

South Asian Urban Studies



Institute for Asian and African Studies

summer term 2024



Photo: Arshi Javaid

Table of Contents



02 Introducing BERSAS - Berlin South Asia Studies

04 South Asian Urban Studies at IAAW - Publications

08 Current Urban Research Projects

14 Urban South Asia - Interdisciplinary Approaches

16 Contact us



Introducing BERSAS - Berlin South Asia Studies



We would like to introduce you to BERSAS - a new forum for interdisciplinary South Asian Studies in Berlin. BERSAS is anchored at the IAAW and open to members of various organizations, departments and institutions. With the introduction of BERSAS, we bid farewell to our long standing Humboldt India Project Workshops, which have been held at the IAAW since 2011 with the aim of bringing together interdisciplinary South Asia competence in Berlin. We also bid farewell to the GAMS research colloquia, through which an international network of South Asia-related gender and media expertise has been established in recent years.

Each semester, there will be a different thematic focus for all formats that we offer for networking, research presentations, and exchange. In the summer semester 2024, we will start with the interdisciplinary field of South Asian Urban Studies. **Four BERSAS events** will introduce you to current research by academics and advanced students.

Geographical, historical, ethnographic, sociological, cultural, as well as media studies approaches will highlight the spectrum of urban research on South Asia and facilitate new networks and collaborations. We will **start on May 03** with an introduction to South Asian Urban Studies at IAAW and six short presentations of current projects by young and experienced scholars.

Introducing BERSAS - Berlin South Asia Studies



To celebrate the **launch of BERSAS** on **May 03**, starting at 2pm in room 315 at IAAW, we warmly invite you to join us for this event which will be followed by a reception.

On **May 31**, we look forward to the first **BERSAS lecture** which will be given by **Dr. Rituparna Patgiri** (TSLs Patiala/Doing Sociology Delhi). The topic of Dr. Patgiri's lecture is "**Eating Healthy Food in Urban India: The Role of Digital Technology**" (room 315 at IAAW, 2-4pm).

On **June 14**, we have the pleasure of welcoming Prof. Sanjay Srivastava (SOAS London) for a **BERSAS film screening and lecture**. In the first part of the double session, Prof. Srivastava will present his latest co-directed documentary film titled "**Survey City**" (2024). The film screening will be followed by a talk by Prof. Srivastava on the topic of "**Entangled Sovereignties: New Land Markets, an Entrepreneurial state and the Aspirations of a 'Criminal Caste' in Gurgaon, Haryana**" (room 315 at IAAW, 2-5pm).

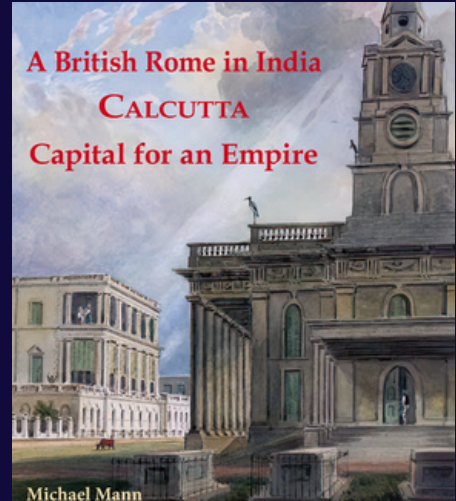
On July 12, a **BERSAS workshop** will take place from 2-4pm in the HU main building Unter den Linden 6 (room 2249a), for which we will circulate an open call one month in advance. This will be followed on the same day by the **retirement ceremony for Prof. Dr. Michael Mann** in the Senate Hall of the HU main building Unter den Linden.

For updated program information, please visit the BERSAS homepage. We very much look forward to welcoming you to the launch of BERSAS on May 03 as well as to all other South Asian Urban Studies events this summer!

South Asian Urban Studies at IAAM

Selected Research Publications

The **Calcutta/Kolkata project** was launched in 2012 when Melitta Waligora started to work on the modern, post-colonial city. Her emphasis is on the various living quarters and their cultural and architectural heritage. With Anuradha Roy from Jadavpur University in Kolkata she published a couple of edited volumes on the city covering political, historical, cultural, ethnographic and social topics. Michael Mann's study on colonial Calcutta, completed in 2022, deals with urban planning, urban design and architecture of the East India Company settlement during its development into the capital city of British-India.



Michael Mann, *A British Rome in India. Calcutta - Capital for an Empire*. Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 2022.

Michael Mann, *Shantiniketan - Hellerau. New Education in the 'Pedagogic Provinces' of India and Germany*. Heidelberg: Draupadi, 2015.

