



Studying the Politics in Constituting Space: A Comparative Analysis of Foucault's Theories of Governance and Doreen Massey's Conceptualizations of Space through Case Studies

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Abstract

Production of space is subjected to tensions of power which employ various techniques and strategies to continuously construct and reproduce the population. The power-relations that are integral to the processes of constituting space are significant not just for the creation of new technologies of governance but also for adopting ways to negotiate and resist top-down implementations of power. Space, therefore, ceases to be just a static platform of activity but in fact transforms into a dynamic factor that is constantly strategized and modified by different parties engaged in relations of power to interact with each other. The aim of this paper is to initiate a theoretical dialogue between Doreen Massey's conceptualization of space and Michel Foucault's take on technologies of governance and resistance through a few case studies to examine the interconnection between space and power-relation. Both Foucault and Massey have conceptualized space as a dynamic entity, playing an operative role in the constitution of social relationships and relations of power. While Massey has focused on the relations between space and humans to trace a historical trajectory of the construction of space that is always in a state of flux, Foucault has analysed how space has been strategized and modified for the development of power-relation. This paper, therefore, ties these theoretical trajectories through two specific case studies that focus on the constitution of colonial and diasporic spaces to analyse the technicalities of producing social groups engaged in various forms of communication with each other.

Keywords

space, power-relation, knowledge, governance, life

Introduction

The construction of space through social relations between people or governmental relations between the State and the people is subject to tensions of power. The focus lies mainly on the technologies of power employed as art, or mechanism of governance, to regularize a population through the construction and strategic usage of space. However, space can be constructed in multiple ways through different processes that are interrelated and at times co-constitutive of each other. And, in this co-constitution of space, or the development of spatial relations, power-relation has a significant role to play. To elaborate further, if technologies of governance can produce space to regularize a population, the population too can resist the implementation of such measures by adopting new ways to curb them. Spatial strategies and usage of space can produce knowledge at both ends for the State as well as the people. So, to argue along with Doreen Massey (2005) that "space is always under construction" along a historical trajectory, it can be proposed that this construction is a result of a power-relation between strategic implementation of governmental technologies and acts of resistance.

It is with this aim that this paper introduces Doreen Massey's concept of space and Michel Foucault's concept of the art of governance and gets them into a dialogue to investigate how power-relation can influence the constitution of space. This theoretical structure is implemented on a case study that compares the colonial management of the bazaar space called the 'New Market' in Calcutta and the spatial management of Bengali migrants in the Spitalfields region of post-imperial London. The motive in comparing these two spaces across historical time is to assess how transnational relations operate under different power dynamics under governmental regimes towards very different ends, and how power dynamics in turn reconstitute transnational relations through the production and management of space.

Theoretical Framework

According to Foucault, the art of 'government' becomes suitable for technological implementation in Europe with rise in population and a consequent shift in economy from the family to the people. Governance or government was fundamentally different from the rule of the sovereign where to be ruled by sovereign power was to abide by the law of the sovereign.¹ What therefore mattered ultimately here was the law that was set by the sovereign for the security of his own body, which demanded unconditional obedience. The power of the sovereign, according to Foucault, was to 'take life or let live' where the issue of 'life' (of the people) and its practices were not the concern of the sovereign (Foucault 241). In other words, what mattered was not the security of the people or subjects, but that of the sovereign and his power (in that sense it was 'his' kingdom, 'his' people). Hence, going by Foucault's

¹ Here I use the term "government" not to designate a group of people with the authority to govern a state or country, but as the action or manner of controlling or regulating a state, organization, or people.

explanation, to 'let' live and 'take' life was under sovereign authority where it was not interested in the conditions of life but could exercise the power to kill if the security of the sovereign was under threat. Death as a public spectacle was a way to exercise the power of the sovereign in front of the people so that his authority could not be challenged. Drawing from Foucault, the point that I therefore like to make is that under the rule of the sovereign, the knowledge produced about the space of the kingdom did not aim at reconstituting the space to regulate the life of the people. In fact, the production and management of space attains a completely different significance under technologies of government.

