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Heyink

Where is Jawaharlal Nehru University?

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Where is Jawaharlal Nehru University? Tracking Changes in India's Higher Education Development

Marina-Elena Heyink

Centre for Development Studies (ZELF)
Institute of Geographical Sciences
Freie Universität Berlin

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Prof. Dr. Hermann Kreutzmann

Contact
Centre for Development Studies (ZELF)
Institute of Geographical Sciences
Freie Universität Berlin
Malteserstr. 74-100
D-12249 Berlin

h.kreutzmann@fu-berlin.de

Tel: +49 – 30 – 838 70223
Fax: +49 – 30 – 838 70757

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Tracking Changes in India's Higher Education Development

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May 2018, Marina-Elena Heyink

Abstract

In recent years, the phenomenon of nationalism has evoked much attention when negotiating the institutional design of India's universities. Justifiably rejecting the political project of naturalizing or essentializing the concepts of nation and nationhood, critical public and scientific discourse, however, often reduces nationalism to its symbolic or idealistic dimension. On the contrary, material structures of public institutional spaces have received little geographical attention when approaching national ideals, aspirations, conflicts, and controversies. This is despite the fact that constructed environments and spatial designs form a substantial link between the nation state of India and its public higher education institutions.
Arguing that *space makes a difference*, the paper in hand raises nationalism as a problem of simultaneous positioning. By tracking India's higher education development through the example of Jawaharlal Nehru University campus space, I will not only focus on nationalism as a matter of symbol and categories of consciousness but also on the material dimensions of institutional design, namely building distribution, constructional aesthetics, and spatial accessibility. Thus, this work offers perspectives that extend beyond the idealization or demonization of the various notions of the Indian nation.

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Acronyms

ABVP	Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad
BAPSA	Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students Association
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CCJNU	Campus Committee of the Jawaharlal Nehru University
CHS	Centre for Historical Studies
CSS	Special Centre for Sanskrit Studies
DDA	Delhi Development Authority
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
JNUSU	Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NEP	New Educational Policy
NPE	National Policy on Education
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PM	Prime Minister
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SC	Scheduled Castes
ST	Scheduled Tribes
SSS	School of Social Sciences
UDSF	United Dalit Students Forum
VC	Vice Chancellor

1 Where is Jawaharlal Nehru University? An introductory question

In July 2016, I jumped off bus no. 511 at Ber Sarai Bus Stop, South Delhi. Disoriented, I turned back to the bus driver: "Where is Jawaharlal Nehru University?". The driver's response was unsettling: "You want to go to JNU? Go to Pakistan!" Pakistan? Was I not looking for one of the most popular and best performing universities of India?

It was on 9th of February 2016, at the very place of Jawaharlal Nehru University Campus, located in South Delhi, India, that during an event organized by a left-wing student organisation a number of people, masked and thus unidentified, were heard sloganeering: *Bharat ki barbadi tak jung rahegi* (We keep fighting our battle until India is destroyed). Informed by upset members of the right-wing student party Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)[1], the university's Vice Chancellor (VC) called the police by way of exception. The police forcefully ended the event, and arrested the then-incumbent JNU-Students' Union (JNUSU) President Kanhaiya Kumar along with two other students. The students were taken to jail and charged with sedition, which provoked nationwide anger. The *9th of Feb incidence* rapidly became media-effective. While on live television, India's most watched anchor, Arnab Goswami, shouted at invited JNU students: "If you're not anti-national, why is the Indian state an enemy in your protest and Pakistan is not? Which side are you on?" (Goswami, 2016). The opinion that JNU is placed on the enemy's side – that it should *go to Pakistan!*[2] – eventually mobilized an India-wide *witch-hunt campaign* against the entire Jawaharlal Nehru University. Convinced of JNU's *anti-national* character, Delhi's rickshaw drivers and shop keepers stopped servicing JNU members, posters propagated their lynching in the capital's streets, JNU alumni received notice that their work- or tenancy agreements were terminated for holding a degree issued by the institution of "terrorism and treason" (FPJ Bureau, 2016), and parliamentarians called for the university's closure:

> JNU has a long history of sedition and anti-national politics and it is not easy to combat it intellectually or through campus politics […]. So the best way is to vacate the hostels and shut the university down. It can be restarted in a different way, with a different curriculum, a different set of students, and a different administration (Chandan Mitra as cited in Sarkar & Swamy 2016).

How could Jawaharlal Nehru University, established as the Indian nation's academic flagship project – *truly national* – and ever since having stood out with its successful alumni – academics, intellectuals, civil servants, diplomats, and politicians[3] – lose its standing and integration within the Indian nation?

