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### The Politics of Plague: Neoliberalism, Hindutva, and the Exploitation of an Emerging Civil Society

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#### Recommended Citation

Thea, Jessica, "The Politics of Plague: Neoliberalism, Hindutva, and the Exploitation of an Emerging Civil Society" (2017). *Spring 2017*. 112.

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# THE POLITICS OF PLAGUE: NEOLIBERALISM, HINDUTVA, AND THE EXPLOITATION OF AN EMERGING CIVIL SOCIETY

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*Mentor: Shefali Chandra*

Surat, a port city on the western coast of India, sent the world into a panic when a small outbreak of bubonic and pneumonic plague rattled the city in September of 1994. Although the outbreak lasted only a little over three weeks, it provoked an unprecedented global reaction, one that surged throughout the international community. India, a newly neoliberal state, became vulnerable to international actors looking to exploit the health crisis and obtain a presence throughout the region. The outbreak served as a perfect storm to allow for international intervention, as it came during a period of economic liberalization and furthered sociopolitical instability. International powerhouses used NGOs (non-governmental organizations), or service and humanitarian non-profit groups, as mechanisms for surveillance and policing in the city of Surat. This project looks at the intersection of neoliberal economic policies and vulnerable sociopolitical conditions, and the consequent establishment of global surveillance vis-à-vis NGOs in Surat. Turning to the long-term implications of the plague, this thesis serves to analyze the retreat of the reach of the state due to neoliberalism and politics of Hindutva, and analyze the gap in power exploited by local and international actors. Connecting the rise of NGOs with the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party, a political party in favor of neoliberalism and the reduction of state intervention, I argue that these sociopolitical changes in turn led to the violent, anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat in 2002, leaving the citizens of Gujarat in a state of disarray.