Referring to Guillaume de La Perriere's definition of government Foucault says that it is in governing things that government's disposal lies (Foucault 96). In contrast to the rule of the sovereign, attention now shifts to the life of the people and their relation to things that need to be governed and regulated. That governance or regulation, unlike sovereign power, does not function through unconditional obedience to law, but rather through the employment of 'tactics' (Foucault also talks about using law as a tactic) to constitute the life of the people (Foucault 99). In contrast to sovereign power, the focus and priority here shifts to the conditions and practices of life of and by the people that need to be regulated by governmental technologies. This method brings into light the importance of social and material space produced and inhabited by the people and the necessity on the part of government to strategize and regulate it. But first attention must be paid to the conditions that necessitated the invention of the art of government. In fact, as we shall see, these two factors are co-constitutive in historical time and have considerable influence on the construction of space. The first condition is population and its considerable expansion in the eighteenth century, and to it is connected the second condition of change in economy (Foucault 104). With increase in population the abundance of wealth increased as well and so did agricultural production. As a result, the focus of economy shifted from the family (this was so under sovereign power) to the population. Over here it is important to mention that the term "economy", Foucault says with reference to Rousseau, means the "father's management of the family's goods" (Foucault 106). With the shift in focus to the population and its demographic expansion as well as the spatial expansion of its economic practices, it necessitated intervention on the part of the government to regulate the relation between population, space and wealth. "Economy" in the sense of management of the population aimed at regulating and developing the life of the people towards generating more wealth. The word "economy" in this sense carried a double meaning. If one refers to the production and consumption of goods and the supply of money, the other refers to the careful management of resources and population.

It is in this sense that governance operates under the terms of 'make live and let die' (Foucault 241). Just like in case of sovereign power where 'life' of the subjects

was outside its interest, similarly with government 'death' becomes a private affair and outside its technologies of power. In fact, the emphasis is now laid on to 'make' live, to discipline and regularize the life of the population at the level of the individual as well as mass. These mechanisms of discipline and regulation operate very often through the strategic production and usage of space. One of the reasons for this is that demographic expansion of population necessitates the study and production of knowledge about people and the space that is inhabited by them on a mass scale using statistical analysis for the study of births, deaths, income, or the incidence of disease (Foucault lays emphasis on endemic diseases), which illustrate the changing structure of human populations (Foucault 243). The knowledge produced by such analysis would then require governmental intervention in the spatial management of proper housing, sanitation, and hygiene. Foucault calls this biopolitics, the regularization of life at the level of population (Foucault 243). Another level, that of the individual life, experiences 'disciplining' at the level of the body, which Foucault calls 'anatomo-politics' (Foucault 243). Spatial strategies are employed here as well by which the individual learns to discipline his/her body according to the space that s/he inhabits. Over here space is not a priori defined static entity waiting to be occupied or filled by the subject. Rather, the equation works such that the space produced through governmental tactics as requiring a subject to discipline the body, is in turn produced and accentuated through the performance of that disciplined body.

However, just because there is no a priori relation between a subject and space but one that is produced through spatial practice, such practices can also act as strategies of resistance towards governmental tactics. It is through such tactics and their subversion or resistance that power-relation between the people and State is defined. For Foucault, biopolitics and anatomo-politics are not mutually exclusive but can and do exist together. Take the example of the barrack from his *Discipline and Punish* (1975). On one hand it aims to discipline the individual body by making it imbibe aspects of correct posture while standing or shooting, or the mechanism of producing docile bodies. On the other hand, the function of the barrack is also combinatory, that is, how these practices of docility aim to create an organized and disciplined mass through drills and other practices. This combination of biopolitics and anatomo-politics, as shall be discussed in detail later in this paper, will be very significant in dealing with the case study of the New Market of colonial Calcutta and tactics employed by the colonial government to discipline each shopkeeper of the bazaar and also regularize the mass.

The reason Foucault's argument about the art of governance and technologies of power have been discussed in this detail is to bring out the significance of space and spatial practices in the employment of governmental strategies. This is important because the conceptualization of the construction and functionality of space and its trajectory of movement through historical time with respect to Doreen Massey's

formulation of space (2005) can be placed within the context of power-relations between the State and the subjects that are governed. Even though Foucault never actively dealt with the concept of space and spatiality in his works, this paper does not look at space with relation to his concepts merely as a metaphor. In the interview “Questions on Geography” (1980), Foucault criticized the Bergsonian notion of space as a static entity but doesn't impart agency to space as strategy. Panopticism according to him was most efficiently, elaborately and strategically implemented at the local, micro level of the through local actors and not just at the macro level of the State. However, he himself was in doubt whether to consider spatiality as an active tool of governmental technology or simply as a metaphor used in order to understand how mechanisms of discipline or regularization of the population was carried out by technologies of power.