---

[1] The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) is a student organisation affiliated to the Hindu nationalist association of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Its political activities are also close to the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, the official youth wing of the governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

[2] 'Go to Pakistan!' has become a proverb expressing 'You have no business here' or 'Go to hell'.

[3] In fact, today, a large number of ministers from the Modi cabinet are JNU graduates. Most prominently the foreign secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, the commerce minister Nirmala Sitharaman, as well as Amitabh Kant, who is said to be the force behind the Prime Minister's *Make in India* campaign.

The following makes the question for JNU's national exclusion a question of positioning. I argue that the public university's disparagement – its normative displacement on the enemy's side – extends far beyond the singular incident of 9 February 2016. Institutionally built upon the administrative intersection of the Indian government and the academic community, JNU is caught between two sides that are gradually drifting apart in ideological terms. The university has become a contested space, where two potentially powerful actors measure the forces of state authority and academic autonomy against each other. The *9th of Feb incidence* is thus only one "political spectacle" (D'Arcus 2006, 6) in a broader trial of strength and larger political negotiations, in which the two sides battle over the prerogative of interpreting nothing less than the nation itself. By methodologically asking 'Where is JNU?', I have approached those negotiations from the perspective of campus space. Following JNU's institutional and constructional history, I will not only focus on the symbolic dimension of nationhood, the nation, and nationalism but also on the material dimensions of the concepts, namely building distribution, constructional aesthetics, and spatial accessibility. This work understands itself as an edited collection of data provided by JNU-members and persons affected or involved in the *JNU controversy*. It is structured in the following way:

Chapter 2 provides basic information on the JNU Campus and embeds the central university within its larger institutional setting, i.e. the Indian higher education sector. Pointing to the interlinkages between physical campus structures and institutional policymaking, I will deepen the understanding for my chosen theoretical perspective and enlarge upon the applied empirical methods. That will provide the ground for the following three chapters. Chapter 3, 4, and 5 each take a closer look at the functional divisions found on JNU Campus, thereby tracking the changes that characterize India's higher education development. Chapter 3 will scrutinize JNU's residential units. Here, in relation with the institutional undertaking of demographic recategorization, the campus's constructional patterns have decisively changed over the past two decades. The interrelating effects of physical structures and demographic identity will be discussed against their historical background and their impact on the understanding of Indian nationhood. The following chapter will then turn to JNU's Academic Block. Chapter 4 investigates on the effects of economic and politico-ideological reorientations in India's knowledge production. Looking at the constructional alignment of learning environments and aesthetics will stress the significant role of historiography and historical knowledge production for the diverging forms of Indian nationalisms that are under negotiation on campuses all over India. Chapter 5 will examine the aspect of spatial accessibility as a key factor for political and administrative participation. Tracking the diversification of political movements and the changing spatiality of JNU's Administration Block, I will describe the various angles from which the university can be viewed in its relation to an outside: the Indian government and the broader society. Based on the information presented in the previous chapters, I will combine the findings in chapter 6. Subsuming the data under the notions of nation as their common reference point will allow drawing conclusions. Thus, the final chapter will provide the possibilities of localizing Jawaharlal Nehru University within the Indian nation and give differentiated answers to the introductory question: Where is JNU?

In its entirety, this work serves a triple purpose. Firstly, bringing together official documents and the contemporary witnesses' knowledge about JNU's construction history, it is a current documentary, a snapshot, so to speak, of Jawaharlal Nehru University campus space. Secondly, this paper wants to contribute to the continuing discourse on the political and societal role, as well as the responsibility of *University* as a national institution. Relying on my empirical data, I aim to concretize the very terms of institution and nation, thus making them more approachable for further empirical research. Thirdly, this work methodologically joins in a debate on how *space makes a difference* (cf. i.a. Massey 2005, McGregor 2004, Sayer 1985, Shortell and Brown 2014, Soja 1996). The example of Jawaharlal Nehru University will highlight how constructed environments and institutional settings in their relatedness are socio-political, and hence spatial constructions, rather than immutable facts.

