

Mapping, sensing, moving: Spatial methods for divided landscapes

Sanderien Verstappen

As Indian cities, towns, and villages are transformed by shifting patterns of residential segregation, researchers addressing these transformations are confronted with violent histories, contended narratives, stereotypes, and with delicate research challenges of method, conceptualisation, and ethics. These challenges were discussed during a workshop on *New approaches for the study of residential segregation in India* at IAS on 14 June 2018, with participation from Raheel Dhattiwala (University of Amsterdam), Pablo Holwitt (Leipzig University), Radhika Gupta, Ajay Gandhi, Cristiana Strava, and Sanderien Verstappen (Leiden University). This workshop was part of a two-day conference *Modalities of Displacement in South Asia* (14–15 June) in the framework of the Leiden University project 'Postcolonial Displacement', which is the subject of the second article on this page.

Beyond implicit assumptions

In India, the Anglo-American phrases of the 'ghetto' – to refer to the clustering of Muslims in the urban peripheries – and the 'gated community' – to talk about class-based forms of segregation in the city – have found their way into the vocabulary of many people. These words signal deepening patterns of residential segregation, which alter and sometimes replace older modes of residential clustering based on occupation/caste, language, and regional identity. These processes are related with unequal distribution of resources and services, gradual processes of discrimination on the housing market, and exclusive visions of city-making, and with dramatic episodes of expulsion in the form of communal violence, slum removal, and displacement.

While debates about residential segregation in American and European literature stem from concerns about race and class inequalities that become expressed and aggravated through spatial modes of exclusion, a South Asian perspective on residential segregation demands engagement with the regional history of 'Partition' – the separation of India and Pakistan on the basis of the idea that a separate homeland was required to guarantee safety for both Hindus

and Muslims after Independence. Given the violent imposition of the 'Hindu-Muslim' binary in the past and its high currency in contemporary politics, with the categories of the 'Hindu' and the 'Muslim' being inscribed onto a range of urban and rural spaces, scholarship into these matters requires a careful handling of the ethics of academic representation, and a particularly critical consideration of the concepts and categories through which interlocutors are addressed.

Is it possible to speak about a politics of separation without reiterating its premises? How can we study, instead of assume, the relations between spatial reorganisation, social-cultural differentiation, and political polarisation? These questions were the starting point for the workshop *New approaches for the study of residential segregation in India*, to discuss the conceptual and methodological challenges of studying residential segregation in India, and to look critically at implicit assumptions that may otherwise remain unquestioned. The discussion stemmed from a desire to move beyond the 'ghetto effect' in urban research – following Radhika Gupta's provocative argument that a 'ghetto effect' is co-produced and even exacerbated by the research methods used by anthropologists.¹ The 'ghetto effect' appears when researchers and/or interlocutors subconsciously apply internalized stereotypes of the 'other' that express and perpetuate power relations, and that structures interactions with the 'other'. When this happens, the risk is that the research reproduces rather than scrutinises stereotypes.

Broadly, two research strategies are available to escape such implicit assumptions. First, history is a way to de-naturalise taken-

for-granted categories. Second, attendance to everyday life in all its complexity and fluidity enables attendance to the way in which the Hindu-Muslim binary appears and disappears as one of multiple modes of differentiation – this draws attention to ambiguous moments of unpredictability and instability, to the unfinished character of boundary-making, and to connections that persist despite the politics of division. During the workshop, we explored the potential of spatial methods to engage more closely with these everyday experiences. We considered three methodologies of space: cognitive mapping, sensory exposure, and mobile ethnography.

Mapping, sensing, moving

In her presentation, Raheel Dhattiwala explained how she uses 'sketch maps' as a participant-empowered mode of visual data generation in riot-affected neighbourhoods in Ahmedabad.² Provided with a blank paper and pen, residents were asked to sketch a line to link their own house with the house of their 'favourite neighbour'. This method of mapping eased the tension of doing research in a violence-affected neighbourhood, because the focus of the interlocutors moved away from the researcher, whose position of 'insider' or 'outsider' was a source of concern for the residents. Mapping also became a valuable alternative to conventional interview methods. While interviews and focus group sessions reveal norms of 'neighbourliness', cognitive maps help to cross-verify these generic responses and to capture in a more concrete way how residents perceive of abstract notions of neighbourliness and proximity.