Based on the analysis of Foucault's take on the art of government, this paper would like to bring space back into the argument by highlighting the fact that biopolitics or anatomo-politics function through the strategic use and production of space, be it at the micro level of the individual body or the macro level of the population. Implementation of governmental tactics function through manipulation and reproduction of space to the extent that space is not just a priori to implementation but produced through active human participation and subversion in power-relations. Be it through map-making or other scientific form of cataloguing human existence and gathering information (scientific knowledge to manipulate and politicize truth), space is not just material, waiting to be acted upon but an active tool/instrument that reconstitutes itself constantly in the production of knowledge. The proposition that space is a technology of power can be accentuated by—as mentioned in the beginning of the paragraph—linking Foucault's concept of the technologies of government with Massey's concept of space. The relation between space and time has been conceptualized by scholars like Bergson as disruption in the continual/progressive flow of time by representation (through its numbering) and thereby slicing up of time by space, leading to its eventual fixation and stasis (Massey 24). Such analysis formulates space as inherently static and equates spatialization with representation not just in/through the process of arrangement of things/objects, but as if also in fixation of meaning. Furthermore, in consequent philosophical developments, space as stasis has been stretched further as a closed system, as a system with finality, a definite telos that robs time of its openness.

Space and time, according to Massey are not identical but enmeshed categories that influence the constitution of one another and is taken as space-time. The argument of representation as stasis or fixation of meaning may hold true for the space-time nexus and not for space. Foucault too, as mentioned above, had criticized Bergson for the same fallacy in designating space as stasis. However, he had bypassed the problem of defining the exact role of space in his work. Massey provides a direction to this problem by imparting an agency to space and talking

about its constitution. Massey's propositions on space can be categorized under three main aspects. The first deals with the fact that space is a product of interrelations and is constituted through the interaction between various aspects (social, political, or economic) working at the micro level of the local or that of the global (Massey 10). The second aspect conceptualizes space as multiple or heterogeneous trajectories coexisting or interacting with each other in the same period of time (Massey 10). The third aspect considers space as always under construction (Massey 11). In this aspect Massey also brings in the first two to argue that the continuous process of spatial construction is possible only because of the interrelation or interaction between various material and social aspects that is dynamic in nature, always subject to flux. At the same time, it is the 'continuous' nature of the construction of space that creates its trajectory through time. It can also be interpreted in the way that this construction being a trajectory, a path, has a past that cannot be captured in entirety, and every such attempt is to recreate it under a new socio-cultural context or governmental agenda.

The words that Massey uses to characterize space like "a product of interrelations" that "is always under construction" move away from a metaphorical usage of space to something more concrete, like a technology or tool that can determine the power dynamics between the State and the population. It is in this context that 'interrelations' can be connected to the relation between governmental technology on one hand and the population on the other. In other words, the relation between the State and population is maintained on one hand by governmental tactics that work at the level of the body (anatomy-politics) or the mass (biopolitics) strategized by the production of space through such tactics (like, material and social spatial reconstitution for maintenance of hygiene or reduce rate of criminality among the population of a city, or the creation of docile bodies in required situations or spaces). On the other hand, the production of space as governmental tactic can be subverted or resisted by the population as well through various strategies. In a nutshell therefore, this continuous change in power-relation between the two parties leads also to continuous construction of space (hence, "always under construction") that therefore has a trajectory of change. Space therefore has a vital role to play in 'interrelations' because it acts as a tool, an instrument through which the equation of power changes.

As case-studies in this paper shall show with reference to the colonial management of a market space, the strategies of space as both governmental technology and resistance, lead to the continuous change in the constitution of space. Again, the example of the management of Bengali migrants to Spitalfields analyses not just how a 'past' of architectural splendour is reproduced through nostalgia to create a space to carry out a definite governmental agenda, but also how concerns about the security (in terms hygiene and social contact) of the colonizers travel in time to post-imperial London to create a nationalist space by managing

(rather, excluding) the Bangladeshi population through governmental tactics. The intention of comparing transnational spaces across time comes with an agenda. We study how in different socio-economic contexts, the technology of power is implemented in unequal power-relations to control, regulate and also gather knowledge about a populace assisting further in governance and the project of nation-building. What binds such comparative study is the critical lens of a postcolonial approach. A study of Jane Jacobs' research (1996) on the condition of the Bengali diasporic population of Spitalfields in London post decolonization necessitates the study of a colonial past that witnessed implementation of strategic material designs and policies by the colonizer to control a native population.