2 How Jawaharlal Nehru University makes a difference: The campus within India's landscape of higher education

This work is based on the critical idea that *space makes a difference*: Public environments always produce and reproduce wider society's norms, forms, images, and imaginings of geography (McGregor 2004, 2; Said 1994, 7). Therefore, the perceptibility of spatial designs forms a substantial link between the nation state of India and its public institutions of higher education. To gain further insights and additional perspectives on the role of national visions for India's institutional design, geographical research on built environments becomes crucial. Before I will turn to a more detailed description of JNU Campus, this chapter has the purpose of preparing the ground. It provides introductory information on Jawaharlal Nehru University in its institutional and spatial set up. As one of India's 47 central universities the campus must also be understood against the backdrop of its larger institutional framework that is India's higher education landscape. Therefore, the subsequent section will provide an overview about India's higher education development. Taking both sets of information into account, I will then enlarge upon my theoretical perspective and applied research method.

2.1 Setting up JNU as truly national university

Years before the actual campus constructions would even start, Jawaharlal Nehru University was already envisioned to become an institutional milestone in independent India's landscape of higher education. In the early 1960s, the idea to establish a new university – a university that would be "different from all other universities in India and therefore be unique in itself" (Education Minister (1969–71) V.K.R.V. Rao as cited in Batabyal 2014, 27) – was born out of necessity. One and a half decades after the Republic's founding, India's higher education system was facing a major crisis of institutional design. Developed as instruments of colonial governance, the bulk of universities had turned into battlegrounds during Independence and Partition struggles. On campuses all over India, most prominently in Banaras Hindu University and Aligarh Muslim University, claims for political power were fought out along the lines of religion, caste, and language. Consequently, universities'

societal benefit was viewed sceptically by politicians and public. Despite many critics, India's first Prime Minister (PM) Jawaharlal Nehru insisted on the importance of universities as the independent nation's main building blocks (Roy 2007, 105ff.). Under PM Nehru's leadership, the Congress government asserted that modernity, progress, and economic development, along with democracy and territorial cohesion could only be achieved by educating the coming generations of India's citizens in "truly national universities" (Education Minister (1969–71) V.K.R.V. Rao as cited in Batabyal 2014, 27). In December 1964, the Jawaharlal Nehru University Bill was presented to the Rajya Sabha, the Upper House of the Indian parliament. It was read as an anti-colonial counter proposal and as such welcomed not only by the Congress, but also by the Communist Party of India:

> Let us not have Cambridges and Oxfords and Princetons and Harvards here; […] let us create universities and colleges that our people need, that our development needs, for the re-making of our material and cultural being […], for the sons of the working people, the workers, the peasants and the middle classes (Bhupesh Gupta from the Communist Party of India as cited in Batabyal 2014, 8).

Interpreted against the contemporary understanding of the Indian constitution, the public institution was thought to be built on an intersection point. On campus, two potentially powerful actors – the Indian government and the academic community – should meet and recreate a harmonious relationship between the Indian state and its citizens. Therefore, the JNU was conceptualized as a central university and thus fell under the jurisdiction of the Union Government. The Centre would provide the university's funding and appoint the Vice Chancellor (VC) of the institution. At the same time, JNU was granted an unprecedented degree of autonomy. It was entitled to make its own statutes regarding "admission policy, framing of courses, methods of teaching, and technique of evaluation of students" (Bhambhri 1996, 87). The idea that a university should not be a "department of the state" (Education Minister (1963-1966) M. C. Chagla as cited in Kidwai 2017) rooted in the founders' attraction to the European ideal of academic autonomy, which was valued as an elementary democratic principle. Simultaneously, the liberal philosophy of academic autonomy was understood as genuinely Indian and, primarily, post-colonial as it opposed British utilitarianism (Bose 2017, 160). Bearing former PM Jawaharlal Nehru's name, the new university was to play a socially transformative role and represent the three basic principles of national integration, socialism, and universalism.

When Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister of India, the debate around the new institution gathered momentum and became concrete. After the Jawaharlal Nehru University Bill was eventually passed in 1966, education minister Nurul Hasan assigned the first teaching positions. PM Indira Gandhi herself appointed Gopalaswami Parthasarathy, India's former Ambassador to the United Nations, as JNU's first Vice Chancellor. Jawaharlal Nehru University commenced its research and teaching activities in 1971 at a site that is today known as the JNU Old Campus.[4]

[4] JNU Old Campus is located at Baba Gang Nath Marg adjacent to the northern boundary of the present JNU Campus.

The site was previously developed as a training ground for civil servants and already offered adequate infrastructure to the first university members:

> From the beginning, the atmosphere was actually very liberal. Everyone lived on campus. Since we all lived close and ate together, it was not so difficult to get work done by the officers. It was easy to relate to them. There was also a very interesting process of gender socialisation. There were a lot of young women students. Within the campus, it was safe, so even in the late night students could hang around chatting (Alumni (m), personal communication, June 17, 2017).

