

## **The State, Displaced Urban Poor and City Redevelopment**

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Jelena Salmi 2019. *Differentiated citizenship, Displacement, and Materiality in State-Citizen Relations in Ahmedabad*. JYU Dissertations 86. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä. 237 pp. Diss. ISBN 978-951-39-7774-0 (PDF) URN:ISBN:978-951-39-7774-0 ISSN 2489-9003.

In recent decades, refashioning and rebuilding urban landscapes has become a political as well as an ideological tool for city elites, state agencies and corporate actors to promote individual cities with dynamic and globally competitive images. This often leads to the demolition of neighbourhoods inhabited mostly by lower-income and vulnerable populations. In Ahmedabad, India, three large urban restructuring projects were implemented between 2003 and 2012 with the aim of making Ahmedabad a ‘world-class city’, which led to the displacement of a large number of slum dwellers from the central city space and relocation to resettlement sites located mostly on the outskirts of the city. In her doctoral thesis, Jelena Salmi examines the aftermath of this process of replacement, which, in many ways, resulted in the socio-spatial marginalisation of a large number of urban poor. She looks at the relations between urban restructuring, citizenship and the state from the displaced populations’ perspective with a focus on everyday life in one of the resettlement sites in Ahmedabad.

The study is structured around three interrelated research questions focusing on different aspects of citizenship, nation-building and state-formation. First, Salmi asks how the good citizen, the state and the nation are imagined in the context of worlding Ahmedabad? The notion of imagineering combines creative imagination and engineering as a way to express how the state (and the nation as a whole) aims at constructing the image of itself as dynamic and globally competitive through massive infrastructure developments in Ahmedabad. The concept of worlding refers to this combination of material manifestations in the built environment with the project of national imagineering and branding India as a country appearing as influential on the global stage. In Ahmedabad, the project of worlding has been realised particularly in the Sabarmati Riverfront, which has been planned with the idea of alluding to the riverbanks of famous global cities such as London or Paris. While modern and dynamic futures are stressed as some of the main characteristics of becoming a world-class city, it requires, besides newly built struc-

tures, acts of removing non-desirable, non-modern material structures and ways of living away from sites manifesting the reimagined city.

This leads to the second question, which brings forth the people being re-located from these newly built sites in asking how these people perceive the state, what it does and what it should do according to their understandings and ways of making claims, which Salmi refers to as state imaginaries. The focus here is on people's everyday lives and particularly on the question of what the role of the actual workings of the state is from the residents' point of view. The third main question is about the roles of documents and infrastructure in forming displaced people's citizenship, which Salmi has examined by approaching citizenship through material artefacts in order to show how both formal and informal relations as well as human and non-human agency are intertwined in the practices and realities of displaced people's citizenship. While shedding light on different sides of the main topic of the thesis, each of the three sub-questions could almost make up a study of its own. At times, this makes reading the work and following all the threads somewhat challenging but also interesting, and it also provides the reader with a number of layers to be found along the way. The thesis is divided into nine chapters, which also tells about the multidimensionality of the thesis, the application of concepts as well as the analysis and discussions of state-citizen relations and differentiated citizenship.

In her study, Salmi applied ethnographic methods, mainly semi-structured interviews and participant observation of everyday life in Sadbhavna Nagar. This data – recorded field notes, drawings, photos and videos – was complemented and combined with analysis of newspaper articles, websites, resettlement-related documents, apartment plans, government brochures and court proceedings. Salmi's description of her ten-month ethnographic fieldwork period (2015–2016) is excellent, and she gives the reader a very vivid picture of how, where and with whom she did her study. She also reflects on different aspects of ethnographic practices analytically and in a detailed manner and opens up her own reservations and positionalities possibly affecting and steering her encounters with the people she has been studying.

In the introductory part, Salmi illustrates how the political situation in Ahmedabad in particular forms a background as well as an analytical framework for the study at large. The main focus, the rise and development of Hindu nationalism, is based, on the one hand, on Hindutva ideology, which describes Hindus as a group having their holy land in India, and on the other, on European nationalism. Furthermore, Hindutva has been fused with the modernisation of the state, which has been expressed by the state government as demands for more dynamic economic activity as well as rhetorical and poli-

cy claims for the advancement of order and discipline regarding the development of urban spaces. Through her selection of the field site for the study, Salmi takes a stand on the political situation in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Ahmedabad, which has polarised into regions of Hindus and Muslims. Sadbhavna Nagar has the largest population within the seven resettlement sites but is the only one inhabited by both Hindus and Muslims, which brings forth the religious aspect as another thread of directing the study as a whole and highlighting how religious dividing lines shape the social and spatial landscapes of the city. In her study, Salmi's looks at the relations between the redeveloped site, its former inhabitants and their current circumstances at the relocation site. Often such relations and inhabitants' experiences are examined either at the beginning of such projects or alternatively at the other end of the project, when people have already been resettled. Here, however, the approach can be explained more as a study of an evolving process, including, in one way or another, all the phases of the redevelopment project and its aftermath.

The theoretical framework of the thesis is constructed around anthropological analyses of differentiated citizenship, i.e. the use of social differences to distribute rights differentially, along with processual, performative and disaggregated understandings of the state. By emphasising the contextuality of state-citizen relations, Salmi wants to move beyond purely legalistic approaches on citizenship, and thus she stresses the interdependency of the formal and informal or state politics and everyday life to gain a deeper understanding of these relations. Both theoretically and analytically, Salmi's work revolves very much around issues central in political anthropology without it being referred to as such. An example of this is her analysis of power relations or patterns of equality and/or inequality. Whether this was a conscious choice made by the author is not explicitly addressed.

Overall, Jelena Salmi's thesis is very rich in many ways as it introduces a number of concepts, intersecting analytical discussions on abstract ideologies and concrete materialities, research data produced from a variety of interactional, communicational and archival sources as well as ethnographic fieldwork combined with multidimensional historical, political and societal analysis. In Salmi's own words, she has analysed how an everyday reality of differentiated citizenship is formed through a dynamic entanglement of documents, infrastructure, state and non-state actors, and differentially positioned individuals. Based on her findings, good citizenship is defined in terms of civility, cleanliness, economic prosperity and non-Muslim identity, while the reality of the daily lives of the displaced people is marked by their literacy, economic and political clout, religious and caste identity, individual persistence, participation in informal networks and possession of resettlement apartments.

Furthermore, Salmi concludes that citizenship cannot be analysed apart from social, cultural and material contexts, which underlines the main anthropological contribution of her thesis.

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