly blunt essentialism: communalist or religious violence does neither find its root in the general nature of communities or of religion, nor in the nature of any specific community or religion, be it Hindu or Muslim, Hinduism or Islam. This point is always worth reiterating. Nevertheless, Wilkinson's summary also reveals that the quest for an optimal set of explanatory variables external to religion never ends: it can only explain violence to a certain extent. This extent is important, but does not cover all factors.

Consequently, more and more scholars develop constructivist arguments, which take religion far more seriously. These arguments complement what instrumentalism lacks 'not so much [in] reasonably well-grounded explanations of political change, but [in] a more sustained regard for the normative prescriptions of a religious and political tradition' (Shaikh 1992: 4). Constructivists argue in particular that a religious

tradition must *a priori* provide an adequate pool of symbols if the instrumentalization of these symbols is to succeed, and the semantic of instrumentalist politicians, when rooted in identities, over time acquires a quasi-primordial stability and thus effectively frames political agency in turn: a vicious circle of identity politics, in which religion is not only being exploited, but also complicit in deeper ways.

Although I look at peace activism and not at communal violence *per se*, I, too, take religion more seriously. In contrast to most instrumentalists, I analyse genuine religious beliefs as well as psychological correlates of religious belonging. Yet in contrast to old-school primordialists, I emphasize the diversity of identities, their reproduction and their transformation, simultaneously exploring structural persistence and dynamic change in a constructivist perspective. Indeed, if there is one key lesson to be learned from the activists presented in this book, it is that we should strive to hold open the spaces of liberty for individual agency and processes of sometimes surprising change. For many activists, religion has a role to play in these processes, but for some it decisively does not; our prejudices about religion in conflict should not prevent us from seeing both possibilities, and especially not from appreciating the gross ambivalences and subtle ambiguities within and between them. Before I turn to such tales of individual agency and instances of creative change, the next two sections discuss how the 'peace community' in Gujarat strategically debated its interventions, and which institutional form their work took.

Peacebuilding

While many politicians and journalists blamed Muslims for the riots, and academics by and large tried to find instrumental explanations for them, sizeable stretches of Gujarati civil society reacted with reluctance or even ignorance, including—in the Mahatma's homeland—quite many Gandhian organizations (compellingly analyzed by Ghassem-Fachandi 2012, who explored, in great detail, the nexus between vegetarianism, other religious tropes of neo-Hinduism, and a 'pogrom at the deep end of non-violence'—the original title of his work). Still, a number of organizations,

networks and professionals joined hands to form an undoubtedly small yet impressively striving 'peace community'. Peacebuilding was a new activity to most of them; Gagan Sethi of Jan Vikas, the non-governmental organization (NGO) umbrella I was most closely associated with during my fieldwork, for instance 'comments that the NGOs were "taken off guard by the extent of communal violence in 2002" and very quickly realized the need for a long-term strategy' (reported by Powers 2009: 157; see also his epilogue to this book). While the motivations and experiences of individual activists inside these organizations make up the main content of this study and are explored in much depth later on, this section therefore introduces the 'peace community' itself. How did this minority in civil society choose to react to the violence?

Again, these questions have been discussed by others in more detail: Oommen (2008), Powers (2009) and Gupta (2011), for instance, have published monographs on the 'peace community'; further studies include those of R. Robinson (2005), Ganguly et al. (2006), Lobo and Das (2006), Jasani (2008), Mander (2009) and Nampoothiri and Sethi (2012). During my own fieldwork, I by and large spoke with the same people in the same organizations as these authors did—there are not many more. In contrast to their work, however, which stressed the uniting goals of all these organizations, the following pages focus on the differences among them (an aspect to which only Gupta 2011 pays close attention).

Two fault lines in particular emerged from my conversations in NGO offices and relief colonies: a tension between those working *in* conflict vs those working *on* conflict—and different opinions about the role of religion in both riots and peacebuilding. While neither difference plays out as a straightforward either/or—many organizations, for example, run several programmes simultaneously and work both in and on conflict—, these differences are worth keeping in mind as a backdrop to the systematic typology of 'being Muslim and working for peace' presented later on in this book.

Nearly all organizations I spoke with joined shared action platforms to coordinate immediate relief efforts post-2002: in the direct aftermath of riots, cultural and ideological differences between different organizations

gave way to the pressing needs of shelter, food and safety. While 'the single greatest contribution to relief and rehabilitation in Gujarat came from Islamic FBOs [faith-based organizations]' (Gupta 2011: 47), for instance, most of these had some links to secular networks like the Citizen's Initiative (Oommen 2008) and other umbrella organizations. The 'peace community' attended to relief and rehabilitation in a joint effort, and it would be futile to play out FBOs' relief work against the NGO advocacy often accompanying it.

However, once a first hue of normalcy—or at least an everyday routine in the camps—was restored, these initial links across the spectre of organizations began to falter. When I did my fieldwork in 2008, most activists were still providing victims with long-term rehabilitation measures and legal counsel, but others began to promote dialogue, to treat psychological trauma or to raise awareness about the complexities of religion among friends and family. Some FBOs also began to oscillate between 'spiritual reconstruction' and missionary work, while most secular organizations did venture further into advocacy and strategic political interventions. The initial unity in diversity among them soon gave way to heightened tensions.

These tensions culminated in heated debates about which kind of activity should count as legitimate peace activism in the first place, and I was witness to several of these debates during my own fieldwork. The issue is further complicated by the multitude of Hindi/Urdu/Gujarati terms for 'peace' (the following translations stem from the Oxford Hindi-English dictionary, McGregor 1993). For some of my informants, peace was *shanti*, meaning '1) calmness, quiet; stillness; peace (of mood); 2) rest, repose; 3) peace (between factions, powers)'. The term bears a Sanskrit connotation of cosmic balance and harmony. Others strove for *sukun*, that is, 'quiet, rest and peace'—understood in a rather more personal sense than cosmic *shanti*; the word originally stems from Arabic. Again others worked for *aman*, meaning '1) security, safety; 2) assurance of safety; quarter, mercy'—an understanding of peace restricted to absence of violence; the word again stems from Arabic and is the one I myself used most frequently during fieldwork, since it seemed least charged. Finally, there were those who chose to speak of *nyay*, a

colourful term meaning '1) right or fitting manner, or method; 2) justice; 3) law; entitlement, right; 4) just or proper act, or judgement; 5) adjudication, decision (in a case); 6) the *Nyaya* system; logic; 7) demonstration, fitting illustration (of a case)'—justice understood in an encompassing sense not limited to lawfulness.

Many activists—both from FBOs and from NGOs—were strongly opposed to interventions which strive for peace in the sense of *shanti* (cosmic balance) at the expense of peace as *nyay* (lived, real justice). This is not least expressed in the complaint by Hakim quoted in the first section of this chapter, namely that 'we have no food in the relief camps [yet] the NGOs parade in to impart an understanding of peace'. To many Muslim activists in particular, this approach also seems problematic for it is most frequently found among expressly Hindu (i.e., Gandhian) organizations, which easily smacks of ill-suited denial of the depth of religio-political abyss on their part (Mander 2009: 21). In fact, Gupta (2011, Chapter 4) even titled his whole monograph on the Gujarati peace community, *Justice Before Reconciliation*—in that order—and extensively discusses the controversy.

While I share some of these criticisms, however, analytical considerations compelled me to myself use a deliberately broad approach to 'peace activism'. Throughout my research, I consciously treated the term as an empty signifier to be filled empirically by those who categorized themselves as peace activists: 'peace' is what people tell me it is. This perspective allows for all activities from relief and rehabilitation, through 'harmony' towards retributive justice. It not least reflects that, 'while justice must always be worth striving for, for ordinary people the resumption of life in the everyday demands compromise and negotiations of a far more complex and nuanced kind' (R. Robinson 2005: 217). While such terminological openness was a strategic decision for methodological reasons, I nonetheless got the impression that most initiatives indeed were productive for peace from a professional point of view—if in obviously different ways. I think this is important to emphasize in light of the ardent strategic debates one sometimes sees among activists themselves.

To bring some order to these debates, a basic distinction in peace and conflict studies could prove useful: that between work *in* conflict

and work *on* conflict. The former peacebuilding strategy acknowledges the existence of conflict and factors the same in when designing programmes—but avoids to take the issue head on, preferring to work on surrounding factors. The latter strategy in turn makes conflict, its precursors, and its aftermath the key target of intervention.

Most of those I spoke to in 2008 based their interventions in what peace researchers call a 'contact hypothesis': NGOs in particular tried to engage people from different communities in cross-cutting issues other than peacebuilding, communal relations or questions of religion. In other words: they chose to work mostly *in* conflict, not explicitly *on* conflict. This emphasis is for instance tangible in a leaflet printed by the long established and avowedly 'secular' NGO Sanchetana. They describe their strategy for conflict resolution as follows:

> [We] identify the common problems of the common poor people, work with them to create awareness about the commonality of their problems. This could lead to a possibility of forming organizations of people from various religions to address the issues afflicting them. The bondage thus created can be strengthened by jointly planning action programs. This breaks the alienation and sense of separateness. [...] Their identity of being religious persons can be broadened to various identities [...] The [broader] aim was to prepare a cadre of Secular Muslim Youths.

It is Sanchetana's strong belief that, in the words of a participant in one of their workshops, Muslims 'have sharpened our identity of being Muslims little too much', have paid too much attention and attached too much emotional importance to their in-group, and to their faith. Sanchetana as well as other NGOs with a similar approach argued that religion had no role in the riots anyway, that it has merely been instrumentalized by politicians in 2002. Consequently, it would be completely wrong to further emphasize religious identity or to start interfaith dialogues. Instead, they intended to weave a strong social fabric which can resist such instrumentalization of religion in future (a stance supported by many scholars of peace and conflict; on the importance of such civic associational networks see particularly Varshney 2002). Some of them might recognize the deeper religious aspects of conflict, but chose to ignore it for tactical reasons or because they felt ill-equipped to take on

religion and conflict directly; either way, an attempt to reconstruct everyday inter-communal relations was the key priority of most organizations.

Others, however, disagreed and argued with Engineer (1995: 284) that even if it is wrong to assume that 'religion is the main culprit and the whole fight is religious', 'this is the general perception—and in this context it is perception which matters, not reality' (again a stance supported by peace and conflict scholarship, too). These organizations thus decided to venture into explicit peacebuilding and began to work *on* conflict, even if that meant that they required extensive training themselves in a field completely new to them. This approach is exemplified in a brochure of the NGO Samerth, whose chairperson for instance very deliberately acquired a Master's degree in conflict resolution prior to working in post-2002 Gujarat:

> In the year 2005, Samerth initiated the process of networking with schools to conduct sessions with the children on peacebuilding using the peace education modules. [...] One of the staff comments: 'if children ingrain these values, change in their attitudes will definitely ensure peace and harmony.'

For Samerth, communal conflict itself is the focus of intervention, and the aim that an ethics of education might break alienation and the transference of hatred upon the next generation. Arguably, there could be space for either approach—for a general awareness among all civil society organizations in Gujarat that they are inevitably working *in* conflict, while some who feel competent move on to work *on* conflict, too. But instead of complementing each other, the tensions between advocates of either group often remained harsh.

Given my focus on religion, even my own research was immediately drawn into the debate; when for instance my assistant and I first visited the office of Sanchetana to speak with their chairman, he accused us of furthering a communal agenda by asking all these questions about religion, and especially by focusing on Muslims only. How could we not see that such a research agenda is the most counter productive thing one could imagine, further highlighting the Muslimness of Muslims?

He was not to remain the only one to question this choice. And indeed: a similar study about peace activists from all backgrounds—including

non-Muslims—would have contributed a more balanced perspective. Muslims are a minority in the 'peace community' (as they are in India at large), where most activists are Hindus, either as practicing believers or, more typically, as a religious, secularist or at times Marxist NGO workers with a Hindu family background (while still others are, of course, Christians, Parsis, or other non-Muslims). If I had focused on this majority of activists, I would undoubtedly have reflected the demographic structure of the 'peace community' more adequately.

However, 'balance' in this sense is quite honestly not what I strove for. In fact, I believe that much mischief is being done in the name of 'balance' in discussions of religio-political conflict in general and Hindu-Muslim relations in India in particular: violence is rarely balanced and neither is peace. Calls for balance thus easily amount to taking sides with injustice, or—in this case—, at least imply a devaluation of the Muslim victims' own agency after conflict. Yet my earlier comments on the uneven ethical responsibilities of victims and perpetrators notwithstanding, Heitmeyer is right in that, pragmatically speaking,

> the project of sustaining communal coexistence, although nominally espoused by a majority of [people], is one which inevitably falls much more heavily on the shoulders of [...] Muslims, given the wider political context in which ultimately it is their livelihoods, lives and well-being which remain most at stake. (Heitmeyer 2009: 118)

Rather than 'balance', the research presented in this book thus deliberately attempts to provide development practitioners and fellow scholars with arguments to challenge the very core of Hindu nationalism—a much distorted perception of Indian Muslims as 'violent' or at least 'suspect'. More importantly, however, I also want to challenge a second constricting and flawed perception of the victimized Muslim minority, a perception widely shared even among Muslims themselves. This is the view that Muslims in India are 'passive', 'disempowered' and 'lack leadership'. I hope the many examples incorporated in this book's typology demonstrate that it is very mistaken to think of anybody as being devoid of agency to such extent.

Part of why the idea of 'disempowerment' nonetheless remains so prominent is the fact that many observers restrict their understanding of civil society to typical NGO-type organizations, and ignore other institutional shapes of Muslim political activism—in particular the work of faith-based Islamic charities. After looking at the diversity of peacebuilding strategies, the last section of this introduction is thus devoted to the diversity of institutions in Gujarat's 'peace community'—and to the not always easy interaction between NGOs and FBOs.

Beyond NGOs

Confining the study of peacebuilding to NGOs would be a double mistake. Firstly, it was not NGOs but indeed faith-based Islamic charities that bore the brunt of relief efforts, which is rarely acknowledged (an exception being the work of Gupta 2011). Secondly, Oommen (2008: 194) and others have reported that many beneficiaries experienced the interventions of Sanchetana and similar secular organizations as ambivalent precisely because these organizations do not relate to (or even acknowledge) some of the deeper dynamics of religion and conflict. Looking only at the activities pursued in the usual secular-Marxist (or Gandhian, for that matter) 'NGO bubble' would thus arguably miss both a large junk of work that has been done—and ignore victims' self-expressed needs for spiritual reconstruction. In catering to this need, a myriad of FBOs arguably fill an important void left by their secular counterparts—even if the answer they gave in reply to these needs did often not really satisfy victims either. Who precisely are these actors beyond the realm of classical NGOs?

A prominent example of such a faith-based organization within the Citizen's Initiative umbrella was, for instance, the Gujarat Sarvajanik Welfare Trust (GSWT), which is closely related to the Tablighi Jamaat Movement. The Tablighis in turn were 'one of the most important groups which had the resources to organize relief and rehabilitation work after the post-Godhra violence of 2002' (Chakrabarti 2010: 619). The GSWT's board of trustees is populated by *muftis*, *shaikhs* and *ulema*,

and their mission is clearly communicated in religious language. Their brochures state that

> the communal riots of 2002 in the state of Gujarat was a challenge to the trust of saving human lives and their rehabilitation. The trust accepted the challenge, struggled hard and with the mercy of Allah, achieve the goal.

The trust—and most similar FBOs—already began to open up to 'mainstream' civil society after the earthquake which hit the area in 2001. Post 2002, they gradually slipped into relief and peacebuilding work. As 'it is difficult for any Muslim organization, no matter how peaceful its goals, to obtain funding from abroad' (Powers 2009: 142; in reference to GSWT), Muslim charitable trusts often had to rely on funding secured 'by way of Zakat, Lillah, Fitra, Sadqa and likes' (as they write in their brochures), that is, through traditional forms of Muslim philanthropy. In addition, they often took funding from their own pockets and began their initiative out of personal consternation and genuine shock, without any explicit strategy, missionary or otherwise.

As a reaction to such traditional charitable endeavours and in search of access to hitherto ignored Muslim communities, some of the non-faith-based organizations—for example, those cooperating in the 'Gujarat Harmony Project' (Ahmed 2004), including Sanchetana—began to deepen their earthquake-induced collaboration with GSWT and similar trusts. The rationale behind these cooperation efforts was simple: the trust provided a reliable grass roots partner in a community so far neglected by 'mainstream' civil society; it served as an entry-ticket on whose trusted reputation among Muslims particularly in Ahmedabad the NGOs could build. The emerging co-operation also fit in with a renewed interest of development practitioners in religion and faith-based actors more broadly, induced both by global events such as 9/11 and by the apparent failure of 'culture-blind' approaches in the past (see Deneulin and Bano 2009).

However, the trust's strong roots among Muslims remained a perennial source of distrust to many: in the tense post-conflict setting of Ahmedabad, its good intentions were doubted, even by some among its NGO partners. In their perspective, the particular strength of Muslim

charities, which are often deeply embedded in Muslim communities and command more immediate trust there, had to be balanced against doubts and suspicions about the potentially negative impact of a re-traditionalizing mission which some of these Islamic charities also pursue.

Moreover, the 'Gujarat Harmony Project', and most other secular NGOs, were deeply committed to the 'contact hypothesis' of peacebuilding: 'a major criterion was that anything an organization proposed had to be intercommunal in the target population' (Powers 2009: 132). Most Muslim groups fell short by this standard. What some secular activists (often with a Hindu background) failed to realize, however, was that the goal of reaching out to a target population which cross-cuts communal boundaries was far harder to achieve for Muslim groups in the first place. Many FBOs tended to work only with Muslims not so much because they would not share the 'contact hypothesis' or because they were communalist in nature, but rather on account of being afraid to engage with Hindus after the riots. In turn, Hindus were reluctant to join Muslim initiatives. Demanding inter-communal contact is arguably easier for NGOs rooted in majority society than for activists who were often victimized themselves and struggling their way out of the passivity associated with victimhood. Hindu and secular initiatives did not always acknowledge this contextual distribution of power and trust—and neither does the academic literature on the horizontal integration of civil society pay enough attention to vertical hierarchies.

This is not to deny that some Muslim charities worked deliberately among Muslims only to be able to combine material with spiritual reconstruction. But while many secular NGOs therefore considered all their faith-based counterparts highly communalized, they at the same time refused to recognize non-practicing Muslims committed to peace activism as Muslims at all. It is not for this study to judge these decisions in any specific case, especially since my sampling was based on self-categorization only. But I want to highlight how boundaries are created by such classifications—the leadership from within Muslim communities is rejected as illegitimate because it is faith-based, and, if it is not faith-based, it is not recognized as legitimately Muslim. Lack of

leadership may then be the inevitable consequence of these presumptions rather than an empirical fact.

While I cannot definitely tell whether Muslims are more or less active for peace than other people based on my research design, my fieldwork suggests that at least in this specific context different groups in the development and peacebuilding community just thoroughly ignore each other. Muslim civil society and Muslims in civil society remain the blind spot in the Gujarati 'peace community' as much as of academic inquiry; I will return to this argument when introducing secular technocrats in Chapter 4—the kind of activist hit most by this fallacy.

One particularly problematic consequence of this blind spot is that many tend to perceive and represent Muslims as mere passive recipients, be it of FBO interventions or NGO programmes. This is of course not true: Muslims have a say in their identity like everybody else, too. Many Muslims portrayed in this study, for instance, were well able to resist, subvert or selectively appropriate discourse—be it the discourse of FBOs or the one put forward by 'mainstream' civil society. It surely would be dangerous and illiberal to put their agency *per se* under suspicion, just because they are born Muslim, and thus allegedly more influenced by Islamic beliefs and community leaders than by their own autonomous reasoning. In fact, it would be illiberal to deny them agency even *if* they base their actions on *hadith* (sayings and practices attributed to Prophet Mohammad) and guidance by others, as we shall see in Chapter 3 on faith-based actors. And it is useful to remember, in Mander's words, that

> many of those who campaigned for the secular democratic idea of India, such as Gandhi and Maulana Azad, were devout practitioners of their respective religious faiths. On the other hand, foremost among those who fought for states constructed along religious lines, Jinnah—father of the Pakistani nation—was not a practising Muslim for most of his life, and Savarkar, founder of militant Hindu nationalism which he called Hindutva, was an avowed atheist. (Mander 2009: 2)

Indeed: such mystified perceptions of Muslim agency as both inherently religious and controlled by external forces (thus not being agency in the true sense at all) bear a dangerous resemblance to Hindu nationalist discourse. In his comprehensive work on *Hindutva*, Sharma (2006: 3)

argues that dialogue is necessary and possible to combat 'fascist' ideology. Unless its core is questioned in public discourse, sustainable peace will not be achieved. 'This suggestion of a conversation might sound politically naive and impractical,' he argues, 'yet, without undertaking a journey to the antagonistic "other", there is little hope'. The particular antagonistic 'other' meant here—, that is, the prototypical proponent of *Hindutva*—is driven by a monolithic cliché of 'being Muslim' and by an image of Islam as alien, violent (nowadays: terrorist) and dangerous. Indeed, Muslims' alleged violence—and their alleged incapability to choose for themselves how they wish to act—is often the prime justification for the whole project of 'martial' Hinduism as such, undertaken as a kind of pre-emptive 'self-defence'. Of course, this argument is circular at best; in the words of Simpson:

> By isolating Muslims from economic resources and political representation, the organizations of Hindu nationalism enliven their own foundational myths, which state that the Hindu majority is in need of protection from the troublesome, isolationist and secretive Muslim minority. (Simpson 2006: 331)

However, I fear that well-meaning civil society activists unintentionally are in the process of tapping into the same fallacy by imagining a 'Muslim community', distinct from their own circles, 'isolationist and secretive', 'out there' and in dire need of leadership. Surely, theirs is a vision of reaching out and supporting this imagined community rather than defeating it, yet they still miss the fact that Muslim activists are not just 'out there', but actually exist amidst themselves. They reinforce boundaries, even if they do so in order to bridge them later on.

This study thus not only engages with Muslims beyond the stereotypes of violent terrorists that predominate in current public discourse, but also beyond the stereotype of Muslims as backward, deeply religious, and devoid of agency found in many academic and NGO portrayals. Moreover, my research lively demonstrates that 'faith-based actors' can very well be found beyond the realm of Islamic charities; that 'secular technocrats' sometimes work for explicitly Muslim organizations; and that 'doubting professionals' and 'emancipating women' spread across the whole range of organizations and approaches. Neither institutional

affiliation nor preferred peacebuilding approach necessarily imply a certain way of 'being Muslim and working for peace' in terms of the typology put forth in this book.

The next chapter therefore makes a series of epistemological and normative arguments for why individuals can and should matter (that their personal motivations don't overlap with institutional setups is an additional one, taken up again in the conclusion). In Chapters 3–6, I then present the empirical core of my research: an empirical typology of 'being Muslim and working for peace', comprising of faith-based actors, secular technocrats, emancipating women and doubting professionals. All of them present their agency differently, and link activism to beliefs and belonging in different ways. The typology therefore illuminates an often overlooked diversity of Muslim civil society and Muslims in civil society 10 years after the riots of 2002. It challenges popular notions of what it means to be a politically active Muslim in India and furthers theoretical debates about the ambivalence of the sacred by reconstructing the same as a personal dynamic. My conclusion finally sums up these wider implications and suggests both a clear differentiation between ambivalence and ambiguity—and more 'strategic individualism' in Indian sociology of religion.

2

Why Individuals Matter

> All the world's a stage, or—more precisely, if less graciously put—the crystallization of rules into roles is the basic fact of society and thus of social science. (Dahrendorf 1973: v)

For this book, I spoke with many people, but primarily with 21 individuals, whose stories I collected in many hours of conversation, and whom I asked to fill psychometric questionnaires. How can these few individuals matter, and why should they? These two questions need not inspire a long, detailed and probably boring methodological detour, but they need to be addressed at least briefly. This chapter thus provides a crisp epistemological interlude before turning to the empirical core of my study.

Social scientists generally agree that most people do not act at random; behaviour follows certain rules and statistical regularities, which on the level of an individual tend to further condense into habits and assumed or prescribed roles. The insight that social life is patterned might indeed be the reason why social sciences evolved in the first place, and Dahrendorf's concise summary of this—quoted above—was a key compass for my own research, too:

> Man's behaviour in this world of men is not random. It follows certain rules which, while they are like everything human, historical and thus subject to change, acquire a life of their own. [...] The official behind the counter and the citizen before it are in a sense not unique personalities, but *personae*, masks, they are playing parts,

> roles. All the world's a stage, or—more precisely, if less graciously put—the crystallization of rules into roles is the basic fact of society and thus of social science. (Dahrendorf 1973: v)

For me, Dahrendorf's striking analysis has two important if less obvious twists, however: a normative one, and an epistemological one that flows from it. I will deal with either in turn.

The first, normative, twist is that I believe it to be a researcher's prime duty to unpack roles and discover who rules in order to understand social life. This discovery is only possible if one takes seriously the persons behind the *personae* and deconstructs the dynamics through which the former 'crystallize' into the latter. The normative reason for this return to individual persons is a concern for freedom: the freedom of an individual to act, to make choices and value judgments, to interpret one's life vis-à-vis others on one's own terms and to negotiate structural restraints in creative ways (see Sen 1985).

Normative concern for individual freedom need not imply that only individuals would exist in this world (rules and roles do too, for instance), or that we can understand social life only through individuals. Such 'ontological' or 'methodological' individualism would be too narrow to adequately grasp the complexity of our existence. But in the domain of ethics, being narrow is deliberate: the essence of having norms is a decision to exclude certain possibilities at the expense of others. In this sense, 'ethical' individualism claims that it is the individuals, their freedom and well-being which we should care about most—even though individuals might neither be all there are nor all we can understand (Robeyns 2008). We might also choose to care for relationships and wider groups—but really only by extension of the fact that most individuals do value these larger entities. Unlike persons, who are bearers of rights and moral responsibilities in their own right, groups can only be assigned ethical currency on a second level.

It is thus unfortunate that a quite extensive and popular body of academic literature, in particular in the political sciences, discusses questions of identity, and of the rights and responsibilities which come with it, in groupist terms (Brubaker 2004). Frequently, religion in particular

is treated that way, and religious groups—rather than religious people—are presumed to be the carriers of identity. I believe this approach to be seriously flawed not just normatively, but also epistemologically—for a simple reason: identity 'is a process—identification—not a "thing". It is not something that one can have, or not; it is something that one does' (Jenkins 2008: 5). And something that is done, embodied and invested with meaning is necessarily done, embodied and invested with meaning by individuals. It is people that act in this world, not groups. Together with Turina (2007: 164), I therefore contend that 'if we really aim at studying the influence of religion on society at large, I think we should look for it in the field of human action, where belief and practice, subjective reasons and objective behaviour meet each other'. Only on the personal micro-level can one highlight the diverse conditions and consequences of identity formation without denying that actors themselves experience their being and belonging as essentialist forces. Only on the micro-level can one therefore truly appreciate the diversity that automatically flows from individual freedom.

Aggregation and homogenization are therefore only appropriate analytical strategies in case several individuals are *empirically* found to believe, belong and behave more similar than others. Ethical individualism mandates at least some degree of methodological individualism, and to take personal diversity seriously requires more than a blanket acknowledgment in the preface. Individuals should figure prominently right at the core of one's research design. Indeed: to assume groups as a conceptual default—rather than treating them as a social phenomenon to be explained—would end up reinforcing roles without unearthing the rules behind them. Only 'when one examines the private self, one encounters the inner voice, which tells how that particular person has tried to mediate his or her relationship with society. Here we find tales of individuation, stories that describe the individual's struggles to take charge of the relationship between society and self' (Mines 1994: 17). If one empirically finds these 'tales of individuation' to be similar among several people, one found how rules form roles—but this requires looking at individuals first.

Furthermore, Dahrendorf quite deliberately speaks of rules and roles in the plural, not in the singular. To me, this hints at a significant advantage of typologizing over generalizing methodologies if we are to take individual lives seriously; this is the second, epistemological twist in his statement. Probabilistic generalizations would not end up delivering 'information about individuals but about groups of individuals, and the information generated speaks not to generalizable knowledge about individuals but rather to probabilistic statements about aggregates' (Hammack 2008: 240). Typologizing methods, in turn, 'retain a clear commitment to the individual as a meaningful unit of analysis' (ibid.) while not forfeiting social science's quest for pattern. Yet rather than aiming for aggregate abstraction, typologies embrace the diversity of pattern in the plural.