It was that special *JNU atmosphere,* hitherto unknown in formal institutional spaces, that attracted liberal and ideologically left-leaning visitors – intellectuals, politicians, and artists from all over India. On campus, extra-curricular talks, film screenings, and political debates became an integral part of the *JNU culture*. To translate that liberal atmosphere into the language of architecture and town planning became the overall objective of spatial planning on JNU's 'new' campus (Campus Committee of the Jawaharlal Nehru University [CCJNU] n.d.).

The JNU Campus construction commenced in 1970 with the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) granting 1019 acres of land to the university. By the end of 1989, the campus was fully functional. Whereas JNU is now located in the buzzing heart of South Delhi, during its initial construction phase, the area was barely connected to the capital's urban infrastructure. As part of the Delhi Mehrauli Ridge, a northern extension of the Aravalli Range, the land was rocky and barren. JNU's development has sustainably changed the environment. To make life on campus more comfortable and protect residents from the harsh semi-arid climate, the entire campus area was afforested (Fig. 1). Today, it comprises 369 acres of green area and 200 acres of protected forest (Jawaharlal Nehru University Engineer Branch 2015). Thus, it is assigned by the DDA (2010) as recreational land, falling under public and semi-public land use. With regard to construction patterns, i.e. building speed and -quantity, spatial arrangement, and architectural style, the campus development can be divided into two construction phases, one before and one following the 1990s. The first phase of campus development was characterized by the gradual erection of residential units in the north-western and south-eastern areas. Simultaneously, in the centre of the campus, an academic complex, initially comprising seven schools, and the Administration Block were developed. The second phase of campus development showed more rapid constructional growth and focussed on large-scale expansion towards the campus's southwest boundary. Furthermore, new schools were built in the Academic Block's fringes, road infrastructure was enhanced, and beautification measures adopted in the 1990s shaped the campus appearance decisively. In 2017, several construction sites indicate the erection of new hostels and academic buildings in the near future. Over the past decades, due to Delhi's growth, JNU has become an integral part of the capital's urban landscape. Framed by three main thoroughfares, the campus lies amidst the residential areas of Munirka Village and Vasant Kunj. Along its eastern boundary, the campus abuts Qutab Institutional Area and the Indian Institute of Technology. In the 1980s, 157 acres of JNU's campus land was allotted to other educational institutions

(Fig.1). Hence Jawaharlal Nehru University became an integral part of a larger educational complex. The university's constructional developments must also be viewed against the background of the broader institutional processes that have taken place within India's higher education landscape.

Source: Jawaharlal Nehru University Engineer Branch 2015; own survey and design2017

Fig. 1: JNU campus map

2.2 The institutional landscape of India's higher education

Since JNU's official inauguration in 1969, the Republic's higher education system has been formally shaped by three major factors: governmental education policy ('standardization'), vacillating programmes of affirmative action ('democratization'), and the process of economic reorientation ('liberalization'). According to Agarwal (2007, 198), India's post-independence development of higher education took place in two distinct phases: one before 1980 and one following the 1980s.

The country's first independent education policy was launched in 1968 with the Congress government implementing the National Policy on Education (NPE). The NPE wanted to reform the hitherto institutional structures that were established under colonial rule and consequently were regarded as undesired colonial heritage. The second NPE was introduced in 1986, and partly revised in 1992. It adjusted higher education to India's changing economic and political scene. Both National Policies on Education, that of 1968 and that of 1986/1992,

resembled each other insofar as they defined education as an agent to promote "the goals of 'socialism', 'secularism' and 'democracy'" (Sharma 2016, 142).