Borrowing from Daniel Clayton this paper proposes that a postcolonial critique of the social condition of Bengalis at Spitalfields brings forth issues of the intertwined lives and cultures of people that "a select group of cultures" have historically always tried to separate/distinguish across spaces at the pretext of nation-building (Clayton 355). Also, with reference to Massey's concept of contemporaneous pluralities of spatial trajectories it can be said that the intertwined cultures of the people determine the nature of social space that is produced over time that certain form of agenda wants to separate and exclude. However, as Natalie Oswin's (2008) proposition of deconstructing queer space shows, such exclusivity cannot function without producing itself by taking the subject of exclusion under the norm and then defining the 'self' by negating it. Under such an objective, this paper chose the construction of the New Market in Colonial Calcutta by the British as the second case. It also lays emphasis on the significance of its design and development as a social space through regular interaction between British officials and native shopkeepers. The objective in comparing these apparently unconnected spaces across time is not just to draw a connection between the production of social spaces and interaction between participants in a colonized land on one hand and the "imperial heartland" on the other (Jacobs 71). It is also to note how such social spaces have always been produced through the enmeshing of social lives of the actors, and hence space as always under construction. Be it the colonial masters and the natives or the British and the Bengali diaspora post decolonization, the technical measure of compartmentalizing them along neat divisions of the "Self" and "Other" has proved to be historically problematic and stands challenged continuously. It is with this agenda that this critique opens up the colonial past, to show how the social construction of identities and production of knowledge through colonial governance shaped the colonized land (and its people) as well as the imperial centre. And this is how, post decolonisation, the mechanism of such governance *travels historically* to influence a design of mutual exclusivity is practically implemented in a place like Spitalfields to materially and socially separate the British and Bengali diaspora in the name of a different nation-building.

This paper studies the two issues in order to tease out the specific elements/qualities in each and observe how colonialism shapes the imperial centre ideologically and in mechanisms of control and also the subjectivity of a native population that in a postcolonial scenario defines the dynamics between them uniquely.

Case Studies

Colonial Calcutta & The Making of New Market

If the New Market was constructed by the British solely with the purpose of serving the interests of colonial masters, that idea hadn't quite succeeded in reality. Colonial Calcutta as a lived space was divided into the "Black" and "White" towns. Though the "White" town underwent wide scale development for a convenient lifestyle for the Europeans, the "Black" town was distinguished for its dingy and narrow roads, congested and unhygienic environment, resided mainly by the natives (Chattopadhyay 10). However, amidst such exclusivity between the "center" and "periphery", the "machinations of knowledge and power" were constantly operative (Clayton 355). Contradictory co-existence was shortlisting as the same technologies of power that aimed at locating, distinguishing, and surveilling the native populace ended up in enmeshing and intertwining the two sections. The production of "White" town as a hygienic space was impossible without also maintaining proper hygiene and sanitation in the "Black" town as the two spaces were connected. Again, the "Black" town had to be properly regulated/controlled in and through exertion of power to establish British hegemony. After all, the "civilizing mission" of the West couldn't be ignored where the colonizers were engaged in a very different nation-building project. This project resulted in producing an "Indian Nation", an imagined feeling of *oneness*. Transnationalism in a way was also contributing to the making of a Nation where the technologies of power produced a social space that was constructed along colonial scientific parameters and also at the same time excluded from the "center", the "White" town.

The New Market as a social space since its inception in the 1870s within the limits of the "White" town was a hybrid space that continued to challenge the colonial system of decorum and vigilance. Establishment of the New Market itself happened at the cost of the Dhurrumtollah market that was reported by many European residents in 1863 as in a very sorry state. The decline of one market and rise of another witnessed the implementation of colonial technologies of elaborate planning and constant surveillance, that also aimed at capturing the vitality of market revenue, sucking the life out of Dhurrumtollah market. The transnational social space of the market proved, however, to be different from colonial domination. Within unequal power-relations, the agenda of the colonisers were

resisted (though mostly unsuccessfully) by the vendors who often refused to transfer their business to the New Market. Within the space of the New Market, multiple market administrative policies were implemented to strictly administer the vendors and also produce knowledge about their daily transactions to extract maximum revenue out of their sales. However, owing to the congested physical structure of the market and loopholes in market administration, revenue collection and skillful governance suffered a setback. The transnational social space of the market experienced secret, under-the-table dealings between vendors and British market officials. Through such illegal transactions the vendor was able to keep his shop amidst competition and also evade high revenue he had to otherwise pay to the municipality. For the market officials, many vendors were put off the record in producing a list of revenue collected, thereby erasing the knowledge of such vendors and their sales from the municipality record. Hence in the light of Massey and Foucault, we see how the intertwined professional and social lives of the vendors and officials produced a different social space of the market through unequal power-relations and by manipulating the congested material space actually *subverted* the system of knowledge production for the authority through the politics of illegal transaction that in a way evaded government surveillance.