With the empirical typology that follows, I therefore aim to unravel the various ways in which individual Muslims' religious identities impact on their political agency as peace activists, and by which rules their religious identities are in turn transformed through agency. While some recent literature on my subject similarly attempts to take personal and individual diversity seriously (for Gujarat, I think again primarily of R. Robinson 2005), this study introduces further methodological rigidity by combining a deliberate exploration of personal diversity with a systematic and statistically aided effort to typologize the same. Only to the extent I found close similarities among some activists, and simultaneous dissimilarities between these and others, I clubbed them together as an empirical type.

This was possible for the four groups of informants represented in the next four chapters; at best, this study thus also stands as an example of what could be gained by a more rigorous approach to individual diversity. This need not take the concrete methodical form chosen here, but should emulate its underlying logic of enquiry. It is thus for illustration, and not to claim exemplarity, that the remaining few pages of this chapter briefly summarize the methodology I used for this study (a more detailed explanation of the statistical aspects, original interview guidelines and the like can be found in the online supplement to this book at http://www.sagepub.in/susewindOS.pdf).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the biographies of 21 Muslim men and women in Gujarat constitute the empirical basis for this book. I tried to understand them through both narrative and structured interviews and through psychometric questionnaires gathered in Ahmedabad and Halol in spring 2008. Each instrument emphasized one particular aspect of my overall research question: structured interviews targeted beliefs and practices, psychometric scales captured one's sense of belonging and group identification, while the narrative interview primarily elicited how both beliefs and belonging impact political agency. My study was thus deliberately *not* an ethnography: I was not so much interested in observing what my interlocutors did or how they did it, but in the reasons they themselves give for what they do, and in the meanings they attach to their activism—believing that 'a person's identity is not to be found in his or her behaviour, nor even in the reaction of other people, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going' (Gollnick 2005: 105).

In a first interview section, I therefore asked all my 21 interviewees to tell me the story of their initial involvement in peace work as well as an exemplary success story in order to get a better idea about their understanding of 'peace activism'. After roughly half an hour, I changed the mode of conversation from narrative to more structured interviewing in order to learn about their religious beliefs and practices. Here, I tried to explore what interviewees think about and experience in several areas related to identity formation: family life and biographical background, beliefs and spiritual practices and personal opinions about the role of Islam in society. When the interview was finished, I finally asked my interlocutors to fill in a questionnaire with four psychometric instruments. The first was the Giessen Test (Beckmann, Brähler and Richter 1991), which assesses a person's unconscious attitudes towards groups in general and had already been applied in Kakar's (1996) study of communalist rioters. The second instrument asked activists to rank various alternative self-categorizations, reflecting the fact that religion is only one among several aspects of being Muslim. The third instrument tried to assess the *intensity* of identification with the religious in-group; following the distinction by Jackson and Smith (1999), four items covered

attraction to the in-group, two items the perception of the inter-group context and three items depersonalization tendencies and interdependency beliefs. I finally included the Inventory for the Measurement of Tolerance towards Ambiguity (Reis 1996, henceforth, Inventory to Measure Ambiguity).

Other than in generalizing research designs, typologizing enquiry requires a purposeful sampling directed towards as broad a variance as possible in the dimensions later used for cluster analysis—irrespective of how this variance might be distributed among a larger population. While I closely cooperated with the youth movement Yuv Shakti and its umbrella organization Jan Vikas during fieldwork, and depended on them for most of my initial contacts, I thus tried to snowball from different starting points; my goal was to find as diverse combinations of religious beliefs, group belonging and political agency as possible. Generalizations beyond the typology presented here are neither intended nor methodological sound and it therefore remains unknown if this typology indeed covers the broadest variety possible, but the demographic breakdown at least showed the absence of gross sampling biases or blatant omissions. I found a rather diverse set of actors—which is a good precondition for meaningful typologizing analysis.

The process of discovering rules behind the roles captured in all this data in a next step required a specific logic of enquiry, which Peirce (1958) termed abduction; in this logic concepts such as 'identity' are neither the starting point nor the end result of enquiry, but a heuristic tool in the middle. Concepts as end results of enquiry occur in inductive theory development; concepts as the starting point in deductive theory testing. Yet my aim was neither to develop a new concept of religious identity through field research nor primarily to find out whether my *a priori* concept is 'confirmed' by empirical data. I much rather set out to investigate the interplay between religious identities and political agency through the notion of roles and rules—as a heuristic device in abductive logic. This strategy necessarily makes use of preconceived categories of analysis, which I therefore do not believe emerge miraculously out of data. For this study, the two main categories in question are roles (in the

form of religious identities) and rules (which govern the impact of political agency on these identities and vice versa).

Sadly, 'identity' is a much abused term, and in his seminal book, Brubaker (2004: 29)—whose approach I by and large followed at the time of fieldwork—boldly criticized that it 'saddles us with a blunt, flat, undifferentiated vocabulary'. As a remedy, he proposes to look at three distinct phenomena too often clubbed together under this heading: 'identification and categorization', 'self-understanding and social location' and 'commonality, connectedness, groupness'. The first and third of these dimensions can be combined, I contend, when analysing the biographic experience of one's own self-identification—since an emotional attachment requires a categorically specified group to attach oneself to and self-categorization without any emotional attachment is unlikely (though not impossible, as we will come to know in Chapter 4). For my study, I thus analysed dynamics both of belonging—consisting of 'categorization' and degrees of 'groupness'—and of religious beliefs—the cognitive 'self-understanding' of being Muslim, partly manifested in ritual practice—in order to abductively find out how these sub-dimensions of identity influence political activism—and vice versa.

As a result of purposefully sampling for maximum variety, these dynamics differed widely among my interviewees. Typologizing methods are thus the natural counterpart to the logic of purposeful, explorative sampling and to the abductive use of concepts such as 'identity' (in the same way, of course, generalizing methods would be the counterpart to the logic of random, representative sampling). To facilitate typology extraction, similarities and differences among interviewees had in a first step to be arranged along conceptual coding axes. One of the ways in which I prepared for this was to use the software 'ethno-ESA' (Heise 2007) to reveal the underlying logical causality in interviewees' narratives: activists presented their political autobiographies as a chain of causally linked events, 'telling a story of their being and development, and providing explanations as to how and why they have reached their present situation or identity' (Lieblich et al. 2008: 613). Unearthing this chain enabled statistically controlled comparisons of the motivations, restraints and contingencies of being a Muslim and working for peace,

while the respective narrative context was taken into account by combining salience statistics with more traditional hermeneutic strategies.

A heuristic framework developed by Lieblich et al. (2008: 613f) finally provided several meta-concepts according to which I coded my data. In their model, one's own agency is first contrasted with 'structure' and 'serendipity', keeping in mind that both are as much barriers to agency as they are a precondition for it. On a second level, this agency itself can then either be used to enhance one's own position (a strategy unfortunately again termed 'agency' by Lieblich et al. 2008) or the position of someone else ('communion'). In order to transform my data into an empirical typology, all literal answers, grammatical, semantic and pragmatic observations as well as the statistical measures of the software-supported event structure analyses were arranged around these four meta-concepts; psychometric indicators were calculated according to test manuals and clustered into categorical tags.

While the overall goal of my design so far was to generate as much variance as possible, by means of purposeful sampling and by employing methodical tools as diverse as narrative interviews and psychometric scales, analysed with statistical as well as hermeneutic strategies, this focus on variety already started to shift with aggregation around coding axes and clustering of psychometric scales. These strategies reduced complex narratives to salience patterns, summarized literal answers and clustered interval-scaled psychological results into disjunctive blocks; the resulting catchwords and labels established a categorical index of systematic similarities and differences among my 21 interviewees.

For the typology extraction itself, interviewees that were as similar as possible to each other in a maximum of categories while simultaneously in greatest possible contrast to other interviewees were grouped together by applying a fuzzy clustering algorithm on an improved Gower dissimilarity matrix of the categorical index (Gower 1971). With this algorithm, some categories began to matter more than others: namely, categories whose dimensions were able to optimally grasp the heterogeneity of all cases became crucial, while others—in which most cases were either quite similar or *totally* diverse—became less relevant. In the end, this statistical process revealed four or five potential clusters of interviewees,

a preliminary grouping moulded into four final types after a second revision of the actual interview data.

Throughout the remaining chapters of this book, I will present these four characteristic ways of how political agency, group belonging and religious beliefs interact among the participants of my study by returning to less aggregated data: I will tell stories, discuss one or two psychometric indicators in between and then again give extensive voice to my interlocutors. This writing strategy serves one main purpose as far as my methodological argument is concerned: it helps to prove that the four types of activists found through a more rigorous analytical process are more than just statistical artefacts: they are indeed in themselves consistent and convincing ways of 'being Muslim and working for peace'. Yet they are also empirically distinct from each other in a statistically controlled manner. They therefore not only confirm that the ambivalence of the sacred warrants closer examination at the (inter-) personal microlevel, but also that it indeed pays out to do this with more epistemological rigour than usual. They hopefully not only demonstrate that individuals *should* matter—but also how they *can*.

3

Faith-based Actors

> This is a *fact* that anybody who [...] is a Muslim [is thus a peace activist]. So there is a very clear-cut definition, so you don't need any other story. (Uthman: Interview with Author)

'Natural' Peace Activism

Squatting on an earthen floor in an old house in Halol, a pious man—named Azim here—explained to me: 'there are two sources of strength in Islam; one is to be a tool for Allah's will—the other is the strength created by the people, by the community'. I had asked him how he manages his strenuous work for peace with little material support, and against considerable odds; this was his reply. Religion enables him to do his work, more precisely both his beliefs—the content of 'Allah's will'—and his feeling of belonging to 'the people, the community'. He further elaborated:

> I am sure that my religion is telling me to do it [peacebuilding work] like this. Because I have read the biography of Prophet Mohammad. His whole life was to help others through social work and social reform. [...] And it appeals to me to proceed on his path. (Azim: Interview with Author)

Given his reverence for Mohammad, it little surprises me that many of his statements in our conversations were drawn from the *hadith*, the

often down-to-earth sayings about the Prophet's life. He is not alone in this rhetorical preference—many faith-based actors spoke about their work in relation to the *hadith*; the saying most frequently quoted to me that way reminds Muslims of an alleged saying of Mohammad, who reminded his followers that 'he who sleeps on a full stomach whilst his neighbour goes hungry is not one of us' (Mesbahuddin 2010: 228).

Indeed, Azim's activism quite literally consisted of filling other peoples' stomachs. In our conversation, he revealed that in doing so, he is guided by a dogmatic interpretation of reality and experiences himself as part of a collective subject. This is the first way of 'being Muslim and working for peace', which I term faith-based in alliance with many recent studies. This way is also probably the most familiar one; if one mentally pictures a 'political Muslim' today, one would most likely think of people like Azim: a pious man, taking his inspiration from the Quran, and emphasizing his community over his own personality. That the experience of faith-based actors is far more complex, however, is one of the surprises in this chapter.

In the following sections, I will look at three typical characteristics of faith-based actors' way of 'being Muslim and working for peace'—and at the considerable difference among them, which could easily be overlooked if we were to concentrate on their rhetoric of unity. This is particularly addressed in this first section, which inquires why most faith-based actors do not like to narrate their lives. The next section dissects the competing orthodoxies hidden behind apparent uniformity, and contains a brief excursus into the Islamic history of India. The third section finally highlights the more problematic aspects of faith-based actors' politics while exonerating the majority of them from the suspicion and accusation of pursuing a fundamentalist agenda.

How did faith-based actors perceive their work and the context in which it takes place? Most of them talked about the riots as ultimately contingent interruptions of otherwise well-ordered lives, as a random 'disturbance', which 'happened' and had to be dealt with. While such '"normalizing discourses" [...can...] act as a coping mechanism through which members of a minority work to maintain material and emotional stability in a precarious and insecure environment' (Heitmeyer 2009: 105),

I think there is more to faith-based actors' discounting the riots as 'disturbances': they were clearly more interested in talking to me about dogma and morality than in telling a story of violence and peace. Or, for that matter, in telling any story at all, since faith-based actors' narrative interviews did, much to my surprise, not contain any narrative rhetoric! That these pious men told no stories is unexpected and allows a first glimpse on the specific ways in which they combine religious beliefs, psychological dynamics and political agency in their work for peace.

Although no interviewee was able to avoid narrative episodes completely given my insistence, faith-based actors felt notably uneasy about storytelling, thus, switching quickly to other rhetoric forms: they asked counter-questions ('what do *you* think?'), presented long analyses of the general political climate ('the media ...'), suggested improvements to my research approach ('be Edward Said!') or lectured on dogmatic obligations ('every Muslim has to work for peace'). Even in their grammatical constructions, they mostly resorted to the third person (impersonal speech), followed by first person plural (representative speech) and only rarely replaced by the first person singular (indicating personal agency): they prefer to clad their own story in non-narrative rhetoric.

Meanwhile, faith-based actors did not object to narrative style when quoting *hadith* or relating the life story of a beloved *pir* (Muslim saint). This specific avoidance of their *own* personal stories is even more surprising if one takes into account that many of these pious men locate their spiritual ancestry in one of India's many 'revivalist' Islamic movements (which I will introduce in more detail in the next section). While these movements differ in their theology, they by and large, share a powerful thrust from other-worldly to this-worldly, political and—most significantly—more individualistic religion: 'at the heart of this activism, and the energy which it created, was the placing of the responsibility of fashioning Islamic society on each individual Muslim' (F. Robinson 2007: 177). Deobandis and Barelvis, the two main strands of Indian revivalist Islam, for instance, 'emphasize hermeneutic interpretation, *taqlid* or the application of reason to law, and the right to assess whether the *hadis* [sic] are authentic or fabricated' (Mayaram 1997: 221), which enables them to work in the deliberative structures of a secular polity

(as extensively discussed by Ahmad 2009)—but also places the responsibility to discover true meanings on individual believers. But if individualism is the key characteristic of these movements, the non-narrative rhetoric of many faith-based actors which avoids subjectivity appears all the more astonishing.

How can we account for this unexpected avoidance of narrative style? Within the following passages, I develop two hypotheses as to why faith-based actors might feel uneasy about subjectivity and storytelling. On the one hand, a personal story might not appear appropriate to them to explain their involvement with peace work because activism is indeed not a personal choice but a hereditary occupation. On the other hand, non-narrative rhetoric might be preferred, since it hides dogmatically unpleasant contradictions between actual biography and moral ideals. While the first hypothesis can explain the rhetoric of some select faith-based actors, the latter hypothesis fits more broadly—and suggests that a giant dialectic might be at work within revivalist movements, which wraps increasing individualism in ever less personal terms.

Before I consider these hypotheses and confront them with my ethnographic material, it is necessary to flag one important deviation from the rule of non-narrative rhetoric, however. When I asked faith-based actors to tell me one story in which they successfully campaigned for peace (in order to gauge their respective understanding of peace activism beyond abstract and formal NGO terminology), they *were* keen to narrate. In fact, they even told stories of such impressive length and in such great detail that I frequently had to stop them to save precious battery life and disk space on my recording device. In these stories, they also allowed themselves to play a role, if only in humble terms—unlike in the rest of their interviews, where they really tried their best to avoid talking about themselves.

Most of these success stories gave examples of classic relief, rehabilitation and welfare work. While the typology presented in this book does not mirror the various ways of working *in* and *on* conflict perfectly (after all, the mismatch between institutional configurations and my typology of personal similarities and differences is one major argument in favour of serious micro-level exploration), a difference in emphasis

can be observed. Pervez, for instance, whom I met in a relief colony in Ahmedabad where he worked for an Islamic foundation, explains this emphasis on material reconstruction *in* conflict as follows:

> That time, the demand lay in the field. [...] Arrangements were necessary for those people who wanted to return to their villages. [...] Existing committees and charitable people were contacted. [...] They helped a lot. [...] We rehabilitated one hundred families here and also arranged for the construction of houses. (Pervez: Interview with Author)

Later in his story, Pervez elaborated in detail on the process of building these houses, explained the outline of the new neighbourhood and was almost lost in square metres, pavements and sewage provisions. Like him, many faith-based actors were absorbed in rehabilitation charity, even though 'it is important to note that none of the Jamaat organizations played any active role in the [initial] setting up of relief camps in the city' (Jasani 2008: 438)—they merely inherited and organized the camp after local grass root initiatives were exhausted.

However, faith-based actors did not restrict themselves to rehabilitation efforts. In many cases, relief projects were accompanied by education work, initiatives for intra- and interfaith dialogue and 'spiritual reconstruction'. Faith-based actors were often the 'first Muslim after 2002, who arranged meetings during every Id day, who invited people from each community, who invited their religious leaders to deliver speeches', as another interviewee told me about his peacebuilding activities. They endeavoured to involve friends and business colleagues (including Hindu colleagues) in their initiatives, often without an explicitly spiritual mission. One afternoon, for instance, I spoke with Dawud, a young aspiring 'businessmen' and typical dealer-wheeler who was trading in all available goods and services crossing his path (especially if they have to do with new media and information technology); after thinking about his answer for a while, he explained his personal success for peace as follows:

> Many of my friends did not think that we should want to go into this [peace] work. [But] slowly, they began with this work and today their mindset has changed. They

> now joined this work, many of them. And this is very much my intention: to bring friends into [NGO] and initiate a programme. (Dawud: Interview with Author)

Outside their success stories, however, faith-based actors avoided narrative rhetoric—especially when talking about their biography. In most cases, a simple argument overruled subjective narratives: Islam means peace; therefore, the only prerequisite for peace activism is to be born as Muslim; end of the story. This 'natural-born theory' of Muslim peace activism presented by faith-based actors shows once more that 'reified views of Islam and Muslims [...] have also emerged from within Islam itself, via Muslims' interpretations and representations of their own religion [and its relation to politics] as unitary, timeless, and unchanging' (Osella and Soares 2010: 2).

Yet surprisingly, this short equalization of 'being Muslim and working for peace' could in fact be an appropriate biographic summary for some activists, too—namely for those holding a traditional and often hereditary conflict-mediating and welfare-providing position for the local community. Azim, for instance, the respected village elder with whom this chapter began, started his story by tracing his lineage back to Prophet Mohammad himself, and then told me:

> Actually, the NGO which started, which I created, this was created after the riots. But in my life as it was before this, I was already going on this path. But they were only a minority, our caste was our limit. We are [caste/family name]. I have been the vice-president in this caste since the last 24 years. (Azim: Interview with Author)

So Azim's activism *de facto* derives from being born into a particular Muslim family. Once the course of worldly affairs happened to turn violent, and his caste association got involved in relief and rehabilitation efforts, Azim became a 'natural-born' peace activist. When he recounted the massive influx of refugees after 2002 in more detail, however, he left the 'natural-born theory' of a time-honoured family tradition and became quite pragmatic. Because his Muslimness did not suffice to cope with these exceptional circumstances, Azim explained in detail how he used his good education and how he mobilized a regional network of friends

and colleagues to professionalize his activities beyond traditional acts of charity. In fact, he even left his previous rather respectable job to dedicate all his energies to relief, rehabilitation and peacebuilding. Today, he is proud that he could transform his traditional caste association into a full-fledged NGO, which even attracts funding and requests for cooperation by state- and nation-wide umbrella initiatives. His organization subsequently played a key role in cooling tempers whenever communal tensions peaked around the riots' anniversaries post-2002. Azim remembered:

> We were 20–25 people; we attempted to control whatever youngsters lived in our own neighbourhood. [...] At that time, our young generation demanded revenge. [...] Meanwhile, [Hindu nationalist leaders] staged—for their own benefit—anniversary processions on the occasion of the Sabarmati train incident, every 21st at the bus stand in [locality]. And such leaders brought in people in trucks from the surrounding villages, which came in, shouting slogans [...] and singing songs full of phantasies about attacking Muslims. [...] They had only one topic: Muslims are like this, like that [long pause]. When the procession returned to the main road, [...] it passed the Muslim quarters. [...] So every month we really struggled hard to keep our young men under control. [...] Since if any single stone had been thrown, if any single car had been set on fire, riots would have broken out [again]. (Azim: Interview with Author)

Azim went on to explain the elaborate scheme of social control devised to keep the anger below surface and explained that in times of tension, only pragmatic arguments did convince hot-tempered young men to refrain from revenge; there was no time to reflect upon 'natural' Muslim peacefulness. Neither did his authority among the youth, apparently, rely on his traditional peace-keeping role; if at all, it was his seniority and life experience as a civil servant that made the youngsters honour his advice. Still, the mere fact that he was able to exert such authority—no matter its sources—ultimately ensured the survival of his hereditary responsibility and thus of the 'natural-born theory': in his final summary of our interview, Azim again equated Muslimness and peace activism.

However, not all faith-based actors held hereditary positions as mediators in and for their communities. If they did not, the equation of Muslimness and peace activism often served ideological purposes:

'uniformity of belief about "fundamental truths" [is] always a goal rather than an achievement [...], is the hollow dream of the traditionalist' (Appleby 2000: 57). The dealer-wheeler Dawud, for example, referred extensively to global politics to justify why 'being Muslim' would describe his work more adequately than 'working for peace':

> Actually nowadays [pause] this term is a wide scope term, peace activism, peace activist. Actually *everyone*, whether you ask this question to Bush, or Dick Cheney or Ariel Scharon, or whomsoever [...] they label themselves as peace activist. [...] Why should I label myself as peace activist? We are by birth peace activist, by birth. [...] 'Islam' word derives from Salam, means peace. The root, the root mean is there. So *every* Muslim is a peace activist. [...] Peace is an *inherent* quality in Muslims. Is inherent, is *ingrained* in them from the very first moment. [...] Actually, [pause] if I only label myself I label myself as a Muslim, not as a peace activist. [...] If there is a Muslim, actually, you don't even have to ask them! (Dawud: Interview with Author)

Another interviewee at last implied a 'natural-born theory' when he argued that a lack of peace stems from a lack of true Muslimness, a situation that he deeply regretted. Under tears, he confessed to me:

> But let me tell you also that today, Muslims have not remained Muslims. I regret this very much. Because these people have not yet obtained real education. If Muslims had become real Muslims, then we would have no fighting of wars in this world and it would not be necessary that Mr. Raphael writes a thesis on peace. Why do you have to research on peace?

Unlike hereditary activists, for whom peace activism by birth is an accurate biographic description, these two faith-based actors use the 'natural-born theory' to make a statement. The dogma does not simply replace subjective narratives, but it helps faith-based actors to interpret these narratives in non-narrative terms: it provides a specific semantic foil through which one's political agency is perceived and communicated.

This hypothesis is further backed by event structure analyses—one of the techniques that I employed to analyse narrative interviews, which reveal that dogmatic references occur far more frequently throughout the event structure of most narratives than pragmatic biographic episodes, but they nonetheless remain statistically less important to the narratives'

internal logic. This overall narrative logic instead hinges on the few pragmatic strands, while the dogma remains a semantic charade. In many narratives of faith-based actors, their frequent dogmatic digressions and the remaining scattered biographical quotes in fact formed parallel but in themselves consistent rhetorical sequences: faith-based actors tell two stories in one. Yet, while their theological lecture provides a lot of dogmatic terminology, close attention to narrative logic reveals that the pragmatic story of actual biographic experiences is responsible for the success of their activism.

In other words, the structural robustness of faith-based actors' stories relies on a subdued pragmatic event chain without which causality would collapse—while theological episodes appear as an omnipresent, but structurally dispensable ornamental feature. This gives the first clue as to why faith-based actors use such rhetoric and what its consequences might be.

Once I began to suspect such a dynamic, I tried to reflect upon it in my conversations themselves. When I spoke with Uthman, for instance, who presides over a traditional charitable society in Ahmedabad, which he got formally registered after the riots, he began to tell me a pragmatic chain of events—but quickly covered this contextual and specific story under theological generalities once I intervened:

> In the Indian context is, what we have to do is [that] we have to get our organization registered. So, we have, we got the thing registered, according as to the state laws. And accordingly we are running all our welfare activities. Including peace activities, so these organizations—*Interviewer: so you became involved in all that in this way?*—See, I just told you, [cross-speech] No, listen, this is like putting a question in other words: how are you a peace activist? So there is no such story. [...] this is a *fact* that anybody who strives for peace and he is a Muslim [pause] so there is a very clear-cut definition, so you don't need any other story. (Uthman: Interview with Author)

The interview with Uthman resembled over long stretches a game of cat and mouse: I tried hard to avoid his lengthy lectures, determined to extract information about what he actually does with his society; but as soon as he sensed that I am implicitly trying to question his 'natural-born

theory' of 'being Muslim and working for peace'—to which he subscribed vehemently right from the beginning—he began to lecture again.

This semantic choice of faith-based actors like Uthman serves, I argue, a very specific function: his dogmatic rationality helped him to reduce his imprecise, contingent and contextual biography (involving state-level legislation and the like) to reliable 'facts'. Such reification is especially well known from self-styled 'fundamentalists'. And indeed one such 'fundamentalist'—whom I shall call Nadir, and discuss at length in this chapter's last section—unsurprisingly had a rather strong preference for such dogmatic semantic. I asked whether he speaks a lot about religion in his family and whether his family members held divergent views on Islam. His reply began with a clear lecture:

> This is not a question of different opinions. Why? Because every Muslim believes in Allah. No different opinion over there. Everyone believes in Mohammad, no different opinion over there. We have to obey Allah's commandments, no different opinion over there. We have to follow the *ilm* [customary example] of Prophet Mohammad, no different opinion over there. We have to pray five times a day, no different, we are paying *zakat* [charity], we go to the *Hajj* [pilgrimage to Mecca]. Actually there is no different opinion regarding these all things. As far as I am concerned, as far as my family background is concerned, [...] and as far as my friends is concerned. (Nadir: Interview with Author)

However, even in his extreme case, an underlying pragmatic rationale revealed quite a different reality. Later in the interview, I enquired how and where he obtained his knowledge about Islam—in the family or, perhaps, from friends? This time his answer differed both in content and in rhetoric style and flux:

> Actually, I learn Islam from the missionary work. Jamaat Tablighi. [...] I learn Islam from them only [pause]. Because, actually [pause] in India [pause] Muslims are scattered. [...] So, from our upbringing [in village X], I didn't come, at all I did not get in touch with Islamic scholars, or Imams. Who can explain Islam, what Islam means? Actually, after that, I came in touch with these people. (Nadir: Interview with Author)

As long as dogmatic causality prevails, he denied a difference of opinion 'as far as I am concerned, as far as my family background is

concerned, [...] and as far as my friends is concerned'. When asked about the source of his knowledge, though, the pragmatic causality surfaces: his and similar stories talk about the importance of a peer group—and not a mysterious spiritual revelation that started their activism. Once his polished rhetoric falters, Nadir thus tells a story in which being a Muslim actually means becoming a Muslim—in his case under the influence of the Tablighi Jamaat (the world's largest Islamic movement and a formation discussed in more detail in the next section; see Sikand 2002, Metcalf 2006 and Ibrahim 2008).

Again, the avoidance of subjective narrative is, for Nadir, a tool to subdue dogmatically uncomfortable tensions—in his case not being raised in a 'truly Muslim' fashion. But unlike the reifying semantic suggests, pragmatic restraints introduce additional criteria to the concept of 'natural-born' peace activism—such as living in a city rather than in a village, that is, living in a place where Muslims are more than a scattered minority and getting in contact with people 'who can explain Islam'.

The following section demonstrates that a similar dialectic of overt commonality and subdued variance can also be found in the purely dogmatic assumptions named by faith-based actors as the main inspiration for their activism: semantic unity—the use of the same terms—glosses over considerable variations in meaning not only when rhetoric is contrasted with empirical observations but also when we remain wholly in the ideological domain.

Competing Orthodoxies

All faith-based actors tended to lecture on the Quran and *hadith*, and sketched a very orthodox image of their spiritual life. This seeming commonality nonetheless covers considerable variance in content. Faith-based actors are strongly influenced by a comprehensive moral framework, gain strength from common rituals and tend to avoid narratives in favour of a reified dogma. Yet the dogma they put forward varies according to their respective religio-political orientation. Similarly, all faith-based actors experience themselves as part of a collective

subject—but their respective understanding of 'community' is anything but consistent and included or excluded very different sections of Indian Muslims. This dialectic between rhetorically projected uniformity and stability on the one hand and actual dynamics and hidden variations on the other hand is the main way in which faith-based actors combine religious identity and political agency; orthodox Islamic tradition's 'very ambition for "coherence" [...] reflects and produces disjunctions within it' (Ahmad 2009: 24).