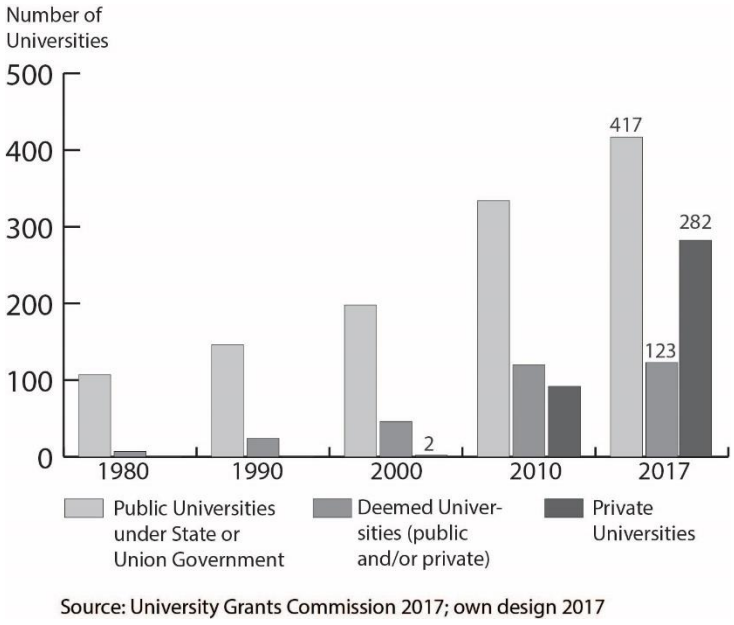
Altering programmes of affirmative action also brought substantial changes in India's higher education system. Already since the 1950s, compensatory discrimination and reservation quotas were continuously enhanced to foster nationwide democratization. In 1979, the Morarji Desai government (Janata Party) mandated the so-called Mandal Commission. The commission's recommendations were eventually implemented in 1990, after which the government decreed a nationwide reservation quota that not only considered members of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), but also citizens that were henceforth categorized as belonging to Other Backward Classes (OBC).[5] The quota aimed to democratize Indian institutions of higher education by granting university seats to students from "the 'weaker sections' of the society" (Desai & Kulkarni 2008, 249). What was controversially referred to as *mandalisation* of institutions, changed the outlook of India's campuses. It led to an overall expansion of higher education and transformed the awareness for differentiability amongst university members. In fact, it lastingly changed the perception of *diversity*. The Mandal Commission, which was established to "determine the criteria for defining the socially and educationally backward classes" (Government of India 1980, iii), had not only assessed the criteria of regional origin and class as indicators for social deprivation, but had also referred to the aspects of religion and – most significantly – caste. The demographic recategorization hit a political and public arena, where the notion of caste was considered "something from the past" (Menon & Nigam 2007, 15) and was a term equally rejected by the Hindu right-wing and the Nehruvian modernists. Reviving the very term of caste for reasons of democratization and bringing it back to public discourse, eventually displayed the "erosion of the Nehruvian secular-nationalist imagination" (ibid., 15).

Besides the NPEs and the enhanced affirmative action policies, the third factor that sustainably impacted the institutional landscape of higher education was India's economic reorientation, also referred to as liberalization. Until the 1980s, India's higher education sector was heavily nationalized. Even though the protectionist state had been reliant on private actors to establish and develop institutions of higher education, it had authorised private intervention only in form of grant-in-aid institutions (Agarwal 2007, 199). However, following the 1980s, India's higher education sector entered a new phase that heralded contrasting developments. Gradually the state disengaged from its responsibilities by handing them over to private actors, who in return for their services demanded more entrepreneurial autonomy from the state. India's economic liberalization in 1991 fostered that trend. In resonance with the national and international[6] directives that called higher education to face its "long-standing problems and the new realities" (World Bank 2000, 9), Indian institutions of higher education were encouraged to adopt market-relevant policies.

[5] Schedule Castes (SC), Schedule Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) are demographic categories that are given reservation status and positive discrimination by the Indian Constitution.

[6] i.e. following the recommendations of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Tilak 2006, 236)

In turn, public budgets for education were withdrawn. The increasing self-financing of higher education, along with a substantial rise in student numbers, changed the academic landscape at the beginning of the 1990s. For the past 20 years, private universities flourish while the public sector stagnates (Fig. 2). The growing significance of commercially interested private actors is also traceable in the Indian jurisdiction. In 1992, the Indian Supreme Court had judged that making education "commerce […] is opposed to the ethos, tradition and sense of nation" (Kapur & Mehta 2007, 30). In 2005, however, it clearly revised its judgement. Then the Supreme Court favoured private property rights over governmental regulation by stating that in the face of "the inability or unwillingness of government to provide the necessary support", institutions which do not take state aid, "should have the maximum freedom possible" (ibid., 33, 36). The granted freedom primarily refers to the admission policy of private institutions and effectively exempts them from meeting reservation quotas (ibid., 35). Not all private actors, who emerged after 1991, were driven by exclusively economic motives. The member associations of the Sangh Parivar[7], for example, started to engage heavily in the education sector and primarily demanded the politico-ideological reorientation of India's education system. In the spirit of Hindutva[8], they stress the need for "nationalising and spiritualising" (Iype 1998) Indian curricular. Over the past two decades, ideological and financial gaps grew between private and public universities because of the 'hindutvaisation' of private education and establishing affirmative action a matter of public institutions exclusively.