makes us rethink the fixities and tenuousness of 'place' itself as a frame, raising questions about notions of place and loss, practice and labour, temporality and spectrality. The displacement of large numbers of people is a central feature of the rapid economic expansion that characterizes contemporary South Asia. Rooted in violent processes of state formation, including partition, militarization, and the repression of regional secessionist movements, South Asia's modern politics are actively consolidating and incorporating erstwhile economically and politically marginal spaces. These processes of consolidation have been accompanied by religious nationalisms and ethnic identity politics that legitimize the ideological or even physical segregation of 'others', conjoining land struggles and development projects with socio-cultural contestations around home and belonging. To interrogate these complexities, the project stimulates conversations across disciplines and institutes to initiate new understandings about 'displacement' in its multiple vectors, modalities and possibilities.

The conference was supported by the Asian Modernities and Traditions fund (AMT), the Leiden Institute for Area Studies (LIAS),

Workshop Leiden University 14 June 2018



Workshop in the IAS lecture room.

Pablo Holwitt argued that residential segregation is motivated by attempts to order and homogenise everyday experiences and to keep potentially unsettling sense-worlds at bay. Given the relevance of acoustic, visual and olfactory phenomena in studies on communal violence and ethno-religious enclaves – manifested in debates about noise pollution or the presence of non-vegetarian food – how can sensory methods be used to study these sensorial dimensions further? Pablo discussed several methods of sensory anthropology – e.g. sensewalks, sensory diaries, listening sessions – to assess their applicability in studies of residential segregation. The discussion raised further questions about how to address the fragility of regulatory attempts, and how to engage shared dispositions towards noise and smell.

My research demonstrates how mobile methods can provide much-needed spatial contextualisation in research on residential segregation. Mobile research offers a powerful way of studying everyday practices of differentiation as well as connection. How do people move in and out of different spaces? How do they give names to objects and people encountered along the way? How do they change their demeanour, adjust clothes, express feelings? Experiences of anxiety and familiarity that come within the scope of the research in this manner do not map neatly onto the 'Hindu-Muslim' dichotomy, thus bringing to the surface a wider set of divisions and connections that matter to the residents.

Discussion

How can researchers address a politics of separation without reiterating its premises? Spatial methods are no comprehensive answer to this question – reflection on the researcher's positionality and scrutiny into the historicity of cultural categories remain a condition for critical scholarship. Still, the methods of mapping, sensing, and moving constitute practical tools and techniques that can contribute new insights into multi-layered experiences, overlapping understandings, and competing narratives that exist in Indian cities and towns, while also forwarding insights into abstract notions of neighbourliness, spatial regulation, and navigation.

Places and pedagogies: rethinking Area Studies through 'Postcolonial Displacements'

Erik de Maaker, Sanjukta Sunderason and Sanderien Verstappen

The project 'Postcolonial Displacements' has been running at Leiden University since 2015, funded by the (Leiden) Asian Modernities and Traditions fund (AMT), with an aim to re-imagine research and pedagogies around 'other places' – framed as 'Area Studies' in the university. Using the thematic of 'displacement', the project seeks to explore new entries into institutional and pedagogical negotiations at the university around subjects and scopes, interdisciplinarity, and theoretical orientations.

We, the project coordinators, Erik de Maaker (Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology), Sanjukta Sunderason (Leiden Institute for Area Studies, LIAS) and project research fellow, Sanderien

Verstappen (LIAS/IIAS), have been working with approaches that are drawn from regionally rooted theories and knowledges – not to withdraw into provincialism, but instead to nurture wider transnational conversations. We have been addressing urgent themes that emerge from the various research sites in which we work, to then think from the specificities of these positions about conceptual, disciplinary, and methodological questions.

The conference *Modalities of Displacement in South Asia*, held in Leiden in June 2018 and the course *Displacement and Development: Anthropological Perspectives on South Asia*, running since Autumn 2017, are pilot projects for developing this thematic approach. The critical thematic of 'Displacement'

the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology (CA-DS), and the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) at Leiden University, the Netherlands.

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Notes

- 1 Gupta, R. 2015. 'There must be some way out of here: Beyond a spatial conception of Muslim ghettoization in Mumbai?' *Ethnography* 16(3):352–370.
- 2 Dhattiwala, R. 2017. 'Mapping the self: challenges of insider research in a riot-affected city and strategies to improve data quality', *Contemporary South Asia* 25(1):7–22.