When asked which Islamic idea is dearest to them, faith-based actors unanimously focused on an ethical imperative to serve other people and to live an honest life (which for most explicitly excluded any compulsion in religion). This imperative was phrased in general terms and leaves space for diverse religio-political orientations. Most major schools of thought in Indian Islam can be found in their narratives: while one self-styled 'fundamentalist' Tablighi was already mentioned, other interviewees lean towards classic Deobandi or Barelvi thought or did not align with any revivalist movement at all. How did faith-based actors themselves describe and deal with this diversity, once I pointed to the obvious flaws and internal contradictions in this alleged unity? Azim, the pious man from Halol who lead the way into this chapter, revealed:

> Sunnis are divided in Sunnis and [Tablighi] Jamaatis. [Pause] So I am Jamaati. I had a friend with this different background, and I adopted his view. Then there are those, which take out their *tazia* [a replica of the shrine of Husain]; they are different. My father came from this tradition. I come from that. [...] But I do not align during controversies in the mosque. I arrange that I come late. When you come late, then you stand behind earlier people. If you cannot go to the front, then you have to stay in the back, right? So I remained in the background. (Azim: Interview with Author)

Azim was born into a rural Sunni caste, in which a syncretistic variety of the Shia festival Moharram is the religious key event of the year. Later, he came in contact with Tablighi missionaries and adopted their interpretation of Islam. Unlike the fundamentalist Tablighi quoted earlier, he does, however, not intend to base his political strategy on dogmatic differences ('I do not align'). If opinions already differ inside one movement,

they are even more varied across schools. Another interviewee, who represented a small trust in Ahmedabad, elaborated:

> You must be knowing the Deobandi Tablighi Jamaatis and the Sunni Barelvis. So I belong to the Barelvi community. And we have *many* differences; so to remove the doubts and certain exaggerations done by the Tablighis, we strive *hard*. And we try to establish a good image. [...] We used to organize a Sufi festival and did an *amalgamation* of the Hindu and Muslim [...]. And because [name of saint] was an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity, it was a massive success. [...]—*Interviewer: On which aspects may opinions differ on Islam?*—No, a big No. [...] The things are very *clear*. [...] We have a difference of opinion. But *not* a conflict.

Here, the dogmatic demand for unity is a mere afterthought to the 'many differences' between Barelvis and Deobandis. And differences they have indeed; I doubt that all faith-based actors would support an 'amalgamation of the Hindu and Muslim'. In a similar vein, Jasani (2008: 451) came 'across families where two brothers followed different doctrines and hence went to different places to offer prayers and followed two different styles of worship'—but had no issue sharing one roof. Gupta (2011) extensively discussed the many contradicting claims and competition between various faith-based organizations (FBOs) in Ahmedabad, too—which did not prevent them from collaborating in relief and rehabilitation. This again proves that empirical exploration beyond abstract labels is fruitful: the alignment with one particular organization, institution, movement or indeed family tells little about individual motivations, beliefs, practices and especially political strategies.

This importance of the individual can ultimately be traced back to the reaction of Indian Muslims to colonial rule. To comprehend just how broad a selection of beliefs and practices the category 'faith-based actor' actually contains, one must, therefore, look at the history of diversity in Indian Islam more comprehensively, and I will try to do so in a small excursus over the coming pages.

Ever since its arrival in the subcontinent through a complex mix of conquest, trade and peaceful mission (in itself a very diverse process!), Indian Islam built on various foundations, with 'law (that is *sharia*, but defined [...] rather broadly); *tasawwuf* (that is Sufi ideology and practice);

and language' being the most important ones (M. Alam 2008: 5). Each of these has its own quite complex history, too complex in fact to unfold here. But under colonial influences and challenged by Western science, this broad history of thought transformed towards the end of the nineteenth century and inspired several revivalist movements.

Impressed by British Christianity, and in a dynamic similar to the emergence of Hindu revivalism, these movements began to reformulate what it meant to be a Muslim in the subcontinent (for an overview see Reetz 2006). Probably most important among these revivalists were the alumni from Deoband (Metcalf 2004), those inspired by Ahmad Riza Khan Barelvi (Sanyal 1996), the Aligarh movement (Lelyveld 2003) and the fundamentalism of Maududi and his *Jamaat-e-Islami* (Ahmad 2009). All these revivalisms were based on earlier traditions in contradictory ways: the labels 'orthodox-reformist' (Deoband), 'traditionalist-syncretistic' (Barelvi), 'modernist-liberal' (Aligarh) and 'fundamentalist', frequently used by scholars, highlight the varying relative importance of religious doctrine in general (least in Aligarh) and the attitudes towards folk tradition in particular: 'if the Deobandis wanted to conserve Islam as they found it in the Hanafi law books, Barelwis wished to conserve it as they found it in nineteenth-century India' (F. Robinson 2007: 66). This difference fuels a rivalry between the Tablighi Jamaat and actors inspired by Barelvi's thoughts to this day—a rivalry demonstrated by the interview excerpts quoted above.

Many scholars, therefore, argue that the Tabligh and similar reformist or revivalist movements 'harden[...] inter-community differences, by crusading against composite, syncretistic religious and cultural traditions that bind Muslims with others among whom they live, and by stressing external markers of "Muslim identity" that sharply divide Muslims from others' (Sikand 2002: 312). However, this harsh description does not fit every individual member of the movement, as my research demonstrates: on the last few pages alone, we encountered both a divisively 'fundamentalist' and a rather tolerant 'laissez-faire' Tablighi.

In fact, while Deobandi scholars indeed focus on *sharia* rather than on *tasawwuf* in their doctrine, those emphasizing such legalism were often descendants of respected Sufi families. This arguably reflects openness

towards (even orthodox) reform inherent in Sufism, and may also be a sign of a special tolerance for ambiguities in Islam (see Bauer 2011 and my conclusion). Either way, the distinctions between seemingly peaceful, apolitical Sufism and horrendous political Islamism are not that straightforward, partly because the underlying contempt for politics is—in this generality—flawed.

Many have argued that the enormous complexity of revivalist movements is not accidental, but results directly from an underlying commonality in all of them: namely the powerful shift from other-worldly to this-worldly or political religion and the individualizing trend inherent therein. Rather than providing a straightforward path into fundamentalism—as often alleged—the struggle for a this-worldly agenda primarily led to an emphasis on personal learning and striving. At the end of the nineteenth century, being a Muslim in this world above all meant to improve one's own Islamic self, to study—and to transform society through such personal example. Although quite diverse in pedagogy and curricular content, Deobandis and Barelvis therefore ran—and still run—*madrassa*s to shape personal consciousness and, as the most pointed example, an influential university was founded in Aligarh in 1875 (for an in-depth analysis of Muslim educational initiatives in India, see Sikand 2005). And while it is true that 'the Tabligh movement has moved the dissemination of Islamic teachings away from the madrassa and into the community at large' (Jasani 2008: 437), Tablighis, too, emphasize personal spiritual development through education. In this chapter's introduction, I already quoted the one fundamentalist activist as saying that he *learned* Islam from the Tabligh, and F. Robinson sums up the discussion by writing:

> The period of British rule saw the emergence of new strands of identity among Indian Muslims. For many their religious identity became their prime identity. Muslim imagination expanded to embrace the lives and fate of Muslims elsewhere in the world; for some this became an all-absorbing concern. Increasingly, Muslim identity in public space acquired a feminine dimension. Moreover, individuals were beginning to emerge who wished to be treated as individuals; they rejected the demands made upon them by their 'community' and resisted all stereotyping from without. It should be clear that not all Muslims were affected by all of these

> processes, and some by none of them. In sum, the period of British rule saw a particular privileging of the religious dimension of Muslim identities, but at the same time it also saw other strands emerge which Muslims might choose to emphasize. (Robinson 2007: 141)

Given that the root of contemporary diversity in Indian Islam lies in colonial confrontation, it is little surprising that faith-based actors disagreed widely on one issue: how should contemporary Muslims react to processes of modernization and to modernity at large? While one of my interviewees held that 'with modernity, change is necessary; if you do not change then you should stick to your own home', another participant made it clear that 'we have no new version [of society]. We have not a revised version [...]; there is a set of laws which is just non-negotiable. So *this* is the Islamic society'. And a third argued that, 'if people would understand Islam correctly, then we would have had since the last 1400 years what we now call modern—but people don't understand'. Should Islam as a theology and/or way of life change in present times, is it eternally fixed or might it even be truly modern from the beginning but unrecognized to this day? It became obvious in my research that faith-based actors do not share a common interpretation.

Is it all diverse, complex, individualized then? Do faith-based actors only share an emphasis on belief, but no substantive beliefs *per se*? This would in turn be too quick a conclusion. There is one exception to the rule of diversity, one belief in which fundamentalists, Deobandis, Barelvis and followers of traditional Sufi orders unite dogmatically: in their specific assumptions about the afterlife. Most faith-based actors imagined the end of times in precise terms and emphasized that the looming accountability of Judgement Day should already transform their earthly lives. As many others have observed, 'the charismatic call for salvation of one's soul is the theme common to all sectarian movements. The invitation to join the congregation begins with a dramatic reminder of the life that awaits us beyond the present one' (Chakrabarti 2010: 599).

Importantly, however, faith-based actors maintained that eternity is not only looming large sometime in the future but also provides a precise model for socially beneficial behaviour today: 'they claim that to change one's moral and spiritual status one needs to change the world

around and vice versa' (Chakrabarti 2010: 599). For them, morally correct behaviour is thus not simply a demand of social reciprocity, nor merely a path to future salvation—as it is for other types of activists. They rather imported a detailed idea of good life from apocalyptic into contemporary times and strive to pre-enact an eternity-to-come. One of my interview partners excitedly explained:

> Ha, we have an *excellent* understanding of the afterlife. [...] See, there is only one creator. It is a final thing. [...] *One* administration is over there. If there are two administrations, what will happen?! [...] The same message is running throughout all the books. The *same* message. That there is a creator, we are the prophets, do what we say, if you want to succeed in this life and day after.

This quote metaphorically expresses that earthly life and afterlife could not be separated, because the rules for both root in the same belief—a belief in the oneness of God and strict Islamic monotheism. The same—and this is key—'*excellent* understanding' ensures success 'in this life *and* day after' (my emphasis). This is in fact almost down to the wording of classic Islamist theology; Islamists hold that 'to be a Muslim is to worship Allah alone not just in the metaphysical realm but also in the political realm because He is the master of both' (Ahmad 2009: 65).

In contrast, the vast majority of interviewees belonging to the three other types of activists expressed merely an unspecific hope for salvation, and agreed that the afterlife is essentially unknown: 'no-one ever returned from death' formulated one of them. Schäfer (2008: 74) explains the difference between these two kinds of afterlife-beliefs by terming the latter 'eschatology, and not apocalypticism. The focus lies on the relevance of today's behaviour for the future. Apocalypticism imagines future and declares its immediate relevance for the present' (my translation). Eschatology formulates a relatively open relation between ethical behaviour and future salvation, while apocalypticism provides a more hermetic interpretation: because the rules of the afterlife are well known (they are 'running throughout all the books'), salvation is guaranteed if and only if one lives accordingly and pre-enacts eternity in contemporary life. It is this conception of the afterlife that separates faith-based actors from other kinds of activists—as far as theology is concerned.

Arguably, faith-based actors' morality also acquires its striking level of detail from such apocalyptic certainties, and their eternal horizon might even explain the stability in their configuration of beliefs and belonging vis-à-vis political agency. According to their own representation, neither dimension of religious identity was seriously challenged by the 2002 riots. After all, how could such worldly events change 'eternity', eternal commandments and aspirations? As they see it, faith-based actors' beliefs determine their agency directly and with little reverse influence.

In order to sustain the energy necessary to pursue their task of not only returning peace to Gujarat, but pre-enacting an eternity-to-be, all faith-based actors draw strength from rituals, in particular from the daily prayer. All of them told me that they pray frequently, and that this practice deeply grounds their politics as well as their lives at large. Uthman, for instance, explained to me that the daily prayer not only bonds him to Allah, but also helps him to deal with emotions:

> Whenever I am standing for namaz, I stand in front of Allah and Allah looks upon me. [...] Sometimes I shed tears in namaz. I become emotional. Afterwards, I feel very good. Very at ease. [...] I am living my life with leisure and at ease. (Uthman: Interview with Author)

Notably, it was in the context of ritual that interviewees switched most often to the term *sukun* (personal ease) as a translation of 'peace activism'. Despite describing such personally stabilizing effects, faith-based actors also argue that the religious ritual has close and direct links to political agency—since both would share the same objective of bringing man closer to God. Finally, the ritual of *namaz*—with its close-knit rows of praying brethren—in their perception and experience inherently link beliefs to belonging, resulting in stronger in-group coherence and ultimately better (and more peaceful) social life:

> Muslims as a solidarity they express themselves on these days. Because of the mass gatherings, they are better able to express themselves. [...] Religion covers all aspects of life. And for us, if we are praying five times a day, and if we are governing a state, actually both are the same [...] for us. Here, five times a day, we are trying to improve ourselves. While governing a state, we are trying to improve [...] the whole society. [...] That has been sanctified by the religion also.

In order to 'improve society', faith-based actors generally prefer a traditional, charitable-patriarchal kind of activism as well—the last commonality I would like to mention. This is in turn particularly apparent in their psychometric profiles, which render distinctly low measures for tolerance towards irritations of role models (medium negative effect size compared to other interviewees) and towards new experiences (small negative effect size). Faith-based actors also express comparatively high social dominance (medium positive effect size, and the strongest overall in my dataset; more detailed statistical description of these and all other psychometric measures in this book can be found in the online supplement at http://www.sagepub.in/susewindOS.pdf). These psychometric indicators demonstrate that the influence of an unchangeable reified dogma serves faith-based actors as a powerful motivator to strive for leadership (with its aggregate of high dominance) while at the same time emphasizing eternal stability (low tolerance towards ambiguity in role models and new experiences).

Despite their strong dominance, however, faith-based actors feel attracted to their community to an extent that leads to higher levels of depersonalization than in many other interviewees' cases: the boundaries between individual and community become blurred. How can someone act strongly (with high dominance) when he is not identifiable in the first place (high depersonalization)? A look to the interview transcripts helps to clarify the relations between self, group and agency:

> *Interviewer: is that also your personal understanding?*—No, not my understanding—it's the understanding of every Muslim! [...] I am the part and parcel of the community. [...] See, our community lies on the foundations of the very religion. Without religion there is no community. [...] This division exists in the Western society. But not in the Muslim society. So there is no question about this or who will decide. The thing is if a community in consensus decides, this is one and the same thing when an individual decides!

This interviewee, who also expressed comparatively high depersonalization in his psychometric profile (almost one standard deviation above average compared to other interviewees), loses not so much his subjectivity but rather his individuality. High levels of depersonalization do not

diminish his ability to act—his being a subject. However, he experiences this ability to act as someone who is 'part and parcel of the community'. This evokes the observation by Mines (1994: 6f) that 'Indians [might] recognize individuality, but do not value individualism' and that individuality, subjectivity and personality can be combined in ways different from what Western understanding might suggest.

Indeed, in their psychometric profile, most faith-based actors appear as 'contextualized individuals' (Mines 1994: 21), which not least also means that the shift to this-worldly religion does evidently not only lead to an emphasis on each person. In doing so it also hides the same behind the experience of collective subjectivity. My earlier claim that dogmatic unity glosses over substantial individual differences therefore deserves a caveat: the dogmatic rhetoric found to layer personal narratives appears to be more than just an instrumental device to avoid uncomfortable ambiguities that they experience as hard-to-tolerate ambivalence. Groupness is not only semantic; it has its correlates in faith-based actors' psychodynamic and is substantively experienced.

However, even at this point, individuality re-appears on a deeper level. Although all faith-based actors tend to closely associate self and in-group—leading to depersonalization—a closer look reveals that they in fact mean very different people when they speak of 'community' or use the pronoun 'we' in corresponding grammatical constructions. Often, the term 'community' referred to the *umma*, the entirety of all Muslims—but at times 'community' also designated the population of a particular geographic area (irrespective of religion), a specific Muslim caste/*biradari*, or members of a religio-political movement.

When I asked interviewees to rank various identities available to them (being a man or a woman, being Muslim, being an Indian citizen, being a speaker of a certain language and belonging to a specific caste), their responses add even more complexity. Surprisingly, only one faith-based actor claimed that religion is highly important for his self-categorization, while all others deliberately refused to self-categorize and either assigned equal importance to all options or explicitly portrayed themselves as patriots.

This latter tendency has of course a specific context: Indian Muslims encounter deep-rooted mistrust about their national loyalty, in particular, when they act out of religious motivations—something I already touched on in relation to the institutional landscape. Faith-based actors might, therefore, emphasize their Indianness simply because they are under close observation. I am therefore inclined to interpret the surprising insignificance of religious self-categorization as a reaction to a challenging research instrument and not so much as a reflection of actual priorities. The way in which many of them creatively transformed this instrument confirms this: faith-based actors frequently wrote critical comments on the margins of their questionnaires or changed the wording or layout of the ranking.

Still, the way faith-based actors reacted to the identification ranking might also reflect the tendency to cover up substantial differences by putting an alleged uniformity forward: faith-based actors refused to rank various categorization options to the effect that all appear indistinguishable—and, importantly, all equate Muslimness.

One last psychological commonality was faith-based actors' uniform assessment of the intergroup context: they had a distinctly positive outlook on Hindu–Muslim relations (small positive effect size compared to other interviewees). This statistical finding is confirmed in many interview quotes, which also reveal the roots of such optimism: an instrumentalization hypothesis. Pervez, for example, told us that his view of Hindu communities remains positive post-2002, since the violence was merely related to 'politics':

> *Assistant: so did your view on the Hindu community change after 2002, or not, and how?*—No, it did not change, no. [...] This [was done by] political people for their own advantage [cross-speech] neither all Muslims nor all Hindus are bad [...] (Pervez: Interview with Author)

The tendency to proclaim a 'natural-born theory' (which closely links one's Muslimness to one's peace activism) on the one hand while professing to an instrumentalization hypothesis (which decisively separates religion and politics) on the other hand demonstrates once more the ability of faith-based actors to combine encompassing rhetoric with

actual pragmatism. It also demonstrates a peculiar 'culture of ambiguity' (Bauer 2011) that survives in Indian Islam, and even among those following reformist movements. These movements might ideologically be on a mission of disambiguation, but their very multiplicity and internal diversity might paradoxically signal a survival of this Indian and Islamic heritage.

Fundamentalism

The traceability of a culture of ambiguity even among faith-based actors should not lead us to overlook more problematic aspects of some of their activities, though. Far from tolerating ambiguity, some of them engaged in hardening and stiffening not only public discourse, but also laid huge demands on their own self, and of course tended to be relentless in their portrayal and moral judgements of others. These tendencies are particularly apparent in one case—that of Nadir, whom I already introduced before.

While many faith-based actors either did charitable work or tried to mobilize their friends and family for peace, Nadir took a different path: he presented his missionary work in the Tablighi Jamaat as the core element of his engagement for peace. To him, peacebuilding is not only a genuinely religious project in terms of motivation, but indeed overarchingly so: he wants to counter the moral laxity among Muslims, which he identified as the cause for a fateful punishment in 2002. The following quote illuminates his agenda:

> Islam is a religion of moral values. Moral values never change. [...] Actually [...] I hear a lot of people saying that Islam should be modernized. But how? What should be modernization [cross speech]? No [need to have] human rights anything. To, actually, actually the free sex. What do you think? Is it a moral view? It's a moral view to have free sex? Moral values?! Actually, it's a *chaos* civilization. It's an animal instinct. It's a carnal desire over there. It's a carnal lust desire over there, to have free sex. [Pause] So, what shall we do? [...] Actually we are over here as mentioned in the Quran: you are the best of the people, rescuer of the mankind. You are the *best* of the people, rescuer for the mankind! That's our work. (Nadir: Interview with Author)

The frequent word 'actually' reifies dogmatic speculation, to 'rescue mankind' from 'carnal desire' is clearly a strategy of social dominance, and the focus on sexuality appears familiar: all three elements are notable features of fundamentalism. Or aren't they? Unfortunately, scholars of different disciplines tend to label different concepts as fundamentalism and discuss either orthodox beliefs (read: teachings in certain Sunni law schools), scriptural understanding of religious texts (read: of the Quran), traditionalist moral demands (read: patriarchy in the Arab peninsula) or global terrorism.

In the Indian context, the semantic used is even less precise. A. S. Khan (2005: 29ff), for instance, writes that 'Islamic radicals' oppose secularism, modernism, ethnic nationalism, Sufism, traditionalism, all kind of political or economical elites and several groups of non-Muslims at the same time. Schäfer, in contrast, suggests a narrow and formal definition to facilitate precise analyses; he writes:

> Fundamentalist movements are movements which (1) set absolute religious convictions (i.e., any belief) and which (2) deduce from these convictions a strategy of social dominance that tries to subdue private and public life. Context (3) for such a strategy is the fundamental politicization of all spheres of life during modernization processes. (Schäfer 2008:18; my translation)

Following this definition, only those actors should be termed fundamentalist who treat beliefs as unquestionable *and* try to impose them on society. The definition remains intentionally formal and abstract to cover fundamentalists of several religious traditions. I will discuss the peculiarities of Islamic fundamentalism below, but it is worth staying with a more general discussion of the concept for a moment.

Setting anything absolute naturally implies a notion of superiority and thus a potential nucleus of conflict. But Schäfer rightly urges distinguishing those who assume such superiority in privatist seclusion from those who promote a political strategy of dominance. Only the latter should be deemed fundamentalists. They adopt a particularly radical approach to politics and construct a friend-enemy distinction, which, when unchecked by pragmatic restraints, easily leads to violent annihilation. These politics are what reveals that fundamentalists indeed act as

modern as their opponents (despite their traditionalist image). They do so not, as often emphasized, by using satellite phones and Facebook, but in a far more comprehensive way: by fundamentally politicizing all spheres of life. This is a key element of modern, functionally differentiated societies, in which 'the break with tradition occurs when societies attempt to take hold of the future by human intervention', that is, by politics (Ahmad 2009: 51).

Nadir fits this definition. He sticks to his religio-political dogma and does not resort to pragmatic causality the way other faith-based actors do: he fundamentally politicizes—and, given his idea of Islamic politics, by definition simultaneously 'religionizes'—all spheres of life, leaving no space for pragmatic arbitration.

Nadir shares with most Islamic fundamentalists not only a form of politics, however, but also a common theological argumentation. For South Asia, this argumentation is exemplified by the thought of one of the most influential theologians of political Islam on the subcontinent, the founder of the *Jamaat-e-Islami* Maulana Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi. In his seminal book *Towards Understanding Islam*, he writes:

> The most fundamental and the most important teaching [...] is faith in the Oneness of God. This is expressed in the primary Kalimah of Islam as "There is no deity but Allah" (La ilaha illallah). This beautiful phrase is the bedrock of Islam, its foundation and its essence. [...] The acceptance or denial of this phrase produces a world of difference between man and man. The believers in it become one single community and those who do not believe in it form an opposing group. [...] [The] real difference lies in the conscious acceptance of this doctrine and complete adherence to it in practical life. [...] Man became guilty of shirk [...] only because he turned away from the teachings of the Prophets and depended on his own faulty reasoning, false perceptions or biased interpretations. *Tawhid* dispels all the clouds of ignorance and illuminates the horizon with the light of reality. (Maududi 2004: 83f, 89)

Unsurprisingly, Nadir highly recommended this very book as a key reading for my research towards the end of our interview. Insisting on the oneness of God (*tawhid*) as the core of Islam is nothing spectacular, as is the emphasis on the Quran: since the time of the Caliphs, mainstream Islamic scholarship assumes that *tawhid* also includes God's word. Because the Quran is not only regarded as one of God's many

creations but part of his being, adding or removing something from it by way of autonomous reasoning becomes a highly problematic act. But this mainstream tradition does not denounce reason *per se*: there has always been an important tradition of interpretation and reinterpretation of Islamic principles in light of changing times.

In order to reconcile the tension between a scriptural understanding of the Quran and their emphasis on reason, many traditional scholars emphasized a never-ending circle of interpretation: suspected contradictions between reason and Quranic teachings should inspire the believer to take the application of reason a step further, potentially leading to the (re-)integration with the Quran, but never to a denunciation of the God-given gift of reason. Bauer (2011: 46, my translation) sees this tradition as a key tenet of Islam as a 'culture of ambiguity': traditional Islamic scholars 'presume that the unintelligible character of one or the other section of [the Quran] is inevitably a God-given property of this text, indeed God's ploy to lure men into permanently renewed interaction with the text, giving us the opportunity to consolidate our insights and prove the sharpness of our minds'.

Maududi, on the contrary, as well as his fundamentalist follower quoted above, categorically distinguishes 'the teachings of the Prophet' from 'faulty reasoning, false perceptions or biased interpretations' (cf. Ahmad 2009: 64f). In his exegesis, he leaves no space for ambiguity: he claims that the only objective interpretation of the Quran is his own (his journal was tellingly titled *Interpret of Quran*). Further thinking beyond this representation is deemed unnecessary or even blasphemous. What is required from 'true Muslims' is merely a meticulous act of memorization. This renders reason—a word Maududi still uses—to little more than a semantic guise.

Because more and more spheres of life become inaccessible to deliberation if the 'light of reality' putatively speaks for itself, this approach indeed leads to a radical 'world of difference' between those accepting 'reality' and those who do not when turned into a political strategy. Fundamentalists 'draw a line inside the Muslim world between what is Islamic and what is not. [...] The need to [...] define objectively what

Islam is—in short to "objectify" Islam—is a logical consequence' (Roy 2004: 22). Fundamentalism is a modern phenomenon in precisely this sense; it attempts acculturation to early non-reflexive Western modernity, hiding the contingency in the application of practical and political reason behind rationalist ideology.

This theoretical insight can be exemplified by Nadir's (and most fundamentalists') obsession with gender relations and sexuality. Using gender relations, fundamentalists re-enact an essentialist contrast between culture on the one hand, which subjugates the God-created world and is therefore considered immoral, and nature or a 'natural' system of familial honour, represented by the innocent female, on the other hand. However, their 'nature' is, of course, not natural but resembles more a useful reification of contingent reasoning. The same strategy to reify reason can be found in romantic Western responses to industrialization, which is yet another indication that fundamentalists are indeed part of processes of modernization.

That Nadir chose 'free sex' of all potential examples for flawed morality in the West and elsewhere is thus symptomatic. Women symbolize the unity and morality of the *umma* (community of Muslims), they have to be protected from the contemporary Western *jahilliya* (age of ignorance) by application of *sharia*, spread through *dawa* (mission) in a moral (and at times martial) *jihad*—a *jihad* that is thus clearly gendered.

The line between committed faith-based actors and fundamentalists is admittedly a thin one, but it exists. And most interviewees, including most faith-based actors, remain on the non-fundamentalist side. I did not discuss the issue of fundamentalism in this extensive manner, therefore, because it would be significant in my data; it is rather a significant theme in global discourse on Islam. Contrary to common wisdom, my data demonstrates that most pious peace activists are *not* fundamentalist, even if fundamentalism exists and is problematic. Similarly, Gupta wrote very clearly that

> contrary to popular impressions, the FBOs that I came across in Gujarat were not fomenting militancy or fundamentalism, but rather, greater tolerance between communities without abandoning the cause of justice or the urgency of rehabilitation. [...] Nowhere did I find any sign of religious intolerance or bigotry among

> them. This is probably because they realise how important the status of citizenship is for minorities to function in a Hindu-majority country, especially in moments of ethnic madness. (Gupta 2011: 93)

To sum this chapter up, faith-based actors' beliefs on the one hand differ considerably and reflect the whole breadth of religio-political tradition in the revivalist branches of Indian Islam—be it Deobandi, Barelvi or, in one single case, fundamentalist thought. On the other hand, all faith-based actors share a strong moral motivation, backed by apocalypticism and stabilized in orthopraxis. Behind their 'natural-born theory', a dogmatic hierarchy is at work—again a dialectic of commonality and diversity. When exploring their way of 'being Muslim and working for peace', it also strikes me that the direction of causality unilaterally runs from identity to agency with little reverse influence—while this relationship is more complex for many other interviewees, as the next chapter will tell. Only the psychological test results leave an ambivalent impression: high groupness is paired with strong dominance, while various in-groups were hidden behind this experience of collective subjectivity.