Source: University Grants Commission 2017; own design 2017

Fig. 2: Number of Indian universities by ownership and financing (1980-2017)

For this reason, the Modi government, incumbent since 2014, has set itself the task to reduce institutional imbalances by fostering higher education's standardization. Presently (status 2017) concerned with developing an educational reform "closer to current realities" (Sharma 2016, 143), the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has announced India's imminent third education policy. With its New Educational Policy (NEP), the government promises nothing less than making "India a knowledge superpower" (Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD] 2015a). According to Madhulika Sharma, who evaluated the policy draft in 2016, the NEP is closely linked with PM Modi's wider understanding of governance. Thus, it is partly based on the endeavour to enhance the marketability of education and "the narration of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP's) spirit of Hindutva"

[7] The name Sangh Parivar ('Family of Organisations') covers several independently run organisations that represent the Hindu nationalist movement, i.a. the RSS.

[8] Hindutva refers to a political concept of Hindu nationalism.

(Sharma 2016, 141). To that effect, the NEP will significantly deviate from the preceding NPEs, especially with regard to the definitions of economic orientation and governmental responsibility. The NEP intends to enhance the "participation of SC, ST and Minority groups" by linking higher education to "employability", "internationalization", and a "meaningful partnership with the private sector" (MHRD 2015b, 29, 49, 54, 2). PM Modi, "the first genuinely post-socialist political leader of India" (Schöttli & Pauli 2016, 157), focuses on increasing efficiency of higher education by uncoupling the idea of inclusive higher education from its hitherto welfare approach. Consequently, the economic developments devised since India's economic liberalization in 1991 were strongly promoted. The NEP becomes the serious economic and politico-ideological effort for the restructuring of the education system, and thus it will support the larger economic and social reforms envisaged for India by the BJP government (Sharma 2016, 142-143).
Although the NEP has not been officially implemented yet, its paradigms already manifest on India's campus spaces. By bypassing the established regulatory mechanisms of the institutions frequently and *autocratically*[9], new administrative functions and procedures have been put into practice at many public universities throughout India. Those institutional amendments target the three structural pillars of public universities, namely campus demographics, the orientation of knowledge production, and the allocation of administrative power.

2.3 How looking at university space makes a difference: Theoretical framework and methodical approach

Jawaharlal Nehru University was conceptualized as a *truly national* university. Hence, it is translating a historically and politically distinct vision of nation into campus design, which has turned the concept of nation into the basis for legitimacy of the institution and made Indianness its enduring benchmark. Nevertheless, over the past four and a half decades the concepts of the Indian nation and its public institutional setting have altered with respect to demographic categorization, orientation of knowledge production, and allocation of administrative power. How did these changes correlate with the spatiality of Jawaharlal Nehru University?

In recent years, various concepts of nationhood and especially the phenomenon of nationalism have evoked much attention by public literature and various scientific disciplines. Justifiably rejecting the political project of naturalizing or essentializing the nation, critical public and scientific discourse on nationalism, however, often reduces nationalism to its symbolic dimension. Thus, the concepts of nation, nationalism, and nationhood are looked upon as political propaganda, *jingoism*, or exclusively as categories of cultural consciousness (Jaffrelot 2003, 11ff.). On the contrary, material structures of public institutional spaces have received little attention when approaching the phenomenon of nationalism. That makes further scientific investigation insightful and crucial. Consequently, the text in hand seeks to understand national "inclusion/exclusion as a problem of simultaneous positioning, focusing not only on the symbolic dimension of the

[9] cf. i.a. Ved 2011; Bhattacharya 2016, 2; Kumar 2016, 30

world but also on the material dimension" (Löw 2008, 26). Material space and nationalism were simultaneously chosen for two reasons: Firstly, in an institutional setting, profound changes are always comparatively tenacious. The construction of environments takes time. Physical environments require extensive planning; they need to be constructed and constructionally maintained. Secondly, constructed environments are the very abodes of everyday life, which makes them immediately perceptible and negotiable. Observation is not enough for serious research; it requires to "verbally express the constitution of spaces, reconsider it, discuss it, and exercise a monitoring influence on it" (ibid., 37). In short, the various notions of *the* nation in their material expressions are scientifically approachable by qualitative methods. Following Martina Löw's (2008) understanding of *duality of space*, I have examined JNU Campus as the product of "social action which at the same time has structuring power" (Löw 2008, 33). Thinking of location as a relational specification, I have empirically approached the campus methodologically by asking 'Where is JNU?'. By tracing the campus's past and present constructional arrangement and land use, I want to provide insights into both, the historically grown physical structures, and the various ideologically shaped interpretations of its spatiality. The empirical data presented in this paper was collected during my stays on JNU Campus between July and December 2016, and in April 2017. In my everyday interactions on campus, I gained first guiding information. To gain further insights into JNU's physical arrangements that navigate "quotidian movements" (Shortell & Brown 2014), and into the lived environment that produces specific localities, I was kindly taken for walks around the campus by present and former university members. Those tours were recorded in jointly created maps (50 records). Collected spatial information was grounded and contextualized in semi-structured interviews. The interlocutors consulted were subject matter experts, i.e. student and faculty representatives (22 and 12 records), activists articulating divergent political opinions (26 records), officials providing constructional information (4 records), and contemporary witnesses sharing their memory of past JNU (15 records). Meetings took place in face-to-face settings or in group discussions. Most conversations were held in English. In case interlocutors preferred another language, it was interpreted to me by attendants. With permission of the speakers, conversations were recorded. Accordingly, quotes found in this work are word-for-word interview transcriptions.[10]