The Case of Spitalfields: What Post-Coloniality Brought for the Bengali Diaspora

The socio-economic conditions of the *once colonized*, as Jane Jacobs shows through her study, did not necessarily improve post decolonization. The colonial discourse of the “Self” and “Other”, the “Centre” and “periphery” on one hand, and its civilizing mission and contribution of western scientific knowledge on the other translated, post decolonization, into a movement to the “Centre” from the “periphery” for the once colonized. The urge of moving to the “Centre” borne out of the inspiration of western scientific rationality in post-colonial memory was a result of *remembering* and *forgetting* for the postcolonial subject (Yeoh 370). If colonization was a co-constitutive process that equally shaped Europe ideologically and if transculturation inspired cultural formation in Europe, the postcolonial diasporic subject through its journey to the “Self” *in amnesia* further concretized the socio-cultural lines of division between the two (Clayton 355). An issue that cannot be foreseen by the diasporic subject, colonisation and western knowledge constituted a *subject-hood*, an identity that post decolonization experienced affinity for the “Centre”, often *forgetting* the practices of segregation and racism that came along with such knowledge. For the “Centre” therefore, such a journey was a threat to its very purity and exclusiveness. It tried to therefore limit it using the old strategy of segregation, a reproduction of that social space through its policies.

For the Bengali diasporic population migrating to Spitalfields, postcoloniality as journey to the “Centre” was “likely to be less definitely felt” (Jacobs 71). If Spitalfields as the highest concentration of Bengali diasporic population was a “product of decolonization” and designated as the “Other” of London, the 1970s and 1980s through gentrification and massive redevelopment witnessed a specific “nation-building project” aimed at bringing Spitalfields within the bounds of main London. The spatial reconstitution that followed produced the relation between the government and Bengali diaspora on new terms of segregation and exclusion. Through the relocation of Spitalfields Wholesale Fruit and Vegetable Market, the allotment of specific place for the Bengali garment industry, or relocating all sweetshops to other areas, the juggernaut of nation-building proceeded along the path of segregation and exclusion. Borrowing from Katherine Mitchell, the geopolitics of the transnational space of Spitalfields operated through mechanisms of the State (or host country) that through internal practices, tensions, and conflicts defined itself territorially by reproducing itself structurally and socially (Mitchell 79). The State produced knowledge of its own territory by reconfiguring the status of the Bengali diaspora. Through the construction of offices and massive residential complexes in Spitalfields, the space was gradually included as elemental part of the expanding city while its pre-existing Bengali population/business was shifted further towards the periphery. However, as Oswin (2008) would say, this construction of a space for the “nation” that effectively excluded the migrants was possible only by assessing them with the dynamics of power-relation, subjected to norms. The Bengali diaspora inhabited (suffered?) a space of deprivation, as an appendix to the society where its existence depended on the decisions of a *tolerant* State.

Conclusion: Nation-Building Versus Nation-Building

Compared to the scientific approach in nation-building which we observed in the case of Colonial Calcutta, the procedure in London employed a mixture of tradition and modernity. Exclusion of the Bengali diasporic population was largely done through a discourse of nostalgia by appealing to revive a *past* of Spitalfields through the renovation of Georgian houses along Georgian architectural design. The production of neo-Georgian architecture (*neo* because such architecture was infused with elements from modern lifestyle if observed carefully) was not just a hark back to the past. These were factors that reproduced history and knowledge of one’s past, the existence of history through the Present, a history that *was* the Present. This is because the past could never be captured in entirety but always reproduced through constant spatial construction. The neo-Georgian architecture aimed to capture the past in exactitude but could only produce spatially under the new governmental agenda of nation-building. In that sense, the architecture was a strange hybrid. Through the publicity of such a discourse the State intended to

concretize and delimit its territory, reproducing (and in turn excluding) the Bengali diaspora as appendix. The historical flow of the knowledge and technique of governance (produced basically in the colonial period in controlling/treating a native population) influenced now a very different nation-building, that of Britain's "home", its "Self". It was *protected* by its possible physical expansion and socio-cultural delimitation by reverting to its own tradition wrapped in modernity which the diaspora could never have related with.

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