4

Secular Technocrats

> Actually, I am not a religious person. I have no idea what faith is all about. I say that frankly. I read the Quran. [...] I also went to a *madrassa* [...] but made so much hubbub there that they threw me out. (Hanif: Interview with Author)

Getting Things Done

This chapter introduces a group of interviewees who are in many ways the opposite of faith-based actors and their positive attitude towards religion. For these 'secular technocrats', neither religious beliefs nor dynamics of belonging play any role in their activism; related questions were quickly dealt with and the only overt commonality in their psychometric questionnaires was a comparatively low identification with other Muslims (medium negative effect size compared to other interviewees). Yet they were born as Muslims and categorize themselves as such, even though this, too, should not be overrated in their opinion: 'oh yes, we are also Muslims—but why do you ask?' was a familiar line in my conversations with them.

This line made their interviews at first look unfruitful for this study: if there is no relation between religious identity and political agency, the same cannot be analysed. Equally little can be said about the spirituality of 'religiously unmusical' people. And a non-relationship with the in-group can be recollected and made plausible, but this won't fill many

pages. Secular technocrats' sparse comments in the biographical sections of our interviews do not even indicate whether their professional scepticism towards religion stems from personal irreligiousness, or if causality works the other way round and professional secularism inspires personal disregard of religion. For this reason, this chapter will, therefore, be a little less comprehensive than the other ones.

Nonetheless, two important lessons can be learned from secular technocrats: the fact that they exist at all—and their dispassionate attitude towards otherwise fierce debates about Indian secularism. While the latter aspect will be discussed at length in the last section of this chapter, the very existence of secular technocrats is remarkable in itself. A significant body of academic literature (and even more so public discourse) assumes the opposite and doubts that Muslims can ever be truly 'secular' even in the inclusive Indian sense of the term. This common stereotype of the always religious Muslim, who only acts out of religious motivation, is of course very useful in today's global politics of othering. It might also be so hard to root out due to its particularly deep historical roots: since centuries, Islamic culture has been portrayed as predominantly religious and Muslims as, above all, followers of Islam. But this portrayal is wrong.

Of course, some Muslims—faith-based actors in particular—are not completely innocent in this portrayal of their fellow co-religionists. The idea is also very present among the local NGO community, where it leads to structural blindness for its secular Muslim members, as we saw in the introduction. The experience of secular technocrats thus also adds to wider efforts to reject this stereotype that Muslim agency is religious by default, which does not even seem to fit Islamists from the *Jamaat-e-Islami*, as Ahmad (2009) has recently shown. The genuine possibility of secular Muslims working in a secular manner for peace should be boldly emphasized. It is one among several modes of Muslim politics—not more, but also not less than that.

How does this mode work, how do secular technocrats understand themselves and their activism? In our conversations, they frequently summarized their way of 'being Muslim and working for peace' by relating small stories such as the following, told by the well-educated,

cosmopolitan Hilal. His first encounter with the beneficiaries of his relief and rehabilitation project left a lasting impression on him:

> I lived so many years in [location], but the Muslim community did not know I am Muslim. If at all then I went there for Friday *namaz*, and after praying, I returned to my home or [business]. [...] So when I entered the community with my car, those people confronted me: who are you? (Hilal: Interview with Author)

'Who are you' was a surprising and challenging question for Hilal; he had not thought about that all too much before. Like faith-based actors, many secular technocrats kept the biographic aspects short in their narratives. Yet unlike the former, they did not avoid subjective narrative rhetoric *per se*. In presenting their politics, they just focussed more on what they do than on why or how they do it—and emphasized success stories rather than personal biography. In the salience statistics of their interviews' event structures, these narrated successes contribute the most important and most frequently reported events which last up to one and a half times as long as biographical passages, a relation which is the exact opposite to most other interviewees. Since their biography is, much like their religious identity, not salient for secular technocrats, they prefer to narrate instead how they get things done. In the words of Fatima:

> *Assistant: can you tell any story [about your peace activism] which you would consider a success story?*—There are really many. In [locality] lived [name]. She became a widow during the riots. When the mob came on [date], when the curfew was in place and all Muslim areas were attacked, the husband of [name] also took his stick in the morning and went. And he was attacked and died right there on the street. Then [name] was much, totally, she was [pause] she developed many psychological problems and was not able to do anything. She also came from a Muslim family. She had no idea how to go outside; she had no idea about the public sphere. [...] We met her again and again, took her out. Now she is so *developed* that she does all her work on her own. [...] Today she is so *developed* that her own [pause] she has her own sewing business. (Fatima: Interview with Author)

It is such victims' concrete problems which secular technocrats try to solve through empowerment and development of skills: most of them were working *in* conflict and relied on classic NGO methods (even though the relation between secular technocrats and secular NGOs is

far from self-evident). It is no coincidence that Fatima—with whom I spoke in Hindi/Urdu—used the English term 'developed' in the story quoted above.

With the emphasis on work *in* conflict in their immediate relief and rehabilitation work, secular technocrats' programmes even resemble faith-based actors' activities—and both cooperated initially as I described in the introduction. But while many faith-based actors remained under a charity paradigm of aid or ventured either into missionary activity or worked for the reconstruction of shared spiritual spaces, most secular technocrats move beyond relief by adopting a rights-based approach to development. They frequently provide legal training, monitor and report on human rights violations and act as a lobby for internally displaced victims of the 2002 riots. Fatima described the necessity of such activities as follows:

> When people filed complaints about what happened [...] it was naturally an offence. [...] Therefore we gave [juridical] representation. Before this, local BJP leader, politicians, people from the BJP or VHP came to the camp and started to put pressure on people. That 'if you want to go on living here, then don't give any complaint'. (Fatima: Interview with Author)

Frequent consequences of many secular technocrats' focus on human rights were complaints about the state's complicity in the 2002 violence. Hilal elaborates:

> Right now the name of Muslims is burned alive in Gujarat itself. [...] not only in 2002. [...] What is this? Why? [...] The chief minister said there are 40 million Gujaratis, so we [Muslims] are among them as well. But talking and acting are two different things. He did not observe what he said. In a way, the minority community is excluded on purpose. (Hilal: Interview with Author)

Equally common was critique towards the charity of most faith-based actors. The often tense relationships between pious men and secular technocrats sprang not so much from the religiousness of the former or the secularity of the latter, however—neither orientation evokes secular technocrats' passions. These tensions speak more of differences regarding their respective approach towards peacebuilding and development.

Secular technocrats were in general against those who prefer peacebuilding approaches other than rights-based development work in target groups of mixed religion.

Like faith-based actors, on the other hand, secular technocrats propagate a pure instrumentalization hypothesis and are interested in the political side of religio-political conflict. Like faith-based actors, they also began their activism in 2002 with classic relief operations. But quite contrary to faith-based actors, religion became no issue in secular technocrats' programmes, missions or visions—and played no role in their personal lives either, as the following sections illustrate.

The Forgotten Muslims

When asked directly whether religious beliefs have any relevance to their peace activism, no secular technocrat took more than a few sentences to negate. Lacking personal religious experiences to narrate, they often shared their general impression of religion in conflict, presumably to be polite and avoid disappointing me, the researcher who asks odd questions about faith. When I asked Umar, a long-term trade union activist in Ahmedabad, at the beginning of our interview whether religion or faith plays any role in his peace work, he made his standpoint very clear:

> Nowhere is peace in the name of God. Wherever peace is clad in the name of religion, reality looks quite different. In my opinion, peace will only develop when the workforce makes labour relations a topic. (Umar: Interview with Author)

While this sounds anti-religious on first impression, the overall account of this born Muslim turned Marxist interviewee was contradictory, however. In later interview sections, and when dealing with theology more explicitly, Umar lauded Islamic ethic:

> *Assistant: Is there any idea in Islam which is most important for you, anything in Islam which touches your heart?*—Yes, what is close to me in Islam is that, when the rich of his time came to Prophet Mohammad, he gave them a blaze in the Quran. 'Allah is Allah' and whatever those create is only dust. [...] [But on the other hand,] I do not

> believe in God or Allah—he might exist or not, nobody has seen him. [...] [Yet] this [ethic] pleases me very much. (Umar: Interview with Author)

This sounds quite different indeed: is 'nowhere peace in the name of God' or is that God a fighter for justice through his Prophet, who 'gave the rich a blaze'? Like similar ambivalence in other secular technocrats' statements about Islam, the seeming contradiction between Umar's earlier claim that peace in the name of religion is an illusion and the later reference to the egalitarian ethic brought by Mohammad might be resolved in the generality of either statement. Stripped from any theological reference, signs of personal spiritual experience or of deeper relation to the in-group, only the overall impulse to do the morally good remains. And who would not agree that religion has the general potential to escalate conflict as much as it highlights social injustice? Secular technocrats' generality above all confirms that religion is nothing they connect to. Of all secular technocrats, Hanif, administrator in a big NGO, made this most explicit. He told me:

> Actually, I am not a religious person. I have no idea what faith is all about. I say that frankly. I read the Quran. Well, the [incomprehensible word] of peace is in each and any religion. Take any sacred book. [...] I also went to a *madrassa* [...] but made so much hubbub there that they threw me out. (Hanif: Interview with Author)

Hanif has no real interest, lest much personal experience with religion. Many secular technocrats were not even decisively anti-religious—if a group in my sample rejected religion, then the emancipating women presented in Chapter 5. Secular technocrats would rather agree with the famous words of Max Weber (1994: 65): 'I am religiously absolutely unmusical and can neither create any religious edifice in my soul nor do I need one—this is just impossible, and I refuse it. But precisely? I am neither anti-religious nor unreligious' (my translation). I found it quite telling that Hanif actually sat uninspired in the corner of his office while I spoke with his superior Mariam (one of the doubting professionals introduced in Chapter 6): he found my interest in religion quite boring—and only agreed to an interview because his boss urged him to do so.

As 'religiously unmusical' people, secular technocrats also said little about religious practice. Some highlighted that the ritual prayer keeps the body flexible like a gymnastic exercise, some other argued that its eternal regularity helps to structure one's day—but only Fatima actually prays, and she does so only on Fridays, as a family ritual. Secular technocrats express a vague and general openness for religious ceremonies and some visit *dargah*s or other 'calm places', but not out of any inner, spiritual motivation, as Fatima explained:

> I pray, I also fast during the month of Ramadan, I am learned in the Quran, I read everything. But there is no emotion. The atmosphere in my home emphasized fasting and all that in Ramadan, so it is an enforced habit. [...] [I also] go to all the places. Not for *puja*, I have no idea how this ritual works. All my friends go, so I go with them. I pay them [the Gods] respect that way, which is all. I also frequent the church to pay my respect. (Fatima: Interview with Author)

In comparison to other interviewees, secular technocrats also express a considerably weaker emotional bond to their in-group (medium negative effect size compared to other interviewees) and all of them strictly emphasized that belonging—in their case mostly plain self-categorization as Muslims—does not influence their activism. Hilal, for example, explained that he helps other Muslims because Muslims are structurally powerless and, therefore, frequent targets of communal violence—not because they constitute his in-group:

> If something like this would happen to Hindus, I would extend my hand to Hindus. I would fight for them. Equally true is that I am Muslim and that this happened with Muslims. And whatever riots happened, Muslims had to feel them the most and suffered the most. (Hilal: Interview with Author)

But a weaker connection was not only felt by secular technocrats towards other Muslims, it was also returned by the latter to the former. The Giessen Test adopted from Kakar (1996) contains a measure for social resonance, that is, for the extent to which one feels welcomed and positively accepted by others. In my typology, only faith-based actors and doubting professionals report such a positive resonance: while secular technocrats and emancipating women express low resonance: not

only do they connect little to other Muslims, other people also tend to ignore them. Their grammatical use of the first person plural was often the only reminiscence of their 'being Muslim':

> We are a minority; we have little [incomprehensible word]. That's why we are oppressed [...] and why we people are also quite backward. We have little education, due to communalism we find no jobs, so Muslim families say that 'even if we educate our children, they would anyway not find a good job'. This is also a thought; this is also a psychological dynamic.

Secular technocrats' answers to the *Inventory to Measure Ambiguity* (Reis 1996) reveal that ambiguous conflicts tend to irritate them more than faith-based actors, emancipating women or doubting professionals (small negative effect size, that is, more intolerant towards ambiguity than other interviewees). This is most likely a correlate of the strong rights based orientation in their activism: conflicts are nothing to be tolerated, but something to be fought out.

The psychometrics of secular technocrats contain a final surprising insight in this regard; this surfaces only if statistical rigor is relaxed to some degree, however. A methodological caveat is thus in order first. Since the psychometric scales used in my questionnaire were not standardized for India, absolute item values can technically not be interpreted meaningfully: they could simply indicate a shifted distribution in a different cultural context (more detailed statistical commentary on this problem can be found in the online supplement to this book at http://www.sagepub.in/susewindOS.pdf). Yet, such rigor is not met by all scholars. Most significantly, Kakar (1996), whose psychodynamic studies of communal rioters motivated me to include the Giessen Test in my questionnaire in the first place, works with absolute values. In order to compare my results to his, I thus have to resort to such absolute values, too.

And this comparison brings out the surprise. While his interviewees' psychometrics varied somewhat from person to person—as can be expected—they share a common profile of unusually high dominance, positive social resonance, a clearly depressed general mood and average social permeability. The unexpected insight from my application of his methods to peace activists: if we consider absolute values, faith-based

actors and secular technocrats share these very same characteristics (with the exemption of the latter's negative resonance, which arguably stems from them being the 'forgotten Muslims'). Similarly, the low tolerance towards ambiguity and ambivalence confirmed in the *Inventory to Measure Ambiguity* for these two types has its correlate in Kakar's interpretation of his interlocutors, even though he did not employ this particular test scale. Emancipating women and doubting professionals, however, very clearly differ in their psychometrics.

What that means is quite simply that Kakar's profile of communal *rioters* is shared by at least two types of *peace* activists. Statistical awareness prevents me from claiming that the similarity in psychometric data warrants a reliable substantive verdict: I would prefer to leave the question open whether the shared psychometric profile of rioters, faith-based actors and secular technocrats really speaks, for example, to their high dominance. However, as the cultural context of India shifts the distribution away from Western test norms, it is relatively safe to assume that this shift affected Kakar's and my research in similar ways: the meaning might be unclear, but the mere fact that our findings are *common* seems quite robust.

Consequently, Kakar's description of violent activists may be more closely associated with their stable worldview than with them being violent: both Kakar's psychometrics and my own data tell the story of seasoned activists who are not easily challenged by changing times. It is the profile of technocratic leadership, not necessarily that of a violent one.

As far as secular technocrats are concerned, to return to my own data, we saw that religion was neither important in their leadership, nor played a significant role in their personal lives. In their statements, religion remains a general category, an empty signifier—and in their experience, belonging to the Muslim community was comparatively unimportant. Reflecting the usual orientalist prejudices about Muslims' political agency, many of my contacts in Gujarat were astonished of me considering secular technocrats as potential interviewees at all. They sometimes only learned through my research that those whom they had merely known as colleagues self-categorized as Muslim; some began to see their own staff (or indeed superiors), whom they never considered

as Muslims, in a quite different light. This of course puts secular technocrats squarely in the blind spot of both Gujarati civil society and heated global debates at large: they are the forgotten Muslims.

Secularized Secularism

If they are not perceived as particularly Muslim nor experience themselves as such—even though they clearly self-categorize—one could imagine these kind of Muslim activists as fierce advocates of secularism instead. But surprisingly, this is not the case. To the contrary: secularism is a relatively relaxed embodied practice for secular technocrats, not a matter of strong opinions, ideological or otherwise. While this does not hold true for all of them (as no generalization ever does), most embody a rather *secularized* secularism as a form of social practice, a secularism devoid of quasi-religious zeal, a secularism which has been secularized in the everyday and lost the characteristics of an ideological creed.

Such calm attitude is in fact not totally new; a nucleus of relaxed, secularized secularism has already once been the core of Indian secularism's pragmatic beginnings, when Congress adopted the concept of secularism as a practical strategy to deal with persisting diversity despite the scars of partition more than an ideological stance. Historically, Indian Muslims were part of this pragmatic story from the outset, and 'whether or not Islam is compatible with secularism and democracy is not a pertinent question to most Indian Muslims. Secular democracy has been integral to their political life for more than half a century' (Ahmad 2009: 11). More to the point, latest since the communal riots of 2002 secularism 'among Muslims living in Gujarat [...] is not an intellectual construct but an ideal that can and should be achieved' (Chakrabarti 2010: 611). But this ideal is achieved—at least in the case of secular technocrats—through secularizing their everyday actions, and not by putting up an ideological fight.

This attitude, however, stays in remarkable contrast to the agitated state of academic debates in India and elsewhere. I am not arguing that debating the meaning of secularism or secularization in India is a waste

of energy—to the contrary. But, in agreement with Turina (2007: 161), I suggest a 'reconsideration of secularization not as a long-term historical process but as a property of action: any action or a whole domain of action [...] is therefore secularized if in carrying it out people are not influenced by religious doctrines or feelings about the way it should be done, and if it is not justified on this same basis'. Like Turina, I feel that 'a general macro-theory of secularization [or secularism, for this purpose] stood little chance of being successful' (162). The lesson to be learned from secular technocrats—beyond the mere fact that they exist—could thus be that a study of secularized practice should complement debates about secularist ideology, as Engineer suggests:

> It is thus very clear that what should concern us is not this or that concept of secularism, for that often reflects only our philosophical positions. What we must be concerned about is how to tackle a complex situation we are faced with. It often implies a creative application of ideas, both religious as well as secular. We do harm to ourselves by being dogmatic. (Engineer 1995: 263)

Of course, Indian secularism was not always that relaxed—in particular from a Muslim point of view. Above all, the turbulent processes culminating in the formation of Pakistan and the scars of partition haunted the nascent secular polity and came to frame its politics. Despite constitutional claims, religious barriers remain strong life shaping realities; today, in times of *Hindutva*, many argue that Indian secularism has failed the millions of Muslims which are de-facto excluded and whose aspirations are being denied. Meant as the polity's foundation, secularism soon became partisan policy. While it is still instructive to explain why 'India has not witnessed large-scale Islamic militancy, despite the growth in Islamic fundamentalist organizations' (Alam 2007: 30), secularism's potential of regulating conflict decreases and its credibility as a common ground for political competition is fading. This is indeed a dramatic story, which speaks little of a relaxed, secularized secularism.

From this perspective, it seems consequential that a heated academic debate about secularism ensued in the last decades: 'secularism, the argument goes, has not only failed to deliver the goods, but exacerbated

the very problems that, in the first place, it was devised to overcome' (Bhargava 1998: 2). For brevity I only point to the seminal volume edited by Bhargava (1998), which contains probably the most articulate recent criticisms towards secularism as state ideology (Madan 1998; Nandy 1998; cf. Ahmad 2009: 12ff).

Still, I think secular technocrats' narratives warrant a more relaxed perspective—an approach rooted in the personal level and speaking of the long-term successes of secularization. While I do not deny the ideological importance of secularism, in particular for more meso-level debates about citizenship and human rights, especially in Gujarat, I would thus revert the argument brought forward by Nandy (1998), who distinguished 'religion-as-faith' (a tolerant way of life) from 'religion-as-ideology' (a political means): in a similar vein, secular technocrats express 'secularism-as-faith' rather than 'secularism-as-ideology'.

This tolerant 'secularism-as-faith' warrants more attention and should not be brushed away too easily for another reason: while religio-political traditions might very well experience a second revival in times of a contested secular polity, their individualistic spin also led to a fragmentation of revivalism and the dialectic development of 'religiously unmusical' stances. The colonial transformation above all diversified identities, fostering multiple religious revivals while at the same time nourishing liberal and secular trends among Muslims as much as among other Indians. The relaxed attitude of secular technocrats, for whom secularism is not another creed but a matter of course, is instructive of these trends: beyond heated academic debates, secularization made deep inroads in Indian society. While 'criticism of secularism is fast becoming part of the common-sense of the Indian middle class' (Bhargava 1998: 27), secularized secularism survives and can be found in the most unexpected places—for example, among Muslim peace activists. This might inspire hope or despair to defendants or opponents of secularism as an ideology—for me it relieves a debate which at times overheats.

Apart from that, secular technocrats' secularized secularism provides further arguments in favour of this book's broader methodological point. I agree with Ahmad (2009: 14) in that much of the debate about Indian secularism 'is too discourse-oriented to unpack tangible histories

and workings of secularism in practice'. This 'secularism in practice' is embodied on the personal level by people such as the secular technocrats presented in this chapter. Accordingly, we have to take their experience seriously. If the colonial and postcolonial transformations of religion indeed furthered individual diversity, we cannot study religion in India on groupist terms anymore. 'Community' irrevocably lost its self-evidence (if it ever had the same), and that might precisely be why it seems on the rise on the level of ideologies. Scholars should, however, dissect this ideological level—rather than adopt it for their own analytical purposes.

To conclude: secular technocrats surprise those who consider all Muslims religious with their very existence and those speculating about the fate of secularist ideology in India with their relaxed attitude. Their emphasis on success stories is one among many indicators that they are 'religiously unmusical': they want to get things done, and don't ponder about belief or belonging—which makes them the forgotten and overseen Muslims in Gujarati civil society. Further, their relaxed secular practices in even post-2002 Gujarat introduce some calm into the heated academic debate, in which I am not the first and hopefully not the last to 'abandon [...] the futile task of determining whether Islam might be compatible with "modernity" and [...] shift [...] attention to ways in which Muslims produce themselves as "modern" in *everyday* life' (Osella and Soares 2010: 5; my emphasis). While I am not claiming that *Hindutva* is no solid threat to Indian secularism (which it is indeed), the secularized secularism of secular technocrats might be a sign of hope. Furthermore: my data highlights the possibilities of co-existence between this creed and the one adhered to by faith-based technocrats, since secular technocrats can be found beyond the realm of staunchly secular NGOs—and faith-based actors can work beyond the bounds of charity.

In the end, however, there is more than pragmatic flexibility and some hint of psychometric similarity that connects faith-based actors and secular technocrats: the two ways of 'being Muslim and working for peace' chosen by them, while contradictory in many aspects, are both stable across time—and in principle not surprising. Scholarship knows them, I was aware of their existence before I came to Gujarat, and I am

sure you know them as well. The following chapters in contrast introduce two rather dynamic and more unusual characters. They explore in more details the chances as well as risks in the grey area between faith-based actors and secular technocrats, a space populated by emancipating women and doubting professionals. These two types exemplify two more ways of 'being Muslim and working for peace', ways which go beyond simple—and in principle expectable—dichotomies, and which open up my main argument about the ambivalence and ambiguity of the sacred.

5

Emancipating Women

> This should not sound pretentious, but I see my success in this direction that I, after joining [NGO], that I can act in that way. [...] I think this is my own big success. (Kamla: Interview with Author)

Victimized Bodies

Nazeema is a thoughtful and strong woman, a young widow, victim of the 2002 riots, mother of two children, self-employed seamstress—and grassroots peace activist. As a female member of a rural caste of syncretistic Sunni Muslims, she embodies the archetypical enemy of *Hindutva* mobs (as much as Islamists), which strive to establish clear-cut spatial and ritual group boundaries by means of violent sexualized politics. When I first met her, she inhabited a small hut in a refugee camp, together with her mother-in-law and more distant family members—her husband died shortly after the riots. Ten years' village schooling notwithstanding, Nazeema was a functional illiterate still. Like other emancipating women (and indeed like this chapter), Nazeema's narrative went straight to the thick of 2002, without detours. Within minutes of us sitting down, she told me in her heavy dialect of Gujarati Urdu:

> I am a resident of village [name], and when these riots happened, we came here, to this place. At night, at 11 o'clock, there were 23 people, my whole family. We have not left this place since. We have not been rehabilitated. Our whole house was torn

> apart [...] it is no more. In three days, all that we owned was taken. [Few inaudible words] our clothes [pause] all and everything. [...] You know, our village is completely feudal; our *thakor* is a Member of the Legislative Assembly for [locality]. He wants no more Muslims in his—our—village. Even though it was only us, a family of 23 people, who lived there. And a Hindu population of five to six thousand. (Nazeema: Interview with Author)

With the house destroyed, her family lost all they owned. When they had to flee their home, they initially hoped to return one day—but it turned out they never would. Nazeema reports these blows seemingly indifferent and embeds them in a long list of hardships experienced by lower-caste, lower-class and surely not only Muslim women. She also spices up the story of her suffering with jovial anecdotes about the '*thakor*' of her village, mockingly using a formally abolished feudal title for the local politician.

Such rhetoric serves a purpose beyond amusement: irony is a means of distancing and self-detachment and thus a means to preserve self-efficacy and dignity for traumatized victims (Reichenbach and Hashem 2005). Therefore, when Nazeema repeatedly re-frames violence in euphemistic terms, the euphemism is arguably less important than the act of re-framing: as victim she needs to retain at least that much: the power to interpret her victimization on her own terms (Lamb 1996).

Nazeema's combination of self-distancing and attempts to emancipate herself from the passivity of victimhood is reflected in psychometric correlates I measured with the Giessen Test, too. Nazeema is—like other emancipating women—more reticent and feels more distance between herself and others than other types of peace activists. She experiences less social resonance and is significantly more assimilated, patient and passive (values of a third, quarter and one standard deviation below average of the respective z-distribution and medium negative effect sizes for all emancipating women compared to other interviewees). This psychodynamic profile is, according to Beckmann et al., typical of people who

> avoid conflicts by phobically stooping, [...] develop reticence in fear of a hostile social environment and expect to be exploited and abused should they open themselves up. Therefore, they frantically hold on to what they have. This isolates them,

> but at least one cannot be emptied or destroyed from the outside. (Beckmann et al. 1991: 41, 45; my translation)

In line with this interpretation, the Inventory to Measure Ambiguity reflects that Nazeema cannot tolerate ambiguous new experiences, ambiguous irritations of role models and ambiguity in social conflicts (values of one, a half and one standard deviations below average of the respective z-distribution). She experiences such irritations—for instance the irritation that most of her neighbours reject her new-found principle of gender equality and the role models that flow from it—as ambivalence only, as an either-or which tears her apart (this differentiation between ambivalence and ambiguity will be taken up in the conclusion again).

Nazeema's self-distancing, her oscillation between dry euphemism and outspoken silence, and the psychometric correlates—which she mostly shares with other emancipating women—point to a deep trauma she sustained. This remained concealed in the conversation with me, a male foreign researcher, but weeks later when I transcribed her interview, the jigsaw puzzle of insinuations and sudden ruptures in her narrative, her silences and background information obtained from others in her colony joined into a disturbing picture: today I am confident that the women in Nazeema's family were not only displaced and robbed, but also beaten up and raped—in a spiral of honour, shame and strategic sexualized violence so characteristic for communal riots (Agarwal 1995; Kannabiran 1996). Nazeema's word choice seems to confirm my suspicion—she talks of 'boundless danger' which 'caressed' her, of the 'essence of evil' which 'penetrated' her—and a representative of her caste association confirmed strategic rape for her village in particular (for a longer version of her story see Susewind 2011).

After faith-based actors' and secular technocrats' deliberate avoidance of intimate narratives (for their respective different reasons), this chapter turns to a kind of activist who tells a very personal story indeed. For emancipating women, 'being Muslim and working for peace' is foremost a personal journey, a journey in which they overcome the passivity of victimhood and numerous further adversities to become self-efficate

peace activists, joining in a wider—but often overlooked—pattern of female political agency in South Asia:

> On the world stage and within South Asia, stereotypes of the South Asian woman have been dominated by her supposed passivity in the face of victimhood [...] yet any truth in such tropes must be balanced by other equally compelling evidence. Women in South Asia have long been involved in various types of social and political movements. (Jeffery 1999: 221f)

This dynamic transformation from victim to activist is the main rationale for me to call these women 'emancipating'. I am aware that this is a problematic term; 'emancipation' itself does not indicate on whose terms and by whom one is empowered. Indeed, the relationship between the empowered and the empowering can be tense, as the final section in this chapter illustrates, where I discuss the dynamics between emancipating women and the NGO world. Still, these women emancipate themselves first from victimhood and later from religious patriarchy—if to various degrees—and thus demonstrate how 'everyday life can become the terrain for acting out an activist politics by individuals who believe in something beyond the mundane and in the possibility of [their own] transformation and who opt to initiate the work of change in their own environments, neighbourhoods or communities' (R. Robinson 2005: 202). Theirs is an ongoing story of regaining agency, and a story of continuous experimentation and change. This is the first characteristic which sets them apart from seasoned faith-based actors and secular technocrats alike.