By combining two streams of literature, the analysis of data unveils a connection heretofore neglected: *public university* and *space*. I took up ideas from cultural geography, critical geography, and sociology of space (i.a. D'Arcus 2006; Deshpande 1995; Löw 2008; Massey 2005; Shortell and Brown 2014). Those theoretical approaches were combined with information from contemporary publications on India's higher education system and institutional change (i.a. Agarwal 2007; Kapur & Mehta 2007; Kumar 2016; Sharma 2016). In the comparative process of data analysis, I have derived three spatially approachable categories, namely that of building distribution, constructional aesthetics, and spatial accessibility. Every category was interlinked to the three factors defining the institutional set-up, namely demographic categorization, orientation of knowledge production, and administrative power allocation. Addressing nationalism as a relational phenomenon, the

[10] Adoption of statements or expressions commonly used on campus are italicized.

following three chapters provide detailed information on the constructional and institutional history of the public institutional space, Jawaharlal Nehru University Campus.

3 Where is JNU living? Spatial distribution and campus demographics in the residential units

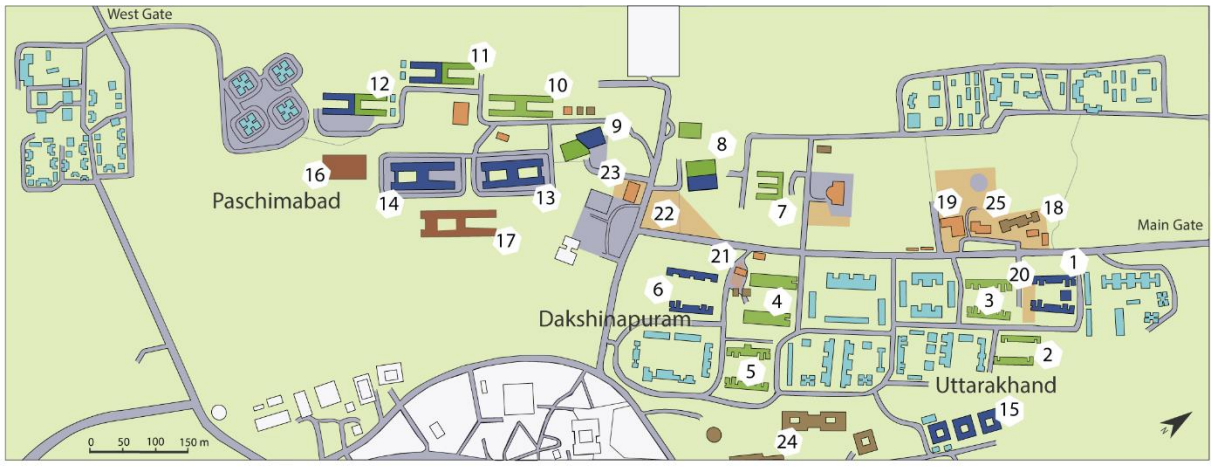
Jawaharlal Nehru University is a residential campus. Spread over four units – Uttarakhand, Dakshinapuram, Pashimabad, and Poorvanchal – JNU Campus provides large housing areas, cultural sites, a sports stadium, shopping complexes, and canteens that cater for the everyday needs of students, faculty members, and *karmacharis* (non-academic employees) permanently residing on campus.[11] When compared to other metropolitan public universities, JNU accommodates a small university community comprising around 8400 students in 2016 (Jawaharlal Nehru University 2016, 2-3). However, over the past three decades, the number of students has quadrupled and the constantly growing number of campus inhabitants has altered the campus's constructional topography in more than one way. The demographic and constructional transformations of the campus must be viewed against the backdrop of nation-wide institutional changes. These modifications emerged in the mid-1980s and took shape in the 1990s. Then two partly contradictory developments affected India's higher education sector. On the one hand, beginning in the mid-1980s, the Indian state gradually disengaged from its educational responsibilities, which led to the withdrawal of public budget for education. It intensified the resource crises at public institutions throughout India. On the other hand, with the intention to democratize India's public institutions, the government extended the national affirmative-action policy. Not only did that lead to an overall increased student enrolment, the demographics of the campus were also affected and the perception of differentiability among Indian university members was lastingly transformed. Both developments, though at first glance seemingly unrelated, showed their reciprocal effects on JNU campus space. At that point, the spatial planning faced not one but two main challenges. Firstly, JNU, though already suffering from severe lack of funds, had to accommodate a constantly growing number of students. Secondly, the burning question was: which kind of spatial arrangement would do justice to the increasingly perceived social and economic differences of students?