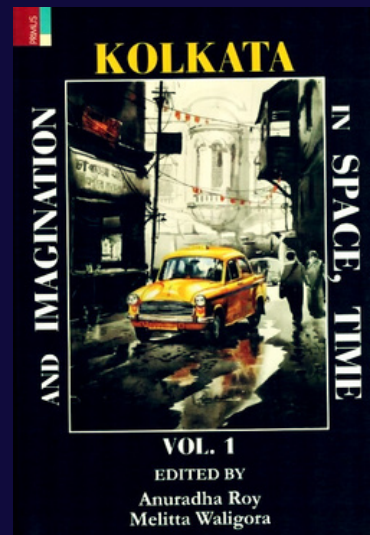
South Asian Urban Studies at IAAM

Selected Research Publications

Anuradha Roy & Melitta Waligora (eds.), *Kolkata in Space, Time, and Imagination*. Vol. 2, Delhi: Primus Verlag, 2020.



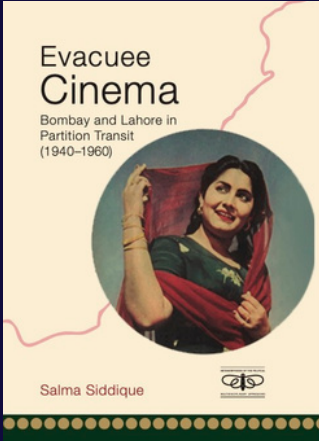
Anuradha Roy & Melitta Waligora (eds.), *Kolkata in Space, Time and Imagination*. Vol. 1, Delhi: Primus Books, 2019.



Melitta Waligora, *Kalkutta. Eine moderne Stadt am Ganges*. Berlin: Neofelis, 2015.

South Asian Urban Studies at IAAW

Selected Research Publications

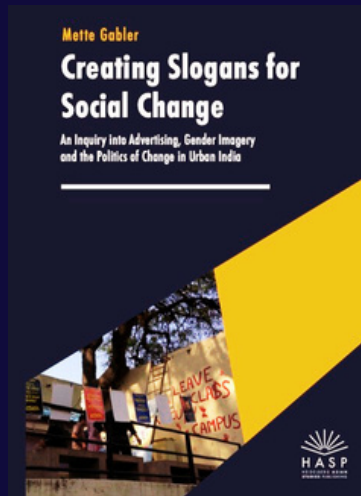


Nominated for the BASAS Book Prize 2024 (shortlist): Salma Siddique, *Evacuee Cinema. Bombay and Lahore in Partition Transit, 1940-1960*. Cambridge University Press, 2022.

Mette Gabler, *Creating Slogans for Social Change. An Inquiry into Advertising, Gender Imagery and the Politics of Change in Urban India*. Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing, 2024.



Nadja-Christina Schneider, *Reimagining Housing, Rethinking the Role of Architects in India*. Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing, 2024.



South Asian Urban Studies at IAAM

Selected Research Publications

Working Group Urban Dwellings, *Dwelling Together. Urban Housing, Neighborliness and Multilocal Homemaking*. RePLITO Digital Knowledge Archive, 2023.



Fritzi-Marie Titzmann, “Trolley Times: Mediating Solidarity in the Indian Farmers’ Movement.” In Fritzi-Marie Titzmann & Nadja-Christina Schneider (eds.), *Conference Publication: How to Live Together? Circulatory Practices and Contested Spaces in India*. RePLITO Digital Knowledge Archive, 2022.

Arshi Javaid, “Seduction of the old City of Srinagar: An Enquiry into Competing Narratives of Belonging.” *Dastavezi*, 2023 (5): 96-110.

Arshi Javaid, “Habba Kadal. What was Left Behind in the Mohallae.” *GAMSzine* No. 4, Summer 2022: 48-50.

Nadja-Christina Schneider, “Feminist Loitering in the City. Transmedia Practice and Imagination.” In Youna Kim (ed.). *Media in Asia. Global, Digital, Gendered and Mobile*. London: Routledge, 2022.

Nadja-Christina Schneider, “Filming Urban Spaces and Entangled (Im)Mobilities: Experimental Documentaries by & about Young ‘Muslim Women’ in Delhi.” In Nadja-Christina Schneider & Fritzi-Marie Titzmann (eds.). *Studying Youth, Media and Gender in Post-Liberalisation India. Focus on and beyond the ‘Delhi Gang Rape’*. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2014: 167-190.