Emancipating women contrast these two former types of 'being Muslim and working for peace' in more respects, too. Both faith-based actors and secular technocrats would agree that communal riots are ultimately not a religious (but a political) problem and their respective configuration of religious identities and peace activism did not change after 2002. Riots are political, and identities stable—these two claims also dominate mainstream NGO discourse in Gujarat. Emancipating women such as Nazeema, however, have a very different and much more complex story to tell.

Their story is first of all different in that it is much more intimately involved. All emancipating women were victimized in 2002 and many of them still live in refugee camps; in this regard, Nazeema's traumatic experience is but one example. Furthermore, none of these women was an activist prior to the riots of 2002—but all worked full time for peace when I met them six years later. Accordingly, they neither report a story of 'natural-born peace activism' (like faith-based actors) nor a commitment to longstanding professional development work (like secular technocrats), but begin their narrative with the rupture of victimization. Emancipating women did not remain in their role as victims, however, and 'the implicit ontology of suffering and agency, like the dichotomy of victim and perpetrator, tends to ignore the fluidity of boundaries and less than clear distinctions' (Walker 2010: 13). The violence of 2002 was but the beginning of their story, and while living through the aftermath of riots, they struggled to regain agency, at times successful, at times less so.

This process which unfolded post-2002—a process of re-appropriating one's agency while becoming progressively politicized—lies at the heart of this chapter. In this first section, I problematize how emancipating women's embodied grief became the root cause of their political agency. They did not only transform politically, however—as discussed so far: their path of empowerment changed their religious identities as well. In the next section, I will, therefore, illustrate the liminal spaces their spirituality used to occupy. Section three accompanies them on their way from these spaces into explicit Islamic feminism. The last section finally shows how this journey continued beyond the bounds of religion into completely new possibilities at the example of a young street theatre actress's liberating journey—as yet another very personal example for the more abstract analysis that follows.

A first indication that emancipating women actually overcame the passivity inherent in victimization is the remarkably direct semantic they used when talking about the riots. While many other interviewees spoke of 'disturbance' or referred to 'whatever happened', emancipating women had no problem with calling riots what they are. Too deeply implicated was the violence in their biographies to be simply discounted

as something else. Not only did they call the riots 'riots', however, some emancipating women went so far as to present the events in disturbingly positive terms. They spoke of the violence as fortunate, because the aftermath finally changed their life for the better after years of drudgery. Nazeema was among those who went that far; towards the end of our long conversation, she remarked:

> Like I said before: those who murdered, who beat up people in the riots, they were of course pleased with their actions. But for an instance, even I thought that whatever happened was [in fact] wonderful—because what was in our mind, the skills we had, all that came to the fore then. [Long pause] But then there is the thought that everything was wrong, that everything got ruined back then. (Nazeema: Interview with Author)

Of course, such arguments are themselves terrible consequences of victimization. Yet we should not discard too easily that emancipating women's self-representation decidedly differs from the stereotype of passive victimhood—even if Nazeema's wording to express this fact disturbs. When I asked them to rank various possibilities of self-categorization, most opted to present themselves as Indian women—and not as Muslim victims. The perspective of women who overcame trauma and victimhood was most explicitly expressed in their replies when I asked them for success stories. Even though emancipating women worked in the same NGO projects as other interviewees, they reported very different successes—which were always closely connected to their own personal transformation. Nazeema, for example, preferred to talk extensively about the micro-credit programme which she joined and which allowed her to act as a multiplier:

> After the riots, women sat around, not knowing what to do. In their souls they still remember what had happened to us; the fact that lives were lost still wanders through their mind. But whatever happened is the past now. [NGO] provided us a training which took place every three months. In this training we fabricated Lucknow-style stitching [*chikan*]. [...] I borrowed money from them. And we are three women who supervise ourselves. We buy cloth from the Bazaar in Ahmedabad and sew it independently. [...] I myself sew and then an exhibition took place. One should arrange this in Bombay, in [list of locations] as well. [...] If

> it were not for that organization, we would never have seen the real world. Those who initiated this programme did a very good work for peace indeed! (Nazeema: Interview with Author)

Distinguished in this quote is not so much the micro-credit programme as such; secular technocrats, for example, did similar work, usually by mixing Hindu and Muslim women in a framework shaped by the 'contact hypothesis' of working *in* conflict. Distinct is, however, that Nazeema herself was both organizer and beneficiary of that programme, thus the manner in which she conflates the subjects 'we' and 'they' throughout the quote above. Unlike all other interviewees, emancipating women explicitly reported their own transformation as their major peacebuilding success. Kamla, another activist from a small town in Panchmahal district cannily put it on the record in the following way:

> There is actually no [success] story, but, and this should not sound pretentious, but I see my success in this direction that I, after joining [NGO], that I can act in that way. [...] I think this is my own big success. Because before that, I did not know that I am able to [...] do something new. (Kamla: Interview with Author)

True: the sewing group of Nazeema and her colleagues has not yet made substantial profits from *chikan*, and the micro-credit repayment is due soon. But it would be premature to discount this (or other emancipating women's usually just half-successful endeavours) as another dead-end development project, from an economic perspective as much as from the perspective of peace activism. Wilkinson-Weber (1999) extensively wrote about the clichés which surround *chikan* as 'hobby' without economic significance, and uncovers the patriarchal discourse and the almost completely male-dominated chain of production behind them. Furthermore: patriarchal clichés obscure that *chikan* is first and foremost wage labour, at times only thinly disguised in 'self-employment' micro-credit schemes. When these women buy cloth from Ahmedabad and stitch it and sew clothes from it, they therefore not only bridge religious boundaries (for most customers are Hindus and many micro-credit groups were deliberately set up across communal boundaries), but

gender barriers as well. Nazeema and her colleagues have to compete with massive gender rents of their male competitors on a daily basis—a truly challenging task. They should not be blamed when it fails.

Moreover, stitching serves more than just one function and there is more to the question of success than monetary return. Nazeema herself made it very clear that she does not merely stitch cloth, the women in her group also 'embroider', in the words of Wilkinson-Weber, 'their lives'—with a thread which links them horizontally to other victims and vertically with Hindu traders and customers. *Chikan* helps them to emancipate themselves from the passivity of victimhood, from the isolation of refugee camps and from the exploitation by men—even if it often does not work out well in pure economic terms.

While their economic situation thus often remained dismal, their sense of achievement grew—and emancipating women consciously chose to invest their recovered self-efficacy in NGO projects and 'everyday peace' (Ring 2006). In their words, they opted for *seva* (service)—the preferred vernacular for female politics in North India (see Ciotti 2011). Challenged about the meagre economic prospects of her sewing business by my assistant, Nazeema thus firmly snapped back:

> For me these are services [*seva*] as well, and service is your duty if you belong. Many women in my group told me: you are crazy, go for something with higher rates of return! But this [*chikan*] is not any random thing; it is a *project* [original in English]. [...] I am happy, I feel free. Earlier there was [merely] home and field. Now I acquired a decisive understanding about social relations and community. [...] I did not know a single thing, back then! (Nazeema: Interview with Author)

Understandably, their personal transformation from passive victim to active agent of their biography and peace activist in their local community is also what emancipating women ultimately aspire to facilitate in other women. While many became part of trauma healing or dialogue projects, organize small-scale businesses—such as the *chikan* group discussed earlier—or have other grassroots-level jobs, they perceive their contribution and success to lie firmly in the personal sphere and try to involve other women in a thorough transformation, as the following, typical statement by Kamla demonstrates:

> I think it is a success that those who were frightened before, who saw rape with their own eyes, feared death, who saw this and did not leave their home anymore, that we took these women outside. We think that this demonstrates [a success]. I myself already told you that while my uncle was still alive, he did not allow us to go from one location to another. Not alone. But today, I acquired quite some courage. [...] In my community, people think that I became strong. I do not fear anyone. [...] Women say till today that '[name], you are very brave, you brought us progress'. I say 'look also at my background, how I was before, I was not like this. I was also a women, I was nobody special. I was not rich, I was poor as well. From this position I came forward. [Now] you go!' By giving them this understanding, I empower these women. (Kamla: Interview with Author)

The metamorphosis from victim to activist not only compelled emancipating women to work for peace, however—it also deeply challenged their religious identities, both in terms of beliefs and practices and in terms of belonging to other Muslims. The complex dialectic of religious identities and political agency experienced by emancipating women is reflected in remarkably similar stories. They first reported how they came in contact with (usually secular) NGOs in refugee camps and joined their grass-root groups. Yet soon, they began to struggle against religiously legitimized patriarchal structures that obstructed their work, and against rumours spread by the elders in their community. Ultimately, many of them, therefore, lost faith in religion altogether—but were struggling to find an alternative source of strength. They were torn apart—and yet remained determined on their path of personal emancipation and political transformation.

Before I analyse these dynamics in the coming pages, however, a methodological caveat is in order. The notion of emancipation implies a transformation over time, yet my data covers only one particular moment in 2008; emancipating women thus pose a considerable challenge to my research design. Their narratives of course contain retrospective episodes and an extensive hermeneutical analysis of these might help with the problem of tracking change over time. Nonetheless, the psychometric scales, event structure salience statistics and some of the answers to the structured part of my interview questionnaire are evidently one-off snapshots. Only a methodical trick—temporalization of difference—can, therefore, reveal dynamics in these dimensions.

The idea behind this trick is that different women proceed with different pace on a path from victim to peace activist, which is—in principle—similar. Thus, the differences between them could be re-interpreted as an outcome of shared chronological developments typically experienced by each of them. This procedure is adventurous, but I argue that it is viable in the specific case of emancipating women given the remarkable similarities of their narratives, far higher than for the other three types. Some women described a quite complex and far-reaching change, others narrated only initial attempts to break free from the passivity of victimhood—yet since the first steps of the former very closely resemble what the latter described as their current situation, I argue, it is possible to construct a common dynamic by ordering all interviews in a chronology of a typical, if hypothetical, transformation. This concatenation of momentary insights then allows observing ideal–typical developments in the numeric data I collected as well.

Which additional understandings does the temporalization of difference offer us in the domains of both event salience statistics and psychometric data—non-narrative and thus inadvertedly 'snapshot' data? As mentioned earlier, emancipating women develop agency and self-efficacy against the backdrop of victimization and structural patriarchy. They then proclaim their biography as an exemplary success of peace activism. In a hypothetical chronology, event salience statistics of their narratives show interesting shifts in the relative frequency, relative importance and centrality of key events during this process of emancipation. These shifts suggest three distinct stages of transformation, which are also approximated in the structure of the subsequent sections of this chapter: the turn to liminal traditions for psychological healing, the discovery of Islamic feminism, and finally—for some—the denouncement of religion altogether—with all its psychological ambivalences.

Across all three stages, 2002 is a crucial *personal* event: the riots themselves—as an abstract *historical* event—never reach the importance of emancipating women's own experience of violence. Many women narrate them in a row with other tragic biographic events, such as widowhood or the death of a child, but unlike those other tragedies, internal displacement brought them in contact with NGOs for the first time.

Thus, it became a precondition for fundamental changes in their political agency: many women pooled in this chapter would, in all likelihood, not have become peace activists without the turmoil of riots.

While the riots remain important events throughout all stages of transformation, they were, however, less frequently mentioned and increasingly contextualized in the later stages. In these later stages, self-efficacy develops, the riots acquire a positive meaning in the context of one's biography (i.e., as the starting point for empowering peace activism) and, step by step, peace activism reaches the same levels of importance as the experience of violence. This transformation is, of course, a very demanding experience; Fauzia, the young street theatre actress whom I will discuss at length in the final section of this chapter, for example, told me of the challenges and mental barriers she faced:

> In the initial three months, I would have felt very awkward, because all this is very different for me. This kind of talk; I have never seen a play in street theatre nor did I participate in it. To take part in it, to talk with other people [...] there were many Dalits, and also boys! I never talked with boys, met them, sat with them and talked with them, worked with them. Such things were totally new for me. [...] So during the first three months, I felt really awkward. (Fauzia: Interview with Author)

The personal struggle with own reluctance as much as with patriarchal pressure from the in-group could also explain the third notable feature of emancipating women's salience statistics: their peace activism was far more important than NGO interventions in the second, intermediary, stage of transformation—even though both kind of events were mentioned equally frequently. In this intermediary stage, the development of self-efficacy is indeed so central that it overrides the importance of its institutional context—a dynamic which only changes in the third and last stage, in which NGO interventions regain importance, arguably because self-efficate agency is by then stabilized.

This typical process of re-acquiring one's agency after victimization is finally associated with a transformation of religious identities, too. In terms of belief, most women start with traditional and liminal beliefs but discover the Islamic dogma of equality in the intermediary stage of

emancipation. They temporarily use this dogma to stabilize their transformation against religious patriarchy—but ultimately turn away from religion, since they cannot win the struggle with the *ulema* (religious scholars). This indicates complex negotiations over belonging, which will be discussed stage by stage in the following sections.

Liminality

How exactly did their journey change these women's religious beliefs, practices and dynamics of belonging? In a first step, and once immediate livelihoods were secured, the relevance and salience of religion increases. This is a familiar picture: Jasani (2008) and many others observed a broad trend towards spirituality and a growing identification with one's religious in-group in Ahmedabad's refugee camps. Many of my informants in the Gujarati NGO community, too, reported similar tendencies, often with concerned undertones; most of them link such trends to the orthodox agendas of Muslim charitable trusts who run some of these camps.

Others, however, strongly contest such projections (in particular Gupta 2011), and indeed, the worries might be premature: not few among my interviewees, and in particular many emancipating women, did not turn orthodox, but rather went into their very own directions. They became more religious, no doubt—but the flavour of their spirituality contradicts the alleged trend towards orthodoxy. What else do they value in Islam? When I asked Nazeema—who, according to my hypothetical chronology, fits into an initial stage of emancipation—whether she prays in the local mosque, she told me:

> This is not for women. I go to *dargahs*.—*Interviewer: which ones?*—I have a *maulana* who came from Bagdad; his name is Bad Shah Baba. He brought his whole family, and he is my *pir*. He is large than I am, and buried in Baroda. For him I am longing, and on his day of remembrance I also go visit him. We are Sunnis, [...] worshipper of the saints of Bagdad and Ajmer. [...] We celebrate all the holidays: Id, Ashura, [...] Diwali. [...] If something troubles you, you cannot think of earthly help alone—but with them [the saints] there can be no oppression. They are dead,

> but whenever I talk to them, the strength for great deeds arises in me. My spirit is enlightened, I accomplish good deeds. [...] Whenever I am lucky—say if I earn money—it is due to [Bad Shah Baba]. [...] There is a [copy of his grave] in Halol and I also go up to Mehsana. (Nazeema: Interview with Author)

Nazeema demonstrates a blithe disregard for rules and light-heartedly mixes orthodoxy and heteropraxy: a *pir* or saint transforms into a *maulana*, a religious scholar, and Sunnis celebrate Ashura, the central holiday of Shias, as well as Diwali, the festival of lights in Hindu tradition. Especially interesting is the inconspicuous hint at Mehsana, a small town in northern Gujarat—this is the place where Mir Datar is buried, a saint about whom Pfleiderer wrote that he

> specialized in helping people who are afflicted with 'madness'. The *dargaha* dropped—or never developed—all other functions which are usually associated with Muslim shrines. Its only function is [...] the religious healing of those afflicted with some kind of 'psychosis' or 'neurosis'. More precisely, it has a reputation for healing those stricken by a bhut. [...] Bhuts are believed to be the roaming souls of unpeacefully deceased persons [...]. The symptoms which result from this latent possession are somatic ailments combined with mental disturbance. [...] The saint's spirit [is] one of the most powerful exorcists in the country. (Pfleiderer 1981: 218ff)

If that is indeed the saint Nazeema is visiting (which seems plausible, given that there are no other prominent *pirs* in Mehsana, according to Pfleiderer 2007), she probably goes there not so much for soteriological purposes only, but to instrumentally overcome what modern psychology would call a Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In a 'culture-specific illness theory' (Pfleiderer, Greifeld and Bichmann 1995), PTSD then appears as possession by an evil spirit; from this point of view (and experience), 'women's bodies, having experienced sexual violence become "containers of poison" [...] pregnant with the knowledge of what happened, which "must never be allowed to be born"' (Blatchley 2010: 26).

As Nazeema visits Mir Datar in Mehsana most likely for healthcare rather than for soteriological purposes, other emancipating women go to saint festivals to maintain social networks, or complain about being pressurized to celebrate religious holidays even in times of economic hardship. In doing so, they challenge conventional narrow understandings of

religion as a set of beliefs in God as well as clear-cut distinctions between Hindu and Muslim traditions: 'accustomed to perceiving Hinduism and Islam as fixed, monolithic and distinct categories, one often forgets that a long and complex historical process precedes the comparatively recent emergence of the two main religious blocs in South Asia' (Khan 2004: 1).

Emancipating women in an initial stage of transformation rather populate a space of liminality in which religion impacts on their political agency through psychological affirmation and healing, which helps them in turn to transcend religious and communal barriers. Prominent examples of such liminal spaces are *dargah*s, shrines of Muslim saints of which Malik (2003: 377) notes that they over time acquired 'therapeutic, social, economic and political significance; and in contrast to mosques, they provide an alternative source of communication and identity for women'. While they were initially linked to Islamic Sufi traditions, their contemporary spiritual significance is wider and often ambiguously liminal, partly for the very reason that they are organized around non-religious categories such as gender.

For their political implications, such liminal spaces lately attracted quite some attention among scholars of South Asia; For the case of Gujarat, Burman (2005) and Engineer (1989) for instance collected many examples of liminality, ranging from an abundance of shared spaces—such as *dargah*s, shrines of saints such as Mir Datar visited by followers of any faith, to whole communities observing 'unorthodox' Islamic traditions—such as the rural Sunni caste mentioned above which celebrates Ashura and Diwali. Mayaram summarizes this literature:

> Much of the academic writing [...] tends to structure the subcontinental experience into the categorical identities of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'. Groups are either one or the other. [...] Both the nationalist and nineteenth-century social reform movements anchored themselves in [this] tradition, seeking to define identities in terms of authenticities. [...] This conceptualization of identity, however, tends to be grounded in singularity and does not incorporate the layers, the plural character of existential liminality [...], a potentially anti-structural questioning of categorical identities, in this case 'Hindu' and 'Musalman'. Folk traditions both derive from and contest 'great traditional' practice. (Mayaram 1997: 4ff and 38f)

Today, however, liminal communities and shared spaces are under severe stress, as political Islam as well as political Hinduism (both of the Gandhian and the *Hindutva* variety) frequently lead to attempts of purification. In the 2002 riots, *dargah*s were more frequently targeted than mosques, and—eased by socio-structural modernization and political factors—renewed orthodoxy puts increasing stress on customary traditions. In the aftermath of the 2002 riots, everyday syncretistic and intercommunal interactions at shared liminal spaces, therefore, decreased markedly.

Simultaneously, liminality also came under stress from within the hearts and minds of believers as well. While emancipating women in the early stages of transformation held syncretistic beliefs and followed liminal practices, dynamics of in-group identification and intergroup evaluation shifted their spirituality later on. Apart from the relative relevance of being Muslim, the psychometric scales used during my fieldwork allow an assessment of the intensity of belonging: many emancipating women score particularly high on that scale (in one case in the initial stage of transformation more than one standard deviation above average of the z-distribution) and have a considerably bleaker outlook on the shared future of Hindus and Muslims than other interviewees (in one case as low as half a standard deviation below average of the z-distribution). The narrative interviews confirm these psychometrics; Basma, a grassroots activist from Ahmedabad, for instance told me:

> Earlier, I thought rather good of our Hindu neighbours, [...] even to [my earlier employer] I had such a good relationship. If I lacked anything and asked for a loan, he immediately emptied his pockets and even bailed me out. [...] Wages were very good. But after 2002, I rather thought: what kind of people are [Hindus]—if they were sincere, they wouldn't have done this. So many dead after just three days! (Basma: Interview with Author)

Basma went on to describe how she used to invite all her Hindu neighbours for Id-ul-Fitr at the end of Ramadan, how they exchanged gifts and ate Biriyani together—in the context of caste-bound assumptions of purity a remarkable event in North India. But 'all that is gone;

[there remains only] bitterness'. Today, she is very sceptical of Hindus and wishes to live among Muslims only. She reduced her visits to *dargah*s and other liminal spaces in favour of more orthodox spiritual options offered in her immediate surroundings in the relief camp.

Yet, if it only were that simple! Often, the orthodoxy found in the camp is not easy to live with, for women who begin to transform into peace activists like Basma or challenge patriarchal processes of production like Nazeema. When the *muezzin* called for prayer through the crackling loudspeaker of the camp's mosque during our interview, Nazeema, for instance, took the opportunity to let off her frustration about local religious leadership:

> Whenever the *maulana* appears and says 'if you roam around [in public] this or that will happen', [I think:] I too have a right to live my life, I too have human rights. [...] There is that Muslim Personal Law Board, which regulates some things for Muslims—some good, some rather not. [...] When, for example, Hindus attack Muslims and kill them, then they could support us, could do something for us. But often, they just oppress us. (Nazeema: Interview with Author)

Then again, spirituality remains an important source of strength for emancipating women—patriarchal opposition notwithstanding. The flavour of spirituality and beliefs might change (as we will see in detail in the next section on Islamic feminism), but religion as such remained hugely important for these women (at least until they entered the third stage of transformation). Nazeema concluded the interview by commenting:

> [I take strength] from religion. I mean: after all what happened, I haven't lost my faith [...] I have not given it up. [...] If you pray, your problems fade. I pray the morning prayers at eight o'clock on my own [...] and feel very calm and relaxed, feel that my day and my work will turn out well. [...] And I also [take strength] from the community, through the community. I would never question the community. [But] the community says until today that I should do this or that as a widow [and] whoever turned an activist was accused 'but you are a Muslima!' and I am also a widow, a lone woman, so everyone demanded that it isn't good if I work, have a job. Womenfolk should not enter the public. [After a long while] Being Muslim is so deep in my heart, there develop such tensions now—what should I do? (Nazeema: Interview with Author)

In these very tensions between their in-groups' demands and their own spirituality, in the contradictions of their dependence on and identification with their community as well as through exposure to orthodox rejection of their political agency, emancipating women experience the ambivalence of the sacred as a personal dynamic—and thus tell a story which moves beyond the dichotomy of faith-based actors on one side and secular technocrats on the other.

Islamic Feminism

Unsurprisingly, the tensions with patriarchy in their in-group also had a profound effect on the way in which emancipating women's religious identities impacted on and, even more, were transformed by their political agency. While they started as peace activists, emancipating women soon transformed into women's rights' activists, due to the considerable difficulties they experienced on their way. Halah, for example, further complained:

> In my home was this atmosphere that especially my parents take a lot from religion. [Pause] that 'you should not do such a work, it would be against'. Since when I started and joined [NGO], many problems came up. In this work I am doing [now], you sometimes come back home at eight o'clock [in the evening], sometimes you leave at seven. So this created a permanent discussion at home. [...] And even if my parents did talk less about it [eventually], other people did. (Halah: Interview with Author)

All emancipating women faced similar challenges while becoming self-efficate peace activists. For younger women and widows alike, it was mainly the insistence of neighbours or family members on *purdah* which made life difficult: while this term does not usually mean the total separation of men and women in Gujarat as it does in other parts of the subcontinent, it still denotes a strategic gender politics which restricts the public exposure of women and women's bodies. This strategy is in direct conflict with, say, street theatre actresses who discover the expressive quality of their body (as described in the next section). Thus,

emancipation from victimization quickly developed into an attempt of emancipation from religio-patriarchal structures, and among scholars of gender and conflict 'there is, critically, acute awareness of how community and women's issues chafe abrasively against each other, particularly in the wake of heightened communal consciousness and targeted violence' (R. Robinson 2005: 209).

The tensions between community and women's activism led many emancipating women to embrace—in a second stage, after liminality—Islamic feminism, a 'feminism [which] argues that the Qur'an affirms the principle of equality of all human beings, and that the practice of equality between women and men (and other categories of people) has been impeded or subverted by patriarchal ideas (ideology) and practices' (Badran 2009: 247). In this second stage, an Islamic ethic of (gender) equality thus became unequivocally central to the narratives of emancipating women, as the following quote by Iman exemplifies:

> If you look at Islam, then, in a way, there is equality. [Cross speech] if we look into Hindu religion, then there are chastity boundaries through castism, there are Dalits. These kinds of divisions are there. But in Muslim religion there is nothing like this. [...] [But] there is a lot of superstition—*Interviewer: superstition?*—yes. Because it is like this, right, that we do not try to think about that time [of the Quran], [about the fact] that the world of the Prophet's Islam is gone now. [...] I do not like this approach. And also not that women are given the second place in [this] Islam. (Iman: Interview with Author)

Iman, who earned her literacy in a small-town *madrassa*, and went to college after 2002 while starting to work for a local NGO, calls for a re-reading of the Quran with special emphasis on gender issues. Interestingly, her way of 'being Muslim and working for peace' thus began to structurally resemble that of faith-based actors: both base their missions, visions and day-to-day activities in religious beliefs and in (or in opposition to) in-group dynamics. In contrast to faith-based actors, however, emancipating women do not root their moral convictions in apocalyptic beliefs about the afterlife. Instead, they attempt to appropriate the imperative of equality for their personal process of emancipation by dynamically re-interpreting ethical commandments. Inspired by the difficulties

of her own emancipation, an explicitly religious ethic of (gender) equality becomes crucial to her activism in this intermediary stage. When I asked Iman to explain the practical consequences of her beliefs, she told me:

> [I like] reading *namaz*. And that you keep your whole body well covered with clothes; to wear a headscarf is a very good thing about Islam. Not in terms of anyone prescribing: 'wear the *nikab*!' Such talk was absent from my home. But to cover oneself is something good, [...] not to exhibit yourself in public. [But] in my kind of Islam, wearing a veil is not enforced—that's precisely why I wear it! (Iman: Interview with Author)

Such a transformation of narrow moral prescriptions into broader ethical orientations—cover yourself, but do not force the wearing of *nikab* (veil covering the face)—was a typical feature of many narratives in the second stage of transformation. Meanwhile, liminality and the spiritual experience (and at times, healing power) found at *dargahs* is not central anymore to the religiousness of Islamic feminists. Instead, an idea of justice—God's justice—becomes paramount for both the interpretation of sacred scriptures and everyday agency.

One reason for this embrace of Islamic feminism was quite pragmatic and instrumental: if at all, their in-group might tolerate an emancipation of women when justified in Islamic terms—but not if this is associated with any perceived neglect of religion. At the same time, however, this choice should not be reduced to a purely instrumental one: Islam was also truly dear to emancipating women and they wanted to remain within the realm of religion—if not necessarily in the version of religion their patriarchal counterparts advertised. Badran thus notes that:

> The feminisms Muslim women have created are feminisms of their own. They were not 'Western;' they are not derivative. Religion from the very start has been integral to the feminisms that Muslim women have constructed, both explicitly and implicitly. (Badran 2009: 2)

During this second stage of transformation, emancipating women consequently also used different Hindi/Urdu terms to describe their activism (McGregor 1993): if they talked earlier about *shanti*, a kind of holistic calmness with an undertone of cosmic balance, often justifying

structural violence like castism or patriarchy, they now talk about *aman*, meaning only absence of violence without any religious implication. Quite a few of them simply demanded *nyay*: all-encompassing justice.

The latter term reinforces that the spirituality which inspires emancipating women's politics in this intermediary stage demands a politics of justice: 'Islamic feminism, which derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence' (Badran 2009: 242). For women who were existentially affected by violence as victims, and similarly existentially restricted by patriarchal convention on their way to self-efficacy and political agency, Islamic feminism was not simply one cause they chose to fight for among many. The strive for gender justice on Quranic terms was—given their biography—a far more meaningful endeavour for them: 'Islamic feminists promote gender equality along a more fluid public-private continuum, promoting an egalitarian model of both family and society. They thus do not conceptualize a public-private division' (Badran 2009: 4)—and thus emancipating women could project their own lives as their biggest success story.

However, this conflation of private and public agency also complicated emancipating women's project. Many scholars have written about the fact that 'the relationship of women to politicized religion is paradoxical and complex. Religious politics has created opportunities for women's activism while simultaneously undermining women's autonomy' (Basu 1999: 4; cf. Jeffery 1999; Hasan and Menon 2005). As is clear in the case of the women discussed in this chapter, 'involvement in politicized religion may also enable women to work with others beyond the immediate family and to develop self-confidence and a sense of empowerment' (Jeffery 1999: 229). Therefore, 'the question is not whether women are victims or agents but, rather, what sorts of agents women can be despite their subordination' (Jeffery 1999: 223)—and 'feminists must also be conscious of—and their activism must also be informed by—the disparity between women's accounts of their relationship with religion and the dominant thread of women's activism, which sees religion primarily as a source of oppression' (Shaheed 1999: 160). Nevertheless, it becomes apparent that the role of religion in emancipating women's

struggles is intricately linked to their in-group, particularly after 2002. Basma explained:

> The main impulse was 2002. Afterwards I became very much a Muslima and a woman. [...] So my only identity at that time was that I am a Muslima, and that is why [NGO] needed me. (Basma: Interview with Author)

This quote illustrates the core dilemma emancipating women are faced with: would they not have categorized themselves as Muslims, they would not have been of any interest to those NGOs which discovered Muslim communities as new target groups after 2002. But at the same time, joining such NGOs meant opposition to the family and community and thus jumpstarted emancipation not only from victimization and passivity, but also from patriarchy. To enter this path through the gate of Islamic feminism allowed emancipating women to take one step at a time—may be the only socially as well as psychologically viable strategy. However, since Muslimness was as much a precondition as an obstacle in their narrative, the relation to their in-group remained ambivalent: they can neither dismiss group identification nor uphold an unbroken relation to their community. While they were seen primarily as Muslims by others, emancipating women consequently identified themselves primarily as women when I asked them to choose among several self-categorization alternatives.

This ambivalence has its psychometric correlates in distinctly low measures for dominance and resonance: emancipating women were in the end neither able to considerably influence their in-group, nor did they meet much confirmation. Even when they—as Islamic feminists—remained firmly in the realm of religion, their struggle was a lonely one. If we arrange emancipating women's psychometric questionnaires on a timeline to construct a hypothetical dynamic (as suggested in the first section of this chapter), we realize further that typically, groupness fades over time (from a small positive effect size to non-descript) while tolerance towards gendered irritations of role models rises (from a small negative effect size to average). Dominance and social resonance, however, decline (from a small positive to a medium negative and from a small negative to a medium negative effect size respectively, always compared

to other interviewees). These psychometrics highlight the difficulties of transformation: while the influence of religious beliefs increases in form of Islamic feminism, belonging to other Muslims increasingly becomes a problem for emancipating women.

Islamic feminism, therefore, offered them more fruitful ways to counter patriarchal demands than liminality—but these opportunities remain ambivalent and were personally more challenging than the solace found at the shrines. This will be explored through an exemplary case study in the last section of this chapter.

Dancing in the Street

The transformation of some emancipating women did not stop with the adoption of Islamic feminism and 'the taking up of specific forms of ethical self-fashioning [such as Islamic feminism] should be understood within the context of a variety of available, and perhaps competing, styles and practices [...] as well as a broader field of politics. Struggle, ambivalence, incoherence and failure must also receive attention in the study of everyday religiousness' (Osella and Soares 2010: 11). To conclude this chapter, I therefore turn to personal narratives again and look at the particular struggles, ambivalences and incoherencies of one particular emancipating woman: Fauzia, a young street theatre actress in her twenties, who captures emancipating women's experience in a nutshell.

Fauzia comes from a family of urban lower-class Muslims and lived with her parents and seven siblings in one of the Muslim-majority neighbourhoods of Ahmedabad—'a complete Ghetto' as she called it. At the time of our interview, she was a freelancing street theatre actress and local activist, whose name repeatedly came up in my conversations with all kinds of NGO representatives during my field research; I was keen to finally meet her in person. When I met her, we incidentally sat down in front of the municipal Tagore Hall, which hosted a big 'anti-terrorism conference' organized by the Jamaat Ulema-e-Hind only a few days before; talking to this young women in the same locality at which I observed hundreds of men from all of Gujarat, clad in white Shalwar

Kameez, listening to emotional speeches on peace in Islam, had its own peculiar charm. Before our conversation turned to the pious men and Fauzia's anger about them, however, I asked her to tell me her story. Like other emancipating women, she began quite straightforwardly:

> How should I begin? Actually this is a very short story. When the riots of 2002 happened in Gujarat, I had no clue that my life was going to change that fast. During these days, I had just finished my studies [...] and a friend of mine told me: '[Fauzia], in case you want to find a job, I got some interview papers [for a NGO position] here. It would be good if you would take the interview'. All right, I gave it a try [and got accepted]. [...] Then I asked my dad [for permission]; [he just said] if you like to, go for it—and if it does not work out, it won't be a problem either. [...] I told him it would mean one year of training on the job, but he agreed [nevertheless]. (Fauzia: Interview with Author)

Fauzia's story is representative of the beginnings of the most emancipating women's peace activism. In her case, a secular Marxist NGO was looking for inroads into riot-affected Muslim communities and began to recruit grass-root-level activists. The NGO provided her with a training programme, which combined social services with 'awareness raising' about communalism, culture and labour relations. The programme was designed as a cross-cutting initiative and addressed mainly Muslims and Dalits, both men and women. Apart from training new grass-root workers like Fauzia, the organization staged demonstrations and held conferences about post-riot Gujarat, with the active help of its new Muslim members. Initially, Fauzia was so attracted by the job opportunity and the organization's ideology that she voluntarily set up a reading circle and repetitory group for Marxist literature once the official training ended. Her gratitude to the organization which trained and later employed her was apparent throughout much of our interview:

> When I joined, it was predominantly because I am a Muslima. At that time, the necessity was to work with both Muslim children and women and with Dalit boys and girls in our locality. That [...] is why the [NGO] got interested in me. [...] And then the [NGO] began to give me a proper understanding. And the work I did for [NGO] for five years—I got the job since my only identity at that time was that I am a Muslima [...] But I also joined by heart. [...] From childhood on, it was [made] clear [to me] that Hindus are like this or that, we are different, they drink alcohol

> etc. Many abusive prejudices like that. [...] It never occurred to me that I might be prejudiced. [...] Only when I joined [NGO], after I met these people [Dalits and other activists] I began to comprehend [communalism] [...]. So these meetings, the conversations, they changed me completely. In five years I personally changed completely. (Fauzia: Interview with Author)

One major facet of this change over the years was that Fauzia shed many of her religious beliefs under the impact of a staunchly Marxist training. While a religious ethic was a necessary strategy to stabilize an intermediary step of transformation for her as well (including her exploration of gender equality in the framework of *ijthihad* [independent reasoning] and Islamic feminism), it ultimately did not last and was replaced by a secular justification of equality and women's emancipation:

> Right now, I do not believe that there is Allah or any god. That much I became atheist. A few per cent still hold that there might truly be something transcendent, but they will also go. [This is] because my family is completely religious, they believe totally in Allah, pray all five prayers a day, fast during Ramadan. So a few per cent are still there from this direction and will prevent me from becoming 100 per cent atheist. (Fauzia: Interview with Author)

If we go beyond the face value of her statement, however, one can see the very personal ambivalences which hinder Fauzia from becoming '100 per cent atheist'. It was not only her orthodox and patriarchal family which put obstacles in her way; at one point in our interview, she also turned very musing and remarked thoughtfully:

> I stopped trying to bring these [religious, spiritual] topics up [in my NGO]. The group was acknowledging that they exist, but it was not a matter of much passion. [Instead] they urged me to close my mind and heart against these [religious feelings]. At times I spent the whole night thinking about it, though... (Fauzia: Interview with Author)

The perception that it was impossible to even discuss religion in her organization finally made her quit the job. At the time of our conversation, she was shopping around for a more suitable organization in which her struggle with religion was better accommodated (for these tensions between Muslim feminism(s) and the broader women's movement in

India see Kirmani 2011). Fauzia's example thus not least demonstrates how 'women's contained mobilization often (but not always) appears passive or responsive, with women being mobilized around agendas managed by others, rather than actively mobilizing around their own agendas' (Jeffery 1999: 235). This is not only the case for politicized religion and Islamic feminism, but equally true for secular NGOs and their respective 'missions and visions'.

What remains is, however, Fauzia's strong sense of self-efficacy, of individuality and of embodied emancipation, expressed through street theatre. It was important for her to become an Islamic feminist, and it was equally, if not more, important for her to work for a Marxist NGO during her journey from the 'Muslim ghetto' into political activism in Ahmedabad and elsewhere. On her way, she was questioned and questioned herself. She experienced strong opposition and the frustration of having very little influence; in the Giessen Test, she shows particularly low dominance even for emancipating women (one standard deviation below average of the z-distribution) and low social resonance (half a standard deviation below average of the z-distribution). But still: today, she is *dancing in the street*, as she likes to call her political theatre in the vernacular. This theatre is her success, her emancipation, her desire.

To sum up: emancipating women develop agency and self-efficacy against the backdrop of victimization and structural patriarchy and finally project their biography as an exemplary success of peace activism. In a hypothetical chronology, event salience statistics show typical shifts in the relative frequency, relative importance and centrality of key events during this process; namely between the generalized events 2002 riots, own victimization, NGO intervention and peace activism. The role of religious beliefs changed in parallel: starting from a traditional and liminal religiousness, most women discovered the Islamic dogma of equality and temporarily used it to stabilize their emancipation—but ultimately turned away from religion. The dynamics of belonging reflect how difficult this process was on a psychological level, typically expressing fading groupness and rising tolerance towards new role models on the one hand and fading dominance and low resonance on the other, leaving us, in the end, with a rather ambivalent picture.

6

Doubting Professionals

> I, as an individual, [...] felt that just because I was Muslima I did shy away from taking position and did not work for the Muslim community. [...] You know in 2002, you feel that [pause] you feel responsible. (Amna: Interview with Author)

Nothing is Simple Anymore

So far, I have explored three different ways of 'being Muslim and working for peace' and dissected the dynamics of religious beliefs, spiritual practices and group dynamics as they typically intersect with each type's political agency. There is one more approach, however, a way chosen by some development professionals who might otherwise fit in with secular technocrats, but who developed severe doubts about their earlier stance towards religion after 2002. For these 'doubting professionals', the riots initiated a journey to their own shadow, to those dimensions of one's being which were earlier suppressed and not lived. Unlike faith-based actors and secular technocrats, their religious identity did not only impact their politics, but was in turn transformed by their activism, too. In contrast to emancipating women, however—whose identities were also transformed by activism—doubting professionals adapted an increased and holistic spirituality.

This chapter explores the peculiar aesthetic religiousness permeating their politics, which emphasizes introspection into the 'beauty of

Islam'. To doubting professionals, religion is neither about details of the good (ethics) nor about details of the truth (metaphysics); they are instead concerned with the *beauty* of the good and the truth (aesthetics) and would typically equate religion with calm, comfort and a feeling of coherence (for this kind of Islamic spirituality see the seminal study of Kermani 1999; this terminology should, however, not be confused with very specific European references to 'aesthetic religion'; for these see Müller 1999). This first section introduces doubting professionals' complex efforts to contextualize the 2002 riots. The following section focuses on how 2002 challenged the group-related aspects of their religious identities, while section three explores the beliefs and spiritual practices which doubting professionals (re-)discovered in the post-2002 years. The last section provides insights into their remaining worries about religion, politics and the future of Gujarat.

What triggered these former secular technocrats to embark on an uncertain journey and what experiences shaped their passage? Mariam, a well-established, middle-aged NGO employee summarized the beginnings of her personal transition:

> I saw [...] communal conflict and, you know, [...] this is how I understood my own identity. Because again and again people started asking me: who are you, who are you? And till then, that time I was [age] years old, I never knew who I am. Because for me, I was born as a Muslim, my family was Muslim, but it was very personal [...] and we never carried our identities. (Mariam: Interview with Author)

In most cases, doubting professionals' engagement with peacebuilding repeatedly challenged their own Muslimness. These challenges were found both in professional literature—which doubting professionals came in contact with on their way into explicit peacebuilding—and articulated by colleagues and beneficiaries within their rehabilitation projects. Not only was the distinction of professional work in and on conflict as new to them as to most other activists in Gujarat—they earlier worked on other social issues on the wide agenda of 'development'. No, engaging with this new field also resonated with doubting professionals' personal religious identities, as Mariam's statement demonstrates.

Yet doubting professionals were able to actively embrace these challenges—which sets them apart from equally challenged emancipating women. As they developed a holistic–aesthetical spirituality and a feeling of responsibility for their in-group, they did neither need religious beliefs for detailed moral guidance nor did their psychological stability rely on high groupness. On the contrary: doubting professionals are the only type of activists in this study who have—psychologically speaking—a secure externalized standpoint towards religion and are thus able to fully embrace its ambivalence—in order to transform the same into ambiguity (a distinction I will introduce in a few pages). They do not have to take sides, because they stand besides; they can appreciate ambiguity because they do not suffer from psychological ambivalence the way emancipating women do as a consequence of their victimization. Unlike faith-based actors and secular technocrats, the identities of doubting professionals are in flux; unlike emancipating women, they do not turn away from religion, but discover within its realm a 'beautiful' language to express the underpinnings of their activism.

At the beginning of our conversations, doubting professionals usually narrated one particular kind of success story: the initiation of (cross-community) religious education projects. Often, they themselves participated actively in such learning endeavours, as Hakim, whose harsh criticism of thoughtless NGO interventions was already presented in the introduction, emphasizes:

> [Only] as we went into deep and we tried to learn and we were oriented in the social work and all this background, with the researches and the studies [...] [we] then said that we should also take up this issue [of religion in communal conflict]. (Hakim: Interview with Author)

Doubting professionals organize workshops on Islam, in part for Muslims, in part for both Muslims and Hindus. They invite the two communities to celebrate their festivals together, and some initiate explicit interfaith dialogues. Abdul, a strategy advisor for an international NGO, recounted his approach:

> See, while working with the Muslims and all that we have been able to bring together the people as well from Dalits as well as Muslim communities together. By explaining all these things by giving analysis of whatever [incomprehensible word] has happened, by taking the example from their life and what have gone through, and of course what the religion itself says about peace and all that. Because in Muslim religion, it is a precondition that even you can't have, as simple as that, you can't fulfil your stomach as long as your neighbour is not fulfilled, he is not, he is hungry. So that a religion can't talk about war and violence and this thing and that thing. (Abdul: Interview with Author)

Religious education was not taken lightly by Abdul—and neither did he and other doubting professionals simply set out to teach 'ignorant Muslim' target groups. To the contrary: they themselves were questioned and had to learn how to respond if people challenged their Muslimness; religious education was truly a shared endeavour. Mariam, a female activist, who earlier worked mainly with Hindu women, remembered:

> We took part in discussions with the youth [...] When I spoke about democratic rights, about what could be the role of youth in nation-building, about issues of the youth, about syncretistic culture and creating a harmonic atmosphere, then many boys came and talked back to me: you seem not to be a Muslima. That is to say, they were holding a concept of Muslima into which I did not fit. This always happens. But then slowly they began to realize that actually a Muslima is talking this way. [...] Then we gathered religious leaders and communal people and told them about the respective other community's affairs. [...] Slowly they began to understand these things. (Mariam: Interview with Author)

Learning about one's own as much as about the religion of others (be they other Muslims or non-Muslims) went beyond mere talking; many projects of doubting professionals turned very practical in their efforts of religious education. Mariam reflects on these issues:

> Initially of course, one wanted to reconcile. [...] So we started working and I told you we [...] brought both the communities together. First thing that was the month of Ramadan, so we were fasting, so we invited all our Hindu friends, you know who have fought at the border side, so we invited both the communities and broke the fast. [...] Lot of Hindus came. It was a huge number, and they were all from the neighbours and they were so happy and then they hugged each other and they apologized and said 'we are very sorry, for what people have done to you' [...] and

> there are hundreds of such stories, which we did and we tried to bring both the communities together. (Mariam: Interview with Author)

The commonality of doubting professionals' success stories, therefore, lies precisely in this focus on 'understanding'. Like other interviewees, doubting professionals also provided immediate relief and extensively worked in the field of human rights advocacy. But closest to their hearts are those initiatives that spread a constructive understanding of religion—initially inside their own NGOs, later on in broader society.

Salience statistics confirm that the most frequent and the most important events in doubting professionals' stories were indeed neither violence nor peace. Instead, a cluster of events under the common theme of 'understanding' was crucial: processes of reflection, a discovery of religious sources, political analyses and similar knowledge- and learning-related events. The development of understanding (of religion, of violence, of identities, etc.) is paramount for doubting professionals and connects the parts of their stories about the 2002 riots with their biography of activism. One example, in which the strategy advisor Abdul tried to capture the ambivalence of religion, is illustrated in this lengthy quote:

> If you look at the Muslim community, then the education of the people is very poor, they are illiterate and act by taking everything from religion. They would be very religious. Because from childhood on, kids go to *madrassas*. [...] Children are very learned in the Quran. But the Quran is in Arabic, and [...] we live in Gujarat, our mother tongue is Gujarati, so why would we want to tell in Arabic? [...] [And] if you talk about the Islam of 1400 years back, then it does not fit the present times. [...] An Islamic ethic would consist of mercy, compassion, equality, education—all this was already proclaimed 1400 years back. [But] people are very much in the grasp of religion, and take for true whatever thing the *maulana* say. [...] This way intolerance is planted inside people and by and large riots will be created; in this way we have seen so much sorrow today. [...]
>
> After we made this whole analysis, we felt that [...] anyway, will people achieve justice? In our country, juridical processes are very complex. They take very long, although we will meet justice if we remain strong. But it is very difficult to develop this understanding inside people. There is also envy, also fear which was created. [...] Men find no jobs, so what can women cook, how will the education of children

> be? [...] So then these people's energy cools down and they claim that if it is Allah's will then live this way and do not do anything. And many people became very religious, after this [2002] happened. [...] [But] Islam has these great values. In Islam there is the doctrine that you should revere the numinous; there is the teaching of equality, also the issue of freedom. There is even the equality of women, which I like very much. These are the core values. About all these basic things [...] we hold meetings, we put our effort in this. To give these people an understanding. (Abdul: Interview with Author)

On the one hand, this quote presents religion as part of the vicious cycle of victimization, marginalization and violence—on the other hand, Abdul claims that Islamic ethic could provide a source of strength and guidance. He tried to resolve the ambivalence by taking into account socio-economic and educational factors: educated people can make good use of religion (because they can adapt religious ethic to modern times), while the poor remain in the grasp of 1,400 years' of backwardness. Consequently, (religious) education is the goal of intervention for doubting professionals. Mariam, who only became an activist post-2002, reports how crucial her own readings in religious literature and literature on religions were during the initial steps of her work, which at the time of our interview had led to the formation of her own NGO:

> Before 2002 happened, I had finished the second part of my master's degree; I was also teaching in a school. And after this carnage happened, [I wondered] in what kind of situation Gujarat was thrown; there was always the thought: why? [...] And could this not change? [...] Because I always had a passion for reading, I started to read and acquired the understanding that the riots happened this way. [...] But [...] we did not know that an organization would develop and that we would work on these issues. [...] Slowly, I realized that I would like to work in this way. Initially, I did not have a complete picture. There was anger, frustration, fear. (Mariam: Interview with Author)

Of course, interviewees of other types also tried to understand what happened in 2002. But in contrast to faith-based actors and secular technocrats, doubting professionals got personally and emotionally involved in this journey of understanding; their conclusions remained open and unclear for a long time because the reflection process went rather deep. Often, the dense event structures of their narratives reveal

two intertwined causal chains: one chain tells a story of peace activism and another one a story of the 2002 riots. Both stories only partially overlap, but each is in itself more complex than most other interviewees' whole narrative. Such partial independence of two narrative strains in one story should not be confused with the parallel causality found in faith-based actors' interviews: doubting professionals remain strictly narrative in their rhetoric, while faith-based actors tell two parallel stories in distinctive semantics. The latter thus create separate causal chains, while doubting professionals narrate a single, but complex story, in which peace activism has more preconditions than the events of 2002 and 2002 is more consequential than a mere initiative moment for peace activism.

In addition, doubting professionals typically emphasize context factors and draw ambivalent conclusions, influenced by the academic consensus evolving around the notion of an ambivalence of the sacred, with which many of them were familiar. The following explanation of Mariam's own biography shows exemplary argumentation strategies for doubting professionals:

> *Interviewer: First I would be interested if you can tell your story. Basically, how did you involve yourself in that peace work?*—It was beyond 2002, it was even before that, because it was, in 1992, there was a Babri Masjid. In the media, and it was a very important event, because [pause]. Firstly, that I would say I got involved in all that peacebuilding work or understanding that whole world of conflict, because I came to Gujarat. I came to Gujarat from [another state] [...] and—before that I had never experienced anything like this, like communal riots. I have never been exposed to it. So *Hindutva* forces and all that. [...] I used to ask my father that why are we staying in this big ghetto, because at that time we were staying at a place called [location]. Exclusively that colony was meant for Muslims. [...] So I said: 'Father, before that we have never been to such an area where everybody is Muslim, I don't like this'. And my father said: 'You don't know, you are in *Gujarat*. You will understand later'. (Mariam: Interview with Author)

Three aspects in Mariam's account are typical for doubting professionals' understanding of religion and conflict: the contextualization in history (referring to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya), in location ('you are in *Gujarat*') and finally the parallelization of 'peacebuilding work' and 'understanding that whole world of conflict'. Many

doubting professionals emphasized very explicitly that context matters and that 'the community, the culture, the culture of that particular geographical area has a lot of bearing on behaviour' as another activist made clear, before adding that behaviour is also 'not always so much defined by the religion'. One doubting professional even said that 'one understands Islam and the Quran only by looking at the beliefs people actually profess to'—rather than the other way round, as faith-based actors would probably prefer it.

Such contextualization typically led to a balanced assessment of the contemporary situation: while doubting professionals put religion into context, they also argue that it should not be left aside totally. This balanced view on religion inspired a change in their organizations' interventions towards explicit peacebuilding. Firdauz, who works close to Halol in district Panchmahal, where this book began, reported:

> As a team today there is very strong consensus and very strong commitment to absolutely work on this issue [of religion and conflict]. And not only make it a cross-cutting issue and say, there was a conflict in [district] and Panchmahal, so we start working with that community. Because we started working with that community and there was lot of risk and we were beaten up two, three months back, we were attacked and all those are part of it. So earlier those things used to really scare the team, in terms of not knowing how to handle it. For other reasons there were the meetings, because we were working on land rights and all the conflicts—but this was a different kind of conflict and we did know how to handle it. [...] Today the team says we have to learn how to deal with it in a better way. [...] That we have to ask, you know we have to ask that community to become morally responsible. So we have to ask for an apology, a kind of a public apology, and that is the process. I mean that is the stand [...] which [NGO] has taken. (Firdauz: Interview with Author)

Earlier, Firdauz's NGO merely extended their established project pattern to Muslim communities. But after their office was attacked, they realized that classic interventions were not enough and they began to make communalism an explicit issue. This change in approach necessitated an often painful and complex process of organizational change, a process in which doubting professionals developed considerable leadership—an aspect of their story which will be explored in the next section.

Feeling Responsible

Even though many doubting professionals held high positions in their organizations, they had to regain agency in a dynamic which, at times, resembled the one experienced by emancipating women. Doubting professionals had to recover their self-efficacy not so much after victimization—only one of them was himself a direct victim of the 2002 riots—but from the shock of having been unaware of and caught off guard with vehemence. The following account by Amna, a well-established figure in the Gujarati 'peace community' and member of the syncretistic Bohra community is exemplary of this shock and the recovery processes of reflection and re-orientation (my emphases; for a longer version of her story—alongside that of Nazeema—see Susewind 2011):

> So all this *was happening* and then of course this 2002. What happened in 2002 it was really, really [pause] I mean it shook us all, because the *immediate realization* was that all the groups that we had in our field area, how insensitive they were to what had happened, to a particular community. Some of them were naive but some of them were almost feeling that: Okay, whatever happened has happened for good. This is what they deserve. [...] Oh it did not make sense. Because at a different level there were very senior people who had some kind of political orientation and social orientation. [...] And then *one* really *started thinking*: is this what [NGO] should be all about? [...] So as a result of all this, what *we felt*: it is, it is absolutely important to work on this issue, and this is the first time that *I felt*, *I am saying: I am going to* take a stand and a position. (Amna: Interview with Author)

Amna's recovery of agency can even be traced on the level of grammar: first, something 'was happening' (an expression of the unexpected) and 'immediately' caused a 'realization' (as an exigent, uncontrollable consequence). Only after a few sentences, she attributes subjectivity: initially to an impersonal actor ('one started thinking'), then in the first person plural ('we felt') and finally as individual agency ('I felt, I am saying: I am going to').

Despite the fact that doubting professionals have been caught off guard by the riots, their ability to act returns and it does so precisely once interviewees actively chose perspective and develop understanding. Regaining agency also affects their personal identities and beliefs,

but not in a destructive sense: while emancipating women experienced the ambivalence of the sacred in the tensions between their spirituality and the patriarchal pressures of their in-group (thus forming a close connection between the ambivalence of the sacred and the ambivalence of victimhood), doubting professionals live through a different conflict with and for religion. In their story, former certainties about religion, beliefs, spirituality and group dynamics were cast in radical doubts. Again, Amna's journey is exemplary. In one of the most complex narratives I recorded during my research, she begins with key events from her childhood:

> I would like to start by saying that, you know, from where I got the inspiration. And that is very much me and my family itself, from my mother and my aunt. [...] She was, I mean, she was very very *pakka* [proper] of her prayers, she never missed any prayer and all that. Even now, she is [X] years old now. And her—lot of people used to say [...] 'you don't look like a Muslim'. You know since childhood I had really heard about that, you know 'you don't look like a Muslim'. And my mother just used to laugh and say, that well, we all are human beings, so nobody looks like a Hindu or a Muslim. But at times she also used to get very angry and she said: 'what do you mean by what Muslims have? Some horns?' (Amna: Interview with Author)

Social activism has a long tradition in Amna's family. Especially her mother was driven by a deep-seated humanism and held the firm conviction that only the alleviation of suffering is important—irrespective of the identity of those who suffer. 'We are all human beings' was and is a core value for Amna, a value also rigorously applied to her personal affairs. After a first outbreak of communal riots in Gujarat in the 1970s, her father was bullied from his job as a government employee. The family was on the brink of falling apart, when her mother began to work as seamstress—a novelty in her century-old aristocratic lineage.

Yet while the inter-communal tensions in Gujarat rose further and further, Amna's mother continued to downplay the importance of religion in the matter. When the parents of Amna's best friend, a Brahmin girl, out of the blue banned contact among the two children, Amna's mother plead practical reasons as a pretext. When Amna was later denied a place in the college dorms due to her Muslim family name, her mother told

her not to bother but to look elsewhere for a room. Religion is a private matter in her family and when the daughter started her own NGO, she naturally worked against casteism, socio-economic exploitation and—in the tradition of mother and grandmother—in the women's movement, but never on issues of communalism or religion.