Current Urban Research Projects

Nitrate Cities:
**Spectatorial Exertions and Film
Experience in Urban South Asia**
Dr. Salma Siddique
DFG Individual Research Grant

The Guddu Film Archive in Karachi is one site of cinephilic infrastructure furthering a spectatorial urban community. © Salma Siddique, 2016



‘Nitrate Cities’ seeks to investigate urban transformations in South Asia through embodied spectatorial practices and identity politics around cinema. The project proposes to examine the way spectators alter their lived urban environment through peaceful as well as agitational activities. The project evokes the nitrate materiality of celluloid, which once made film stock highly unstable and combustible, as a metaphor for local sensitivities that have existed for as long as filmmaking in the South Asian region. Liable to hurt and offense, these sensitivities are predominantly connected to religious beliefs, caste-class identities and historically constituted inter-community dynamics. Identifying cinema as the foremost representative space of negotiating social mobilities and future identities, Nitrate Cities builds on scholarship on cinema and the city (Mazumdar 2007, Bruno 2001), film preservation (Hediger 2011, Cherchi Usai 2009), and embodied spectatorship (Sobchack 2004, Marks 1999). Finally, Nitrate Cities proposes a new method of understanding the relay between cities and cinema, by ethnographically engaging with the material forms, affective practices and historic configurations of urban spectators.

Current Urban Research Projects

A memory archive for the
old city of Srinagar in the
Kashmir Valley

Dr. Arshi Javaid

Einstein Junior Scholar



Arshi Javaid's research project seeks to create a memory archive for the old city of Srinagar in the Kashmir Valley, which is undergoing a dramatic transformation in terms of architecture, infrastructure, demography and ownership patterns. The project is called Yaadgah (abode of memories) and is currently hosted at <https://www.instagram.com/yaadgah>. Through this project she aims at freezing the alternate forms of living as they existed in the city before they are exterminated by the designs of state and market.



Current Urban Research Projects

**New Communicative Figurations,
Practices of Subjectivation and
Socio-Religious Change in the Anti-
Caste Context: The Translocally
Connected Ravidassia Community**
Dhanya Fee Kirchhof, PhD candidate

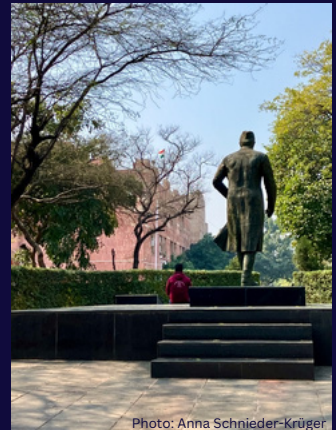


Dhanya Kirchhof's doctoral project explores changing communicative figurations in the context of North Indian medieval Bhakti saint Guru Ravidass and related to people who identify themselves as followers (and often as descendants) of Guru Ravidass and originate from the Doaba region of Punjab. The increasing participation of Ravidassias in trans-regional, national and global media flows is also highly relevant for ongoing discussions in the field of Urban Studies. It effects the visibility of and the interconnection between localities related to Ravidassias and Guru Ravidass worldwide. In this context, localities within South Asia and around the globe emerge as media hubs which do not correspond with the predominant understanding of global media cities – for instance small towns, semi-rural regions, or suburbs of industrial cities. In this regard, the project questions an urban-rural dichotomy within media studies and sheds light on the transformation of localities in a highly mediatized and glocalized world.

Current Urban Research Projects

Living (in) JNU – A Campus, a University, a Home, a Neighborhood and a City within a City

Anna Schnieder-Krüger, PhD candidate



Using the campus of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi as a case study, this research project addresses the following questions: How does living together in a transforming and transformed place affect the idea of home? To what extent does the material (built, as well as planted, living, moving, and changing) environment influence the coexistence in these spaces? JNU represents different ideas in different contexts. In my research, I look at the campus as a (temporal) home that is created through homemaking practices, (neighborly) relations, (collective) memories, and artefacts. I argue that the JNU campus provides a unique way of life that gives us important insights into what was considered the ideal of an Indian university in earlier decades and is currently being renegotiated.

For more information and previous research:

Schnieder-Krüger, Anna. 2023. "Wofür steht die JNU und wem gehört ihr Campus? – Der symbolische Deutungskampf um den Campus der Jawaharlal Nehru Universität". In: *ASIEN* 164/165 (peer-reviewed).

Current Urban Research Projects

**DHARMA – The Domestication of
'Hindu' Asceticism and the Religious
Making of South and Southeast Asia
(2019-2026)**

Annette Schmiedchen

ERC Synergy Grant (ERC 809994)



Photo: Annette Schmiedchen

The project DHARMA is an interdisciplinary and transregional research project carried out by a consortium of three host institutions (CNRS, EFEO [both Paris] and HU [Berlin]) and one partner organisation (L'Orientale [Naples]). As the focus of this research is the history of religious institutions in selected regions of South and Southeast Asia from the 6th to the 13th centuries, three regional task-forces (A, B, and C) of overlapping membership have been set up, each under the responsibility of one host institution.