This tendency of having worked on any pressing issue other than communal tensions before 2002 is shared by most doubting professionals. Mariam recounted her initial reaction to the riots:

> You never thought that [Muslims] are a group which you need to work with. Then lots of questions came, even within the development sector. That we never thought about this group. We were working with tribals, we were working with Dalits, we were working with poor, other backward caste—but we never thought of Muslims. This was a debate which some of the very well-known development workers of Gujarat, like Teesta Setalvad, Gagan Sethi, Father Cedric [cross speech] So I think that was a question which I personally started asking. [...] I have never thought that we should work for Muslims or that because I am a Muslim, I should do something for them, it never occurred to me. [...] [But] my own identity [...] started surfacing. Which was very dominated before. [...] So I think that identity started surfacing for me and I used to think very strongly about my own community. [...] It started surfacing and I thought: 'yes, I am a Muslima and I have some responsibility for this community'. [...] The first time I had this. The thought: I have ignored it, and I am not going to ignore it any more. [...] I will do something for them, this is something, this is my moral obligation towards the community. [...] So that is what came to my mind.' (Mariam: Interview with Author)

Mariam's is an example in which the new interest in religious beliefs did not remain restricted to the professional level of the interviewee's work; for her, belonging to other Muslims became very personal. While all doubting professionals opened up to irritations of their religious identities, they did not transform in uniform ways: for some, 2002 impacted on their spirituality, for others it affected their relation to other Muslims, some others reported changes in both dimensions of religious identity. However, they were all influenced in some way or the other, which separates them from the self-reported unaffectedness of secular technocrats—the category most of them would have fallen under before the riots.

That not all doubting professionals reacted with rising groupness complicates the interpretation of their psychometric scales: most remained

inconsistent; low and high groupness, optimistic and pessimistic assessments of intergroup relations and all levels of permeability for—and resonance in—one's surrounding were present among doubting professionals. The ranking of possible categories of identification remained equally diverse: women activists and deliberate non-categorizer were among doubting professionals as much as those who put religion, caste or language as their first priority. The measure of dominance in the Giessen Test was comparatively low (a small negative effect size compared to other interviewees), probably reflecting the difficulties doubting professionals experience in the formidable challenge of organizational development.

Only one psychometric finding was robust enough to be reliably interpreted: doubting professionals' comparatively high tolerance towards ambiguity in all dimensions of the Inventory to Measure Ambiguity, especially towards irritations of role models (once with a medium, in the other two dimensions with a small positive effect size compared to other interviewees). This fact separates them from emancipating women, who at least initially show low tolerance towards ambiguity: ambivalence as well as ambiguity was forced upon both types of activists, but doubting professionals coped with it more successfully. For them, remarks like the following, by Amna, were typical:

> You know the fear that you have, you know coming from a minority [voice breaks], that [pause] though I was a leader, I could not [pause]. I am sorry—Interviewer: not at all [...]—That [pause] even working in that team, where the majority of the team came from the Hin [sic], the majority community. You know from the [pause] [...] I felt that I am a strong person and humanity and all that. One felt that—but we became so vulnerable. Because suddenly I felt that I wanted to work on this issue [of communal peace], I felt that it was very important, you know, to involve Muslims, and to work on this whole issue of conflict between Hindus and Muslims and even as one did not know how to go about it, it was very important to work on this issue. But I became very, kind of vulnerable, because I wasn't sure how the team was going to respond. (Amna: Interview with Author)

This quote illustrates how grammatical constructions—again—break down and how singular, plural and non-designated subjects are all invariably mixed, when it comes to the issue of belonging: 'occasions

of exceptional trauma and holocaust', writes Mayaram (1997: 193), also create 'a rupture of language'. The riots of 2002 not only disturbed doubting professionals' internalized assumptions about religion in general, but particularly their personal manner of 'being Muslim'.

However, while it took time until Amna regained confidence in her leadership, the institutional renewal was successful in the end. She gave up on former secularist certainties and lost parts of her old team on the way, but Amna and her organization are now determined to focus all their resources on the ambivalence of the sacred (a term she herself used). While I talked to her, a Dutch advisor in civic conflict resolution held a training in the meeting room next door; the NGO's entire core team was present. Earlier, Amna worked if at all implicitly *in* conflict, but now she increasingly develops projects *on* conflict. Besides strategic cross-cutting interventions, these projects venture into explicit peacebuilding, human rights advocacy among Muslims and, above all, religious education.

This naturally brought her into tensions and conflicts with the local *ulema*, and—like for emancipating women—changes in group identification were psychologically not easy for doubting professionals either. But, and this sets them apart, ambivalence was not part and parcel of victimization in their case—they rather chose to confront traditional clerical hierarchies because they felt responsible. Amna further told me:

> But again, coming back to why I, as an individual, felt so strongly about working on peace [...] felt that just because I was Muslima I did shy away from taking position and did not work for the Muslim community. [...] You know in 2002, you feel that [pause] you feel *responsible* [emotional breakdown follows; tape stopped for one minute]. (Amna: Interview with Author)

While doubting professionals' aesthetic-holistic spirituality and their liberal-professional background as seasoned development activists create tensions with orthodox Muslims, their feeling of being responsible for their in-group motivated them to endure these tensions. Since they do not need a close identification with their in-group for their psychological stability, this choice was a comparatively free one, which distinguishes

their way of 'being Muslim and working for peace' from the paths entered by other interviewees.

The reflexivity of doubting professionals and the—in contrast to emancipating women voluntarily—embrace of change further points to profound issues of class and educational differences among Gujarati Muslims. We already saw that this last type of activists can tolerate ambiguities in social conflicts, role model irritations and new experiences better than other activists. Why is that so? I can only speculate given my non-generalizing research design, but I believe one reason might be that, as often seasoned social workers from a middle- or upper-class background, doubting professionals evidently command other material and psychological resources than most victimized, emancipating women: nobody and nothing other than their reflexive feelings of responsibility forces them to take 2002 as an existential challenge. This enabled doubting professionals to develop an intuition for the ambivalence of the sacred out of choice and, more importantly, to cope with rather than being ripped apart by it.

The wider the basis of the psychological and material resources they can build upon, the easier it was for them to integrate the irritating ambivalence of the sacred into their biographies. On a personal level, they experienced spirituality and religious group dynamics as only one aspect of their lives, which allows them to look at the ambivalence of this aspect from other perspectives. This is not possible for faith-based actors nor for emancipating women, whose psychological dependence on the sacred—be it as ambivalent as it may—is adverse to the development of multi-perspective reflexivity.

A similar effect has recently been observed in other, quantitative studies as well and has been termed 'social identity complexity' by Roccas and Brewer (2002: 103), who write that 'high social identity complexity may help individuals confront threats to the status of any single in-group'. This in turn leads to higher tolerance of ambivalences and ambiguities of the kind I found among doubting professionals; Roccas and Brewer (2002: 97) claim that social identity complexity and its positive effects are 'affected by personal attributes [like] tolerance for ambiguity because

a complex representation of the in-groups provides a less clear-cut representation of the social world than a simple representation'. This form of identity allows reflexivity upon one's religion without implying psychological destabilization. While doubting professionals' relation to their in-group also changed after 2002, it therefore developed markedly different from the transformation of emancipating women. The reasons for this difference, I suspect, are both material and psychological in nature.

The Beauty of Islam

So far, I focussed on the group-related dimensions of doubting professionals' religious identities, that is, on the transformation of their feelings of belonging. This section takes up their beliefs and spirituality and analyses how these dimensions changed under the shock of having been caught off guard by the riots of 2002. Most doubting professionals have a liberal middle-class family background, which typically brought them (if at all) only in casual contact with religion. They also worked—in some cases for decades—in typical secular NGO frameworks. But even if they were not religiously raised, their growing professional interest in religion after the 2002 riots frequently inspired a reflection on their personal position on matters of faith. A typical story is told by Hakim, who grew up a-religiously, but discovered Islamic beliefs after 2002:

> I saw women, and livelihoods lost, and for example: there were people, and this is a big area, 3 lakh [30,000] population Muslim, and people had no food, and they were not regularly eating one meal and all this was affecting me really badly and then I moved around. Because before that I have never been to that, you know: what is Juhapura [one of the biggest Muslim ghettos in Ahmedabad; RS]. I just had a house, and as a typical donor and development worker, I did get out of my house and I travelled all over the world, but I didn't know what Juhapura is all about. And I was getting much and much—I was lost. So I was psychologically affected. [...] And I realized that I did not know anything about my faith. That thought came repeated again and again. And then I started reading, I started reading Quran, the English version of Quran, and then I started reading books. (Hakim: Interview with Author)

This quote shows how the discovery of religion is not only part of developing a professional understanding, nor did it merely touch upon the group-related dimensions of religious identity—it is also a process of acquiring a deeper self-conception in terms of belief and spirituality. Unlike secular technocrats, doubting professionals abandon their prior assumptions in this process. Yet unlike faith-based actors or emancipating women in the intermediary stage of transformation, they pick neither various orthodoxies nor Islamic feminism or any other specific theologies to back up their politics. What doubting professionals develop instead is a holistic-aesthetical spirituality. What are the main features of such spirituality? Dunia, the only convert in my sample, narrated the following Sufi anecdote:

> There are 700 pages in Quran. [...] The first word on the first page is 'bas'. Then you should stop reading. If you understand the following two words, it will come to your mind. 'B', 'a' and 's' are what? 'Bas'. [In Hindi/Urdu] 'bas' means 'enough'. If you turn it around, it will become 'sab' ['everything' in Hindi/Urdu]. Everything goes in this word.—*Assistant: is this the most important teaching of Islam for you?*—yes. (Dunia: Interview with Author)

Dunia is not interested in the details of 700 pages Quran. To her, the experience of coherence, the beauty of everything, a generalized spiritual world view is sufficient. Korsch writes about this kind of religiousness:

> To find oneself in the irritating in-between, to become certain of oneself in sweeping presence, [...] to stimulate and move beyond the known and expectable: this is religion, lived religion. It is more than mere assuredness in the vulnerabilities of life. It becomes life-experience as surprising self-experience. And this exactly happens when [religion] foregoes to clad itself in metaphysics or morality, when it rejects to legitimize through holy texts and exposes itself to questions. (Korsch 2007: 257f, my translation)

Doubting professionals frequently claim that Islam would be truly progressive if only seen as such a holistic spiritual way of life, not as a set of fixed moral rules or demanding metaphysical beliefs. Unlike secular technocrats, who denounce religion, doubting professionals prefer reinterpretation and incorporate scientific and psychological insights into a religion which fosters self-reflection. Mariam summarized:

> I think that the most important thing about Islam is this whole thing of *equality*. Which is something, which I find is so important, you know, and the place of women [...] those were the things which were very very close to me, in terms of humanity, and loving others and all that. And the most challenging thing is about this whole *jihad*. How *jihad* is being interpreted by others and also Islam by the Muslims—but this is such a wonderful concept of fighting your own egos. (Mariam: Interview with Author)

Much to my surprise, the word *jihad*, which so dominates academic and public discourse on Islam and conflict, occurs only this one time in all 21 interviews: as an element of an advice to work on self-improvement (which, I suppose, reflects poorly on the contemporary academic obsession with the concept). Similarly, if doubting professionals use the term 'Islamic behaviour' at all, then to designate an overall ethical orientation that is functional for societal integration. It is not used to detail a set of moral guidelines.

Doubting professionals' personal religiousness thus emerges neither as the rigid framework that faith-based actors promote nor as the patriarchy from which emancipating women try to escape with the help of secular technocrats, but as something for which all three types of activists have comparatively little intuition: a spirituality 'not attempting assurance about any transcendental *a priori*, but more in the romantic sense of a reflexive and thus ironical relation to oneself'—and to others (Luhmann 2002: 110; my translation). Doubting professionals were quite explicit in pointing out which concept and ideas they adopt from mainstream Islam and which not; Amna for example stressed the point that:

> That whole thing about Fatwa and do this and there Fatwa and I do that, this is kind of a [pause]. Basically Fatwa is advice, it is not like making a [cross speech] rule, an ethical law and things like that. [...] So much we are saying that Islam is connected to science. And logic, and way of life and love and all that—so it is such a *beautiful* religion, in terms of if you bring those things into life. (Amna: Interview with Author)

'Religion is beautiful when connectable to one's own life': this further demonstrates that doubting professionals do not just prefer aesthetic–holistic spirituality over given sets of metaphysical beliefs or authoritative

moral commandments out of a personal inclination. They rather do so for a wider reason: to them, religion is only credible when relatable to personal experience. To find one's relation to religion, which has to be cleared of anything not coherent with autobiographic integrity, requires considerable cognitive resources, the ability to distance oneself from community tradition, and a high tolerance towards ambiguities. Mariam explained:

> I am not a practicing Muslim, because I have not seen religion in that way. When I was a child I would absolutely like three times *namaz*, I would never miss *namaz*, and so many times going through Quran and all those things. [Pause] So, but today I follow my own understanding: I don't have to do this, I don't have to do *namaz*. [...] And now, being a part of that community that I am in, if you go to a mosque, or a tomb, or a *dargah*, then I have to wear a *burqa* [whole-body veil]. So I say: no, I don't want to. I am not going to pretend [...] I visit so many temples, I go to Jain temples, I go to all the beautiful places, you know like to Sufi places. (Mariam: Interview with Author)

This quote again speaks of an inner freedom in religious affairs and of the ambiguity tolerance which stems from and enables social identity complexity—something few of the three other types of activists possesses. This freedom also reflects an acute awareness of the empirical variance within Islam which is also reflected in doubting professionals' intricate and contextualizing assessment of the situation of Muslims in post-2002 Gujarat. Dunia, a former Brahmin Hindu who embraced Islam after her marriage, began our conversation with that very revelation:

> To begin with, my name is [name]. Earlier this was not my name, though. Earlier my name was a Hindu one. My name was [name]. I married a Muslim, and [...] then converted to Islam. And my name became [name]. [...] During my education, I fell in love, met him, we felt that we fit. We did not go into details and quickly went together for a court marriage. [...] When I came to their place, my father in law talked a lot with me, the daughter: 'in Islam we do not revere an idol; we do not have an image, he, whom we revere, is invisible; and *namaz* is read in this way...'—I learned many things from my father in law. 'Do not go to *dargahs*'; because these people are [community name], they are very puristic, right. [...] [Therefore] I know quite a lot about Islam as it is written. [...] [But] I am also thankful to [NGO]. Because with them, we went to many places, and met very different people.

> We learned about their respective beliefs, and through this we [really] understood what Islam is and what Quran is. (Dunia: Interview with Author)

Her last sentence reveals how important and constructive doubting professionals deem it to empirically assess religion, and diversity in religion—an ideal that permeates this book as well. One aspect of this diversity is doubting professionals' newly found—or, for some, renewed—spirituality, which provides them with a language to adequately express their experience. This new vocabulary goes on to ground their demanding work for peace by giving them serenity, whilst suspending moralistic or metaphysic rigidity and whilst remaining receptive towards irritations.

Doubting professionals thus experience oneness not by casting out ambivalence, but by aesthetically integrating the same in embodied ambiguity: Islam—with all its ambivalences—is such a beautiful religion 'if you bring those things in life'. In their personal experience, doubting professionals transform the ambivalence of the sacred—a relation of religion being 'both very good and very bad at the same time'—in ambiguity, that is, in a sense for the possibility that religion is 'neither very good nor very bad'. In doing so, they not least demonstrate how the ambivalence of the sacred can take more than one form on the personal level.

Worries

Ambiguity, not ambivalence, is finally what leads doubting professionals to weigh their words very carefully when they spoke about the future of Gujarat and the relationship between religion and politics in the state. Above all, they emphasize that the current state of affairs is 'neither very good nor very bad'. But they expressed distinct worries—not fears or passionate accusations—but worries nonetheless. These worries had to do with problems of leadership, gender and secularism—but also touch upon frustrated young men, the lack of income and jobs. Importantly, not all doubting professionals shared all of those worries; it is the balanced form of their worries and their rhetoric style more than the concerns themselves that clubs doubting professionals together.

Most commonly reported were worries about the low level of education of Muslims in Gujarat, which doubting professionals fear might solidify into a habit of uneducatedness in increasingly mono-religious and mono-cultural, ghettoized neighbourhoods. Hakim, for instance, commented his biography with the remark that his 'upbringing was somewhat advanced, just because by chance no community, no family members were living in the same place [...] that's why ghettoization is so problematic'. However, he later on acknowledged that ghettoization is not the self-chosen fate of Muslims, but is rather born from necessity and frequently the consequence of deliberate and violent religious 'cleansing' of specific neighbourhoods, in particular in the capital Ahmedabad.

Further worries articulated by doubting professionals frequently circled around the increasing influence of the *ulema*. They do not necessarily want to fight against orthodox religion, but they decidedly want to enable Muslims to make their own informed choices about spirituality—the same way they themselves made their choices after 2002. Yet rather than turning anti-religious like emancipating women, doubting professionals emphasize that religious ethic remains an important resource as a community-stabilizing bond, especially in post-conflict ghettoes—and that one needs learned professional theologians to impart the same. There is no shortcut to having Ulema. Hakim, who worried about increasing ghettoization and a culture of neglecting formal education in favour of renewed religiousness thus also made it clear that he does not want to ban religion, either:

> See, after the massacre the people who have been done injustice, and who have not seen any ray of hope, and who are still being discriminated: it is likely that they will develop a feeling of revenge against those who were the perpetrators of the crime. [...] The religion and this [spirituality] are the only things with which you can diminish or you can do away with that revenge and you can bring them to peace and calm and comfort. (Hakim: Interview with Author)

These concerns about revenge and anger on behalf of Muslims were well-founded, even if Gujarat had not experienced a massive backlash after the 2002 riots. We already saw the enormous efforts some faith-based actors made to prevent such a backlash in Halol. Likewise,

doubting professionals remember very well how fast communal conflicts can escalate from earlier instances of rioting in the state and elsewhere. Mariam recounts:

> In 1992, there was this Babri Masjid demolition [...] I was in Juhapura at that time, I saw Muslims attacking some of the government structures, petrol pump, there was an Agro Industries Office in that area. And my father repeatedly told them: 'see, this will create a very big setback, please don't do that. [...] If you attack *this* [public infrastructure], you are going to be completely marginalized. Look, you are a minority!' And we were told by an angry Muslim: 'you are a *kafir*! That's why we are doing this: you know, they have demolished the mosque and you are telling us not to destroy the infrastructure, their property? We should kill them; destroy each and everything in this country'. So Muslims were also in rage, everything was completely in rage. (Mariam: Interview with Author)

The balanced nature of doubting professionals' worries surfaced again when Mariam later on spoke of her hopes for inter-communal peace, which persist despite her fear of anger and revenge:

> We still have friends working with us, they are Hindus—so then [the important division] is good and bad [people]. It is not Hindu or Muslim for us. That way I still have lot of hope, and I look at all that very positively, and I have the feeling that we all will coexist. And there are [problems, but] there is not a failed state or something like that. [Pause] One thing I would like to put at this: I have, I somewhere have this hope, but there is no justice. There are lots of people still who have not got justice. So when you talk of peace, and there is no justice, then it becomes little problematic. (Mariam: Interview with Author)

The emphasis on justice as a mediator between anger and hope was shared by many doubting professionals. However, transitional justice was not projected as the definite solution either: in doubting professionals' opinion, the contemporary situation of Muslims in Gujarat demands a complex set of interventions, with transitional justice being only one among many. There exist, they insist, multiple demands which are not easy to reconcile. Abdul, the strategy advisor, pointed out:

> The people for whom we entered into court proceedings were of course not allowed to return to their home villages. [...] They were put under pressure that if they want to return to their villages, people would not allow them to live a peaceful life. So we

> made this whole analysis and in the beginning, I advocated these [court proceedings], but later I felt that it was [rather] important for people to earn a living. Then it was also necessary to educate people. [...] But how will they meet justice as well? In our country, court proceedings are an intricate matter and take very long, but if we remain strong, then we will be rewarded with justice. But it is very difficult to explain this to people. They are poor, which implies that they will be oppressed if they come forward for justice. [...] And after six years, we still see no solution. (Abdul: Interview with Author)

The procedure Abdul finally resorted to—and which he tried to convince his employers of—was an empowerment strategy for women to counter the lack of perspectives for men, and above all religious, legal and social education. As for all doubting professionals, everything boiled down to the importance of education, and they uniformly plead: 'please get educated. That's how you learn to live your life peacefully—and peace will come if you are educated.' Education as a concept is not exhausted in the realm of formal education, it also encompasses honouring existing skills among Muslims; one of the multiple demands put on doubting professionals' initiatives was income generation, after all. Nasim reported:

> If you look at education in the form of degrees, we have little to offer. But still among [Muslims] are valuable skills. [...] But, take handicrafts: we are unable to achieve regular prices on distorted markets. [...] It is not as if we had no skills. Hindus might have formal education but Muslims often have other skills, also Muslim women have skills, but they are honoured neither by the government nor by the community itself. (Nasim: Interview with Author)

A final set of worries expressed by doubting professionals was, to conclude, very personal: quite a few of them worried for their personal safety in the still tensely communalized atmosphere in Gujarat. Perhaps these worries are so pronounced among them as compared to other interviewees since doubting professionals are the only kind of activist who chose to work on these issues and who have—as middle class seasoned cosmopolitans—a realistic exit option. They could work all over India and on many other social issues, and the voluntariness of their activism sets

them apart from others who have fewer choices. Perhaps, the worries were also more justified since doubting professionals took on communal violence most explicitly among all interviewees. Be that as it may, one seasoned NGO leader concluded our interview as follows:

> Often I think, I am not going to come back to this house anymore and [my colleague] also does not like me to come back. But then this is our own office, we can't go anywhere, so—at least we are not here at night. If there are some disturbances, we close this office and then we operate from Juhapura. [...] In my colony lots of people know who I am. [...] They never asked me, but later they came to know that I am a Muslim, but they never asked me about what happened. I also didn't tell them that I am a Muslim. So we don't tell them, but I think everybody knows now that I am a Muslim.

Such doubts and worries were also mainly addressed to the Hindu majority in Gujarat. Even though doubting professionals clearly saw the needs and demands of their Muslim in-group, they never lost track of the wider—and largely anti-Muslim—context they are working in. When I asked Hakim in his home in a new fancy neighbourhood in Ahmedabad which hopes he has for the future in Gujarat, and which roles religion and politics, respectively, should play, he explained:

> If I am to talk about the Muslim community, then I think that [...] democratization of the community is important. The religious leadership has such a hold [...] and we are trying to think about and work towards a more progressive [leadership]. But pragmatically, this will have to emerge step by step. In terms of gender, big changes are necessary as well. If we talk about religion, then there are mainly two domains: one is the rituals, the other the values. So I began [after 2002] to put quite some emphasis on the values. [...] I am also looking at that from the human perspective and from the perspective of a citizen [...]. Because people depend too much on religious leaders and think that only they are allowed to make interpretations in religious things. [...] Democracy demands that you take your own decisions, but please take them based on values. [But] the change that should happen is foremost a demand from the Hindu community. [...] There are many people who grossly over-generalize [Muslims]. Maybe they [originally] were not conscious; maybe they did not enter serious discussions. [...] But [today] an ideology is at work which forbids thinking and understanding, it is a political movement, but religion is an integrated part of it. (Hakim: Interview with Author)

To sum up: doubting professionals' aesthetic–holistic spirituality supports their activism. Their feeling of being responsible for their in-group changed their professional life quite radically after 2002. They do not need to identify with their in-group for their own psychological stability, but actively chose to work for the benefit of Muslims (which does not exclude working with Hindus as well) out of an enlightened reflexive feeling. Their religiousness is deeply aesthetic and concerns their life in a holistic manner; they integrate positive and negative elements to maintain a coherent self. Doubting professionals' knowledge about the ambivalence of the sacred (being at times a good force, at times a bad one) thus turned into personal ambiguity (in which religion is neither distinctly good nor clearly bad) over the years of learning, reflection and understanding after the riots of 2002. The next and last chapter takes this internal differentiation of ambivalence in ambivalence proper and ambiguity further—after a concise summary of the study so far.

7

Ambivalence and Ambiguity

> [The ambivalence of the sacred] reflect[s] a continuing struggle within religions—*and within the heart of each believer*—over the meaning and character of the power encountered in the sacred and its relationship to coercive force or violence. (Appleby 2000: 27; my emphasis)

Four Types of Activists

Religion matters—while it has always been, at times a more, at other times a less fashionable topic in the social sciences, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 drew particular attention to the link between religious revivalism and violent conflict—and latest since the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, even those otherwise ignoring the force of religion acknowledge it in one or two paragraphs of their texts. The historical triggers predestine a particular focus in this emerging discourse; while the modernist paradigm of global secularization ceded, what is in most likely more of a rediscovery was and often still is portrayed as a substantial return. More: this assumed return is seen by many as an unfortunate regression. Not only is religion coming back, it also brings with it violence we thought we had overcome—or so the argument goes.

This applies to authors of many recent books and articles, irrespective of whether examples of religious 'holy wars' are collected (Partner 1997), fundamentalism is feared (Pargeter 2008), today's relevance of secularism is discussed (Bhargava 1998; Asad 2003; Roy 2007), religiously inspired

terror is explained (Juergensmeyer 2005), Huntington's hypothesis of a clash of civilization is assessed (Fox 2001, 2004) or the monotheistic idea is criticized (Assmann 2000, 2003 and partly revising, 2006). And Lewis (2002) simply asked: *What Went Wrong?* (cf. critically F. Robinson 2007: 6).

The experiences of faith-based actors, secular technocrats, emancipating women and doubting professionals which I presented in this study thoroughly complicate such discursive emphasis on violence. By looking at the nexus between religion and peace and by reintroducing the agency of actual people to my research design, I attempted to rethink the dynamics of religion in conflict. From children's embodiment of violence—with which this book began—to doubting professionals' diverse experiences of ambivalence and ambiguity—with which it ended, my research endeavoured to dig deeper. I set out to investigate the complexity in how religious identities relate to the struggle for peace, the liberty spaces activists find to creatively negotiate belief and belonging, but also the odds they face. The resulting typology of 'being Muslim and working for peace' thus reframes the 'ambivalence of the sacred' (Appleby 2000) as a *personal* dynamic.

The first section of this concluding chapter attempts to briefly summarize this typology, highlighting above all the complex role that religious identities play for political agency. The second and third sections focus on wider conceptual implications, both substantial—enriching our understanding of the ambivalence of the sacred—and methodological—emphasizing not only the importance of personal experience, but also the intricacies of how to study the micro-level with appropriate rigour.

In 2008, I went to Gujarat in order to meet Muslims who work for peace, wishing to explore the politics and poetics of their activism. My enquiry was guided by the conviction that 'the crystallization of rules into roles is the basic fact of society and thus of social science' (Dahrendorf 1973: v), and that it is my duty as a social scientist to unravel roles and uncover rules. After all, everybody in contemporary Gujarat knows whether he or she is a Muslim, and even those practicing liminal rituals categorize clearly. The roles are assigned—colonial and postcolonial identity politics achieved that much. But what it means to be Muslim,

which rules govern the roles, and how being Muslim *de facto* relates to political agency is far from clear.

By combining purposeful sampling for variety with explicitly typologizing methods, the resulting study attempted to portray peace activism of Muslims in Gujarat as a diverse phenomenon *sui generis*: neither can peace activism be discovered by simply inverting observations about violent activism, nor are relations between belief, belonging and agency uniform across the width and breadth of my interviewees: faith-based actors, secular technocrats, emancipating women and doubting professionals represent systematically distinct, if overlapping, ways of 'being Muslim and working for peace'.

Faith-based actors, to begin with, back their politics with detailed moral commandments and identify strongly with other Muslims, to the extent of experiencing themselves as collective subjects. I have shown why they do not like to narrate their lives, but rather present a 'natural-born' theory of 'being Muslim and working for peace': for those who inherited traditional mediation roles, this is an adequate biographical summary—and for most other faith-based actors, this semantic unity allows to subdue uncomfortable tensions in the way their activism *de facto* functions. I further dissected the competing orthodoxies hidden behind such alleged uniformity, which spread widely across Deobandi, Barelvi and other strands of Indo-Islamic religio-political tradition. This broad variety underscores once more that revivalist movements, above all, lead to increased individualism—albeit to an individualism clad in ever less personal terms.

The only truly uniform belief of faith-based actors was their apocalypticism, from which their moral commandments derive a striking level of detail: they want to pre-enact a future-to-be in our everyday lives in order to become good Muslims and transform society. Finally, while the line to fundamentalism was a thin one, the majority of faith-based actors I spoke with stayed clear from any attempt to impose their beliefs on others by force, a finding particularly relevant given the ubiquitous suspicion faith-based actors are faced with from their fellow citizens in post-conflict Gujarat: 'it needs to be understood that the transformation of religious movements into political actors follows multiple trajectories,

and "communalism" [or fundamentalism, for that matter] is just one of those possibilities' (Chakrabarti 2010: 598).