For each region, the main sources of study are inscriptions, but archaeological data are – wherever possible – also included. A fourth task-force (D) investigates non-epigraphical texts. Humboldt University is the host institution for task-force B “From the Deccan to Arakan”, which covers medieval central and eastern India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. Annette Schmiedchen, Dániel Balogh, Samana Gururaja, Natasja Bosma, Amandine Wattelier-Bricout, and Jens Thomas (all Berlin), as well as Coline Lefrancq (Paris), Ryosuke Furui (Tokyo) and Rajat Sanyal (Kalkutta) have contributed to the research of task-force B since 2019.

**DHARMA – The Domestication of
'Hindu' Asceticism and the Religious
Making of South and Southeast Asia**
(2019-2026)

Annette Schmiedchen



Although urban studies are not the main focus, task-force B adds a transregional and pre-modern perspective to this field of research hosted by Humboldt University. Coline Lefrancq, for instance, is supervising the surveys and excavations conducted by the French-Bangladeshi archaeological mission at the site of Mahasthan, the ancient city of Puṇḍranagara, one of the main towns (if not the capital) of Puṇḍravardhana in north Bengal, which is now known to have been founded around the 4th century BCE and to have lasted beyond the 13th century CE.

Current excavations focus on the urban organisation and on the relationship between the Śaiva religious ensemble called Bairagir Bhita and the habitation areas. Besides archaeology, epigraphy also provides plenty of information on pre-modern urbanisation, on the relation between cities and their rural surroundings, on the preference of certain religious communities for either settling in towns or for village life.

Annette Schmiedchen, for example, has studied the concentration of medieval Buddhist monasteries, especially nunneries, in towns in her article “Monastic Complexes for Monks and Nuns: The Social Fabric of Buddhist Monasteries under the Maitrakas in Gujarat.” In Annette Schmiedchen, Arlo Griffiths, Ryosuke Furui (eds). *Epigraphic Evidence on Patronage and Social Contexts of Buddhist Monasteries in Medieval South and Southeast Asia* (= Buddhism, Law & Society 7 [2021/22]): 59–98.

Urban South Asia

Interdisciplinary
approaches to the city

Sadia Bajwa



Photo: Adeel Shabir on Unsplash

This MA course (winter term 2023/24) took the category of the city as a starting point of inquiry into the dynamics of social, cultural and political life in South Asia. The course approached the city, first, as a symbolic space where discourses of belonging, past and future are negotiated. This includes envisioning of the modern nation-state through statist projects of infrastructure and mass transit, heritage conservation or ‘beautification’ of the city. At the same time, cities have been the subject of cultural expressions and narratives of belonging, hope and loss that are found in the realms of literature, poetry, street art, and other forms.

Second, the city is also a space of inclusion and exclusion. Therefore, the course asked how urbanism has been negotiated by citizen-subjects along intersectional lines of class, gender, ethnicity, age etc. The course adopted an inter- and multidisciplinary lens, drawing on research from urban studies, anthropology, architecture, political science, history, literature and film. Guest speakers working on various urban themes engaged with students on the processes and challenges of their respective research projects, from the development of the research question to research ethical and methodological reflections.

Urban South Asia

Interdisciplinary approaches to the city

Sadia Bajwa



Image: Detail of Jean Baptiste Tassin, Map of the City and Environs of Calcutta, 1831 (Public domain)

Michael Mann (IAAW) spoke about his historical study of the making of Calcutta as a colonial capital; Nadja-Christina Schneider (IAAW) presented on (media) practices of architects in shaping architecture as a field of knowledge. Aseela Haque (FU) introduced her urban ethnography of roads in Karachi and on the politics of infrastructure, inhabitation, and more-than-human relations in the city. Last but not least, the students engaged with Ali Usman Qasmi (LUMS) and Arshi Javaid (IAAW) in a tandem session on memory archives in Lahore and Srinagar respectively.

The students formulated their individual research concepts focusing, representing various parts of South Asia and engaging with comparative examples across the Global South as well as transregional connections between cities. Their project ideas spanned from comparing modernist planned capital cities in postcolonial Pakistan and Nigeria to analyzing the phenomenon of the 'pink ticket' in New Delhi in an exploration of its implications for gender and mobility in an urban context.

Contact Us



Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Institute for Asian and African Studies
Invalidenstraße 118
10115 Berlin
<https://www.iaaw.hu-berlin.de/de>

Department for South Asian Studies
Prof. Dr. Michael Mann (michael.mann@hu-berlin.de)

DHARMA – The Domestication of ‚Hindu‘ Asceticism and
the Religious Making of South and Southeast Asia (ERC
Synergy Grant)
Prof. Dr. Annette Schmiedchen
(annette.schmiedchen@hu-berlin.de)

Department of Gender and Media Studies for the South
Asia Region (GAMS)
Prof. Dr. Nadja-Christina Schneider
(nadja-christina.schneider@hu-berlin.de)

EDITOR & DESIGN
NADJA-CHRISTINA SCHNEIDER

Please note: In the online edition of this booklet you
can directly access all linked sources.