Secular technocrats—the second type of activists—could best be described with Max Weber as 'religiously unmusical': neither religious beliefs, nor religious belonging play any role in their activism. With this profile, they are the forgotten Muslims of Gujarat, if not of India at large. Like faith-based actors, secular technocrats tend to avoid personal stories and rather want to get things done. Their secularism is, however, unagitated, and similar to religion not an issue of passionate conviction. I coined this sovereign attitude 'secularized secularism' and argued that it warrants wider attention; it might in particular calm overheated discussions about the fate of secularism as an ideology in India, by introducing a micro-level perspective on 'secularism as a property of action' (Turina 2007).

While these first two modes of 'being Muslim and working for peace' are in many ways opposed to each other, they are similar in other respects: both faith-based actors and secular technocrats classified the riots of 2002 at their core as a political, not a religious issue. And the violence did not change how either type perceives and enacts beliefs, belonging and behaviour. In contrast to this overall stability, emancipating women and doubting professionals—the other two kinds of activists in my typology—represent highly dynamic ways of 'being Muslim and working for peace'.

Emancipating women—the third type—began their journey into peace activism as victims of the 2002 riots: theirs is foremost a story of emancipation from the passivity of victimhood towards self-efficate grassroots politics. They started off as peace activists enlisted and trained by local NGOs as local multiplicators, but soon began to rally for women's rights and appropriated the Islamic imperative of equality for their own emancipation. While their embodied grief became the root cause of their political agency, their spiritual journey took them from liminal healing traditions via Islamic feminism into, at times, firmly anti-religious terrain. However, Muslimness remained both a precondition and an obstacle for their agency; in the emerging tensions between their own spirituality and that of their in-group, and in the contradictions of their own dependence on and identification with their community on

the one hand and the orthodox rejection they experience on the other, emancipating women embody the ambivalence of the sacred as a personal dynamic.

Finally, doubting professionals—the fourth type—began to (re-)discover both Islamic beliefs and Muslim belonging in a period of intense learning and reflection post-2002, and managed to transform the ambivalence of religion into ambiguity. Working *in* and *on* conflict was new to them, as for most other activists in Gujarat. Yet other than most activists, doubting professionals exposed and challenged their own Muslimness whilst engaging with this new field of peacebuilding. In consequence, a peculiarly modern, aesthetical spirituality permeates their political agency and lured them from the position of established NGO activists into unknown territory. To them, religion is neither about details of the good (ethics), nor about details of the truth (metaphysics). They rather discover the *beauty* of the good and the truth (aesthetics), thereby finding an Islamic source of inspiration and strength quite different from that tapped into by other types of interviewees.

After the shock of having been caught off-guard by the vehemence of communal violence in 2002, many doubting professionals took some time to regain leadership. During this professional as much as personal struggle, they developed radical doubts about former certainties, such as the certainty that religion is irrelevant, that beliefs and spirituality would be stubborn or that belonging need necessarily be exclusionary. For the first time, they felt a special responsibility for the fate of fellow Muslims in the state—without leaving the state and its responsibility to protect off the hooks. While they clearly see the problems of a faith-based stance and worry about their own precarious position as a minority within a minority, however, doubting professionals did not reject religion for its ambivalence. To the contrary, they integrated their worries with a deep tolerance for ambiguity. This hints at broader psychological (and socio-economic) resources than those commanded by all three other types of activists.

The four ways of 'being Muslim and working for peace' in Gujarat differ in their combination of beliefs, belonging and politics, but—importantly—not in respect to socio-demographic characteristics (other than gender), or specific peacebuilding approaches. Old and young

activists, postgraduates from the countryside and illiterates from the cities distribute evenly across the typology. Neither type shows a definite preference for, say, relief and rehabilitation, trauma work, peace education or interfaith dialogue (emphasis is observable, but only to an extent which could easily be a sampling artefact). Most significantly, faith-based actors were not just found in FBOs and secular leaders not only in NGOs, while the two more dynamic types of emancipating women and doubting professionals have no firm institutional home at all yet.

This lack of overlap between my typology and broader sociological categories constitutes a final strong argument in favour of dedicated micro-level research in addition to those listed in chapter two: *a priori* aggregates at the meso-level (such as 'works in an FBO', 'observes Sufi rituals' or 'is a literate urbanite') are insufficient shortcuts to personal experience. Emancipating women and doubting professionals in particular would have remained undiscovered in much deductive and meso-level research—which usually only describes the well-known pattern of faith-based actors and secular leaders (or, in fact, restricts its treatment of Muslims' political agency solely to the former type, if not to 'terrorism').

The generalizability of my findings beyond the sample remains, nonetheless, inestimable, and it is surely appropriate to emphasize its limits. Three questions in particular cannot be answered by this study: what might be Indian about the four ways of combining belief, belonging and behaviour, what might be Muslim about it (rather than Hindu—another fascinating study waiting to be done), and to what extent the typology reflects *peace* activism rather than activism *per se*. These questions can only be answered in comparative research, since cultural differences should empirically be determined, not conceptually be presumed. I for one prefer erring on the universalist rather than the culturalist side: until proven otherwise, I would expect a similar diversity in other places and contexts, too (in extent at least, if not necessarily in substantive content). Another interesting question which cannot be answered based on this study is of course also the relative distribution of my typology across a wider population—again, I would be curious to find out more about that.

But statistical generalization is not the only way in which a case study might point beyond its empirical origins. How the experiences of faith-based actors, secular technocrats, emancipating women and doubting

professionals contribute to wider debates other than through generalization is discussed in greater depth in the following two sections. There, I argue that my typology both substantively enriches our understanding of the ambivalence of the sacred—and provides a 'proof-of-concept' for how one could take individuals seriously with more methodological rigour than often employed.

Either/Or, Neither/Nor

The typology presented in this study firstly complements the emerging literature on the 'ambivalence of the sacred' (Appleby 2000) at the micro-level of belief, belonging and behaviour. It highlights that one need not look at both peace activists and rioters to discover ambivalence: the same can be experienced by the former type of activist alone, both in the form of ambivalence proper and in the form of ambiguity. In the monograph which inspired this new line of enquiry into the role of religion in conflict, Appleby propagated that:

> [R]eligious traditions are internally plural, fluid, and evolving, responsive to new interpretations by gifted religious leaders and capable of forming individuals, social movements, and communities that practice and promote the civic and non-violent tolerance of others. These are carefully worded and rather modest claims. The evidence suggests, for example, that many religious leaders and communities are 'capable of' rather than 'committed to' promoting tolerance toward outsiders, including the religious or ethnic 'other'. (Appleby 2000: 281)

His wording already suggests that the ambivalence of the sacred always unfolds in messy practice, and that this complexity heavily depends on the agency of individual believers. A narrow focus on religious institutions or discourse would, therefore, likely miss important factors for the ambivalence of the sacred, which lie in the configurations of religious identities and political agency. Consequently, Appleby focussed on the concrete practices of top religious leadership, and understood the same in terms broad enough to reach beyond traditional church representatives. I would argue, however, that this elite focus is still insufficient. In my research at least, the ambivalence of the sacred was most interestingly

at work in the cases of doubting professionals, whose leadership was severely shaken, and of emancipating women, most of whom are 'merely' grassroots activists, not leaders in a traditional sense. A focus on religious elites would have missed the experience of both types.

More: Appleby—and large stretches of the literature reacting to his monograph—tend to assume that the ambivalence of the sacred primarily separates rioters from peace activists. My study provides a more nuanced understanding of the productive side of religion in development and peacebuilding, demonstrating how this side is *in itself* ambivalent. Even peace activists experience the ambivalence and ambiguity of the sacred! On one level, my findings could, therefore, reinforce Appleby's claim that this ambivalence stems from the nature of the sacred itself—and not from configurations of the social context such as the relation between rioters and peace activists. Accordingly, the ambivalence of the sacred affects everyone who comes in contact with religion—even peace activists taken in isolation.

On the other hand, however, the impact of context factors in shaping the experience of ambivalence and ambiguity cannot be denied. Emancipating women, for instance, experience the ambivalence of the sacred within their biography of struggling against external odds from the riots to the patriarchal structures in their own communities. They tend to resolve this ambivalence chronologically through a gradual transformation: first, they see religion as useful, good and healing—later as bad and obstructive to their unfolding activism. But either position is taken by the same women in her personal quest to regain her agency.

While such diachronic unfolding of ambivalence is the most obvious variety of how emancipating women experience the sacred, their example also shows that further ambivalence can originate *synchronically* from tensions between belonging and beliefs, too. In the intermediary stage of their transformation, for instance, feminist ethic (perceived as good) contrasts external orthodoxies (experienced as bad). Only in later stages, religious beliefs and Islamic feminism lose their influence, but then belonging in turn becomes even more precarious: ambivalence again develops diachronically between earlier (positive) and later (negative) configurations of religious identity.

These diachronic possibilities carry further significance and demonstrate once more that identities are static and persistent background factors only in our (self-)imagination. To see how they are shaped by activism is therefore an important counter balance to the usual perspective in which it is identities that frame and facilitate activism. Most connotations of this book's title—'being Muslim and working for peace'—are thus unintended, since the title initially seems to suggest that identity is static while activism is dynamic. Of course, whatever constitutes the inner self in psychological terms might arguably be relatively more static than the multitude of activities taking place while working for peace (identity, after all, signifies something which stays identical over time). But it is not as if identities were the static independent, and agency the dynamic dependent variable always.

Furthermore, the experience of emancipating women in the last stage of transformation (and similarly the experience of secular technocrats) underline that religiousness is not necessarily the most important dimension of identity for everyone born as Muslim, even if scholars often presume so. A focus on religion may not reflect interviewees' priorities; in fact, some of the activists I spoke to were rather upset when labelled with religious categories. One should never forget 'that human relationships and especially inter-group or inter-communal relations are characterized by ambiguity, complexity and relativity [and] that human behaviour is not motivated by any one factor alone, however important it may be. It is not rare for religion to be a major factor, but it is not the only motivating factor' (Engineer 1995: 291).

Doubting professionals' journey, finally, is helpful to further differentiate our understanding of ambivalence in ambivalence proper and ambiguity. While emancipating women are torn between either religion or activism, or between either 'good' religion at one time or 'bad' religion later on, doubting professionals embrace both the positive and the negative aspects simultaneously, yet they do not encounter the extreme tensions emancipating women experience in their agency. Rather than rejecting religion for its violent aspects, they actively and explicitly embrace ambivalence and transform it into ambiguity. They object moral

fixation, but long for an aesthetic spirituality which tolerates, or even incorporates ambiguities.

This spirituality might surprise many. Isn't religion—and Islam in particular—precisely problematic because it cannot stand ambiguity, cannot tolerate an openness of meanings due to its very nature of propagating an absolute truth? Based on my work among Muslims in India, I would strongly contest that this intolerance is indeed the most important aspect of religion—even as far as Islam is concerned. In fact probably *especially* as far as Islam concerned: there are good reasons to look at the 'ambiguity tolerance' of Islam more closely. Apart from Appleby (2000) and his work on ambivalence, I would thus like to introduce a second author to contextualize this study: Bauer (2011), who wrote a history of Islam as a 'culture of ambiguity'. Unfortunately, his scholarship has not yet been translated from German into English; I thus take the liberty to simultaneously sum up and appropriate for my own ends his main thrust of argument.

Bauer began his enquiry into ambiguity and Islam with the 'suspicion that the contradictions which readers of classical Islamic texts encounters might not be contradictions who failed to be resolved, but in fact contradictions whose resolve has never been aspired to' (Bauer 2011:12; my translation). He then painstakingly demonstrates that classical Islamic culture indeed displayed a remarkable tendency to tolerate, appreciate and at times even seek out ambiguities—a tendency only reverted in its opposite during the confrontation with ambiguity intolerant Western modernity in colonial times.

To substantiate this claim, Bauer provides a pluriverse of phenomena which demonstrates such Islamic tolerance for ambiguity. First, 'the acceptance of a plurality of discourses' (43) even in the domain of Islamic law, which has by no means by default been Islamic in all times and places. Second, 'the acceptance of multiple interpretations' to which even otherwise 'arrogant and self-righteous ulema subscribe', who present 'the saying of the prophet that "differences of opinion are a grace for my flock" [...] as one of the most important key tenets of classical Islam' (45). Third, Bauer refers to 'ambiguous texts, practices and places', starting right from the Quran—an ambiguous text indeed—through to those liminal spaces I also discussed in earlier chapters. Finally, there is

a long Islamic tradition of 'reflecting upon and training for ambiguity'; Bauer for instance mentions 'multiple collections of "words and counter-meanings"' among the very first books produced in Arabic, arguing that it is indeed 'astonishing that Arabs, when they first began to deal with academic questions, had no other topic at hand then thinking, among all potential issues, about ambiguity' (49).

All this, Bauer argues, signals a great traditional tolerance for ambiguity in Islamic heritage. While he mostly concentrates on Arabic and Persian sources, I would not the least be surprised if this tolerance for ambiguity could not also be found in even larger quantities in India, the geographical space where East and West interacted for centuries (and here I am deliberately subsuming Islam as a Western—graeco-abrahamitic—tradition).

Bauer is of course not so naive that he would not recognize that this ambiguity tolerance seems to be a phenomenon of the past, as we can confirm almost daily in the news channels. His conclusion is, therefore, highly significant for my own argument; he argues that:

> [T]he ambiguity intolerance of modern Islam is a phenomenon of modernity. It is, as I like to preliminarily suggest, the result of the fact that a very ambiguous perspective of both one's own civilization [...] and the West—perceived as a force which both destroys and brings the future—had effectively been crowded out. Such an ambivalent state of affairs has—so the hypothesis of psychological research—a strong ambiguity intolerance as its consequence. (Bauer 2011: 52f)

Ambivalence is a relation of 'either—or', ambiguity one of 'neither—nor'; my study shows that the sacred can be experienced either way. This on the one hand confirms the general assessment of Bauer, but also hints to the possibility that total despair and frustration might be premature. At least at the level of individual experience and diversity, the 'culture of ambiguity' hasn't quite disappeared yet, not even in Gujarat after 2002. Ambiguity tolerance is undoubtedly under severe stress, both in Gujarat and globally. But hope, I believe, is still justified.

Indeed, I think we are well-advised to trust individuals' capability for transformation and their liberty to change the course of history. Not everybody enjoys a similar level of such freedom, of course, but often freedom also develops in contexts and through persons where we least expect it. At least, my study demonstrated that not only can ambivalence

impede agency for the worse—as it does in the case of emancipating women—agency can also incorporate ambivalence, eventually transforming it into ambiguity—as doubting professionals demonstrate. Whether the deceptively clear-cut role of religion in violent conflict turns out as ambivalence or into ambiguity arguably depends on additional factors—and individuals and their lives are one easily underestimated of these factors.

In fact, an increasing number of scholars attempt to identify a range of variables which moderate the ambivalence of the sacred. After all, Appleby's hypothesis was only the beginning for more granular analyses. Yet, few authors concern themselves with the micro-level of belief, belonging and behaviour. They rather discuss favourable or unfavourable demographic distributions (Schlee 2006), horizontal integration of civil society (Varshney 2002), discursive interventions of religious top leadership (Appleby 2000) or simply path-dependency and its institutionalizing effects (Brass 2003). For them, the ambivalence of the sacred always appears, literally, as ambivalence between rioters and peace activists. This is unfortunate—since with closer attention to lived experience, we can see that ambivalence may also take the form of ambiguity, it might transform from one to the other, and this in turn inspires hope for the future of religion in conflict.

This book, therefore, irreversibly complicates many common endeavours to explain the ambivalence of the sacred through meso- or macro-level aggregates alone. It demonstrates that ambivalence already unfolds in the lived experience, identity and belonging of peace activists in Gujarat: 'the real "clash" is [...] within each person, as we oscillate uneasily between self-protective aggression and the ability to live in the world with others' (Nussbaum 2007: 334). Appleby (2000: 27) anticipates this when he describes ambivalence as 'a continuing struggle within religions—*and within the heart of each believer*—over the meaning and character of the power encountered in the sacred and its relationship to coercive force or violence' (my emphasis). Thus far, the personal level too often remains a hyphenated insertion or a well-intentioned caveat in many a scholar's introduction, however. The final pages of this conclusion consequently return to the methodological implications of my study.

Irreducible Diversity

Peace activism, like any social phenomenon, does rarely happen at random: which options for action people perceive in the first place, is prestructured by one's self-identification and -understanding, and arguably by wider meso- and macro-level context variables. Hence, attention to those is important. Yet, even though social scientists naturally strive to discern motivations for deeds, they should weigh structural explanations with respect to chance—and, more importantly, with respect to individual diversity. One might wish to establish a causal relation between macro- or meso-level factors and peace activism (in either direction), but there might simply not be one to start with, because people differ from each other, and they not *always* do so in systematic ways.

Such irreducibility of individual experience is no defeat for social science, but a fact of our world. We are well advised to acknowledge—not just in our prefaces, but at the very core of our methodologies—that patterns are fluid and understandings context-bound, and that individuals make surprising use of the spaces of liberty which both chance and structure open for them. I believe there is no reason why this should not be as true for Muslim Indians as for everybody else, and after having written this book, I can only agree with Mines, who wrote:

> A key tenet of Western social science lore about India is that individuality lacks importance in its social life. Indians are said to value collective identities, the identities of caste and family, *not* the identities of individuals. [...] I write this book to counter these commonplace views and to offer a theory of [Indian] individuality. (Mines 1994: 2)

In a similar vein, I wrote this book to demonstrate that Indian Muslims are able to resist, subvert or selectively embody discourses about 'being Muslim and working for peace'—be they religious, secular or, indeed, scholarly. In Chapter 2 of this book, I therefore argued that, in addition to meso- and macro-level studies, it is necessary to enter the messy realm of lived experience and everyday practice to grasp the whole breadth of the ambivalence of the sacred. I believe the result of my methodological stricture *ex post* confirms its relevance; my study hopefully contributed a

'proof of concept' of how such attention to the micro-level can be accomplished with appropriate methodological rigour whilst using a research logic which respects the inevitable limits in breadth, should one aim for such depth.

Indeed: had I relied on ethnographic methods alone, and had I not sought to employ an explicit and rigorously typologizing research design, my typology would arguably have looked rather different. It is telling that the first presentation I gave about my findings in 2008—immediately after the end of field research—suggested a two-pronged typology consisting of faith-based actors and secular technocrats. Without the methodologically stringent typology extraction, which outwitted my pre-conceived ethnographic impressions, I would have missed finer nuances of faith-based actors and secular technocrats and might have missed the distinct qualities of emancipating women and doubting professionals altogether.

Similarly, the meso-level institutional landscape of peacebuilding in Gujarat might reflect—if only tentatively—the experiences of faith-based actors and secular technocrats, but it gives no institutional recognition to emancipating women or doubting professionals. Moreover, the diversity of individual ways of 'being Muslim and working for peace' does not simply mirror the institutional diversity in Gujarati civil society portrayed in the introduction even for the more established kinds of activists: not all faith-based actors worked in faith-based organizations, nor did all doubting professionals work *on* conflict.

The fact that individual motives and institutional 'missions' did not correspond makes a strong case for treating the ambivalence of the sacred as a personal dynamic; merely looking at the meso-level of civil society is no shortcut to understand the diversity of religious identities. And only by taking individual persons seriously can we discover some of the more dynamic and less institutionalized ways of 'being Muslim and working for peace'—such as those of emancipating women and doubting professionals. The very outcome of this study, therefore, adds to the reasons listed in Chapter 2 for 'why individuals [should and can] matter'.

The outcome also confirms that it is important to not only differentiate several sub-dimensions of religious identity—belief and belonging

above all—but also to integrate all of them into a comprehensive design which combines both ethnographic and psychometric strategies of enquiry. With only group identification in mind, emancipating women would probably appear as strongly in-group-bound faith-based actors, while doubting professionals would seem to identify with their in-group as little as secular technocrats. If religious identity would only be thought of as a certain set of beliefs, misunderstandings would ensue the other way round. The fact that ambivalence partly unfolds between both sub-dimensions of identity—as is the case for emancipating women and doubting professionals—becomes only visible when the usual narrow conceptualizations of identity are discarded.

All these insights are *ex post* good reasons to emphasize lived experience over structural restraints—not because the latter would not exist (they certainly do in Gujarat), but rather as a deliberate choice to strategically intervene in current scholarly trends.

This choice is not without pitfalls: a typology in itself cannot explain how its empirical existence came about—how people became activists one way and not another—nor what its consequences might be—at least as far as structural consequences are concerned. This might mislead one to put too strong an emphasis on the possibilities of agency vis-à-vis structural restraints (Gagan Sethi's critique from an activist's perspective follows up on precisely this danger after a few more pages). But maybe it is time that social scientists stop using individual diversity as merely a building brick for wider arguments about causes and consequences—and let it stand in its own right. In fact, I do not know if this typology is more about Muslims or more about peace, about both or about neither—since in one sense the extraordinary lives which went into it are not 'about' anything: they just 'are'.

I thus very deliberately want to conclude this book on the individual level, too—precisely because a sensibility for the individual and his or her spaces of freedom and choice beyond instrumental considerations is so dearly missing in contemporary Gujarat. Resisting the ready temptation to conclude with outrage over the riots of 2002 and the structural restraints the aftermath still places on Muslims all over India, the literal last words shall thus be reserved for a last interview voice, recorded

at the very end of a rather comprehensive conversation. Troubled by the often instrumental and often very generalized global debates about Muslims and Islam today (and, I should add, likewise features in debates on religion, politics and conflict more broadly), this activist said good bye with the following words:

> I wish you have [developed] a better understanding of Islam and you proceed accordingly. [...] Do not look at Islam as the spectacle, from the viewpoint of the West. And you may not look at Islam from the viewpoint of a Muslim. [...] Just look closely at Islam from a third viewpoint: as what is actually happening. [...] If you are asking me such questions, I am also trying to [longer pause] See: these are not questions which are there in my mind. But this is also making me think! To think is good.

Epilogue

An Activist's Comments

Many activists portrayed in this book opened their minds and hearts in the hope that perhaps through me, the foreign scholar, their voices might at last be heard. They knew that I would soon return to distant lands, building a successful career out of whatever they told me—and they expected that I would likely never come back, at least not to them. This is not my fault, they consoled me: it simply is the way in which the global knowledge economy operates. The accurateness of their observation, and even more so the certainty in their voice, continue to greatly disturb me, even while I can offer little else than my best intentions. I am thus very glad that Gagan Sethi, one of my closest contacts in Gujarat, agreed to follow up on my findings and interpretations from an activist's perspective. Gagan is a senior human rights activist and social worker, co-founder of Jan Vikas, Centre for Social Justice and Dalit Foundation and sits on the board of several other civil society initiatives. He was also part of a special monitoring group on the Gujarat riots for the National Human Rights Commission (on which he reflects in Nampoothiri and Sethi 2012). Here is his reaction to my study:

It has been a privilege to be associated with Raphael Susewind on his journey of immersing himself in the Indian Muslim reality post the Gujarat 2002 carnage. His lens of an outsider-insider is important, as most people within the country are only seen as taking sides, and their accounts are often brushed away as biased towards an incident that caused immense pain and injured the body politic of the Indian Nation—a nation that some say had just about healed from the trauma of 1947. Thus, the initiative of a German scholar, young, intense and wanting to understand peace activism in the context of Gujarat's communal violence was extremely welcome. It also proved that human rights are a universal concept and that people of different cultures can be moved

to start asking fundamental questions, to extricate the truth and also to deepen the knowledge-building process around this topic.

Raphael unfolds the incidents of 2002 from the lens of different peace activists who are engaged in relief and rehabilitation work post the Gujarat carnage—and herein lies the first question: were they all really peace activists or were they not rather human rights activist/defenders and victims seeking justice, who could not call themselves by these identities because these very identities had been degraded and denigrated by the local state government? On the first visit of the chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission, there was slogan shouting by the Hindu activists and even damaging of his convoy; this was much before the chairperson even gave his first public report, while the commission was still in a fact-finding mode. Somewhere in the penumbra of the Indian consciousness, the word human rights has acquired a negative connotation with the police and the establishment. Hence, my question whether these activists, who were actually engaged in relief and rehabilitation work, and in the attempt of bringing people to justice, were really peace activists—and are not rather ordinary human rights defenders who could not call themselves that?

Moreover, while Raphael focuses on individual stories of being Muslim, I wonder whether he did then not overlook the identity of many of them as being competent, trained social workers? Be it as NGO staff doing a project or as a faith-based organization (FBO) person doing what their leaders asked them to do, whether one understands peace as absence of conflict or as more, whether one redresses victims of violence or were supporting individuals to seek justice, one question always prevails: in which sense was there any real effort during this time to engage with 'the other'? The Muslim identity was in any case such a ghettoized identity in Gujarat, seemingly above all other identities; this often reduced Muslims to being just Muslims and nothing else. Now this identity of being Muslim also consumed the identity of the peace activists and NGO workers—seen as pro-Muslim and little else. Could these activists really contribute in any way to peace in this context? Or did they not rather end up stabilizing their community as a community victimized, because they, too, now appear above all as Muslims?

This question of ghettoizing the Muslim identity is crucial because it connects to wider processes. The Gujarat carnage was unusual in that the political right wing had systematically broken all associational linkages whether economic or social long before the actual violence started (challenging the proposition of Varshney 2002). The truth is that children were divided based on faith-based schools for already a long time. For instance, in Dang district and other Adivasi-dominated areas, one saw three schools: one school run by the local district panchayat (often merely on paper), one *Saraswati Mandir* (temple of learning) run by the different outfits of the RSS, and one school run by the Christians. In Bharuch, a Muslim-dominated district, it is the makatib competing with the Christian school. Everywhere, religious identity was being highlighted.

Beyond schools too, special squads to promote vegetarianism by accosting transport of beef by private militia and so on have been on the prowl, and large *sammelan*s (congregation) were held by Hindu religious leaders to win over the Adivasis. The Adivasi Hindu identity, which earlier was a misnomer, has dramatically changed through *shudhikaran* (cleansing processes)—again trying to put religious identity on top of everything else. All these processes beg the question: was the violence a starting point or the ending of a long-drawn conflict, which began with highlighting one particular identity above all others (and in contrast to all others)? The systematic use of the Dalit sub-castes to lead the violence in 2002—through offering spoils and not based on ideological belief—creates a guilt-based loyalty, which is dangerous to say the least. This, too, is something that Raphael could have gone deeper into.

In the context of these two criticisms—about peace activism and about emphasizing Muslim identity—Raphael's classification of faith-based actors, secular technocrats, emancipating women and doubting professionals shows the ambivalence in and of identity. But at times, Raphael's categories—though real and very identifiable on the ground—will need further sharpening, both regarding the relative strengths the identity brings and regarding the specific vulnerability that mark the interventions of these four types of activists. Raphael's analysis of the attributes of these diverse ways of 'being Muslim and working for peace'—be it that

some do not like talking about themselves, that others subsume immediate pain to mysticism as a 'flight' and that again others resort to other forms of defense mechanisms—is interesting and will eventually help to unravel the inner motivations of peace activism. But in this unraveling, it remains important to see whether being a peace activist and being a Muslim are proactively chosen identities and are not rather reactionary ones coming out of convoluted fear, anger and hate, sublimated through religious discourse—as in the case of young people who, put through extreme trauma, find solace in religion.

In his conclusion, Raphael rightly states that 'the acknowledgement that religion is neither irrelevant, nor always violent, but not peaceful by default either, is an important first step to more clarity in the debate on peace and conflict'. Likewise, his own study is a departure in that he looks at the Indian Muslim mind from the lens of peace and brings to light both the 'ordinary' and the charismatic leadership within the community. While we should not forget the contextual restraints on identity, the individuals he portrays do extraordinary acts and can thus rightly be called peace activists. I hope this will be recognized more widely: all categories of people exist in all communities, and the gross labeling of all Muslims in the negative needs to be shunned. Raphael's book will hopefully also spur the imagination of other young researchers nationally and internationally to understand 'what makes a peace activist'—and thereby dovetail the attempts to train people for peace. The above are, therefore, merely some points of critique which came to the mind of a practising conflict transformation student. However, the book is very readable and thought provoking and should be part of the mind space of students and practitioners of 'understanding conflict'.

Gagan Sethi
Ahmedabad, May 2012

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