In view of these two challenges, this chapter investigates the ideological answers provided and spatial solutions determined. By more closely examining JNU's western residential units, section 3.1 and section 3.2 will track the distinct constructional patterns that have emerged on campus before and following the 1990s. The subsequent section will discuss the empirical findings in their comparison.

[11] In 2016, two thirds of the students enrolled in JNU were accommodated in 18 hostels: 8 hostels are reserved for men, 5 for women students. Four hostels comprise both a women's and a men's wing. One complex accommodates married students and their families. In 2017, the basic room rent for two semesters was between 90 to 240 INR.

3.1 At JNU's constructional origin

Within a few walking minutes behind the main gate, having passed famous Ganga Dhaba and the Kamal Shopping Complex (Fig. 3, no. 18 & 19), then taking a sharp left, one stands amidst Periyar, Kaveri, and Godavari student hostel (Fig. 3, no. 4, 5 & 6). The three buildings belong to the first set of constructed hostels on campus, which are shaped like pyramids, designed by the architectural office Kukreja as "places where one finds rest" (Former Student of Moonis Raza (m), personal communication, April 17, 2017). The bright red bricks of the hostels and the architectural recognition factor of the campus were used to represent JNU's "indigenous modernism" (CP Kukreja Architects 2017). While Periyar and Kaveri offer differently sized and angled rooms to male students, Godavari hostel is reserved for women. The three hostels stand in close proximity to each other and are arranged around an open square named after the South Indian mountain range Nilgiri Dhaba (Fig. 3, no. 21). The *dhaba* (food stall/roadside restaurant) is the heart of Dakshinapuram campus unit. With its three student hostels encircled by faculty residences, its State Bank of India branch, a bicycle and a shoe repair shop opposite several road stalls, Dakshinapuram campus area forms an assemblage. Herein lies JNU's constructional origin. Following the spatial arrangement of the unit, the asphalted streets sneaking up the hill, or one of the numerous well-trodden footpaths traces JNU's original idea of accommodating university members in *unity*.



student hostel, women
student hostel, men
residential block
future hostels
meeting point/shopping complex, dhaba
other use
green area/forest land with footpaths
paved area
non-residential area

Student Hostels
1 Ganga
2 Jhelum
3 Sutlej
4 Periyar
5 Kaveri
6 Godavari
7 Narmada
8 Sabarmati
9 Tapti
10 Mahi/Mandavi
11 Lohit
12 Chandrabhaga
13 Koyna
14 Shipra
15 Yamuna

Planned Hostels
16 Barak
17 Shipra II

Meeting Spots
18 Ganga Dhaba
19 Kamal Shopping Complex (KC)
20 Jhelum Lawn
21 Nilgiri Dhaba/Bank square
22 Sabarmati
23 '24/7' Dhaba

Other
24 Aravali Guest House
25 Health Centre

Source: Jawaharlal Nehru University Engineer Branch, 2015; own survey and design 2017

Fig. 3: Map of the western residential units

When in 1970 1,019 acres of land had been granted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University, a Campus Committee, chaired by the Vice Chancellor G. Parthasarathi, formulated a *Document for the Design of the Master Plan of the University Campus*. The document details how the Nehruvian principles of national integration, democratic way of life, and scientific socialism should be cultivated in JNU's residential space. In each campus unit "students and teachers coming from different parts of India […], professing diverse faiths, studying and researching in different fields [should] live together" (CCJNU n.d.). JNU's first rector, the geographer Moonis Raza, is said to have been the mastermind behind JNU's spatial planning. He suggested that the "spirit of democracy and social justice" (ibid.) should spread in the campus within four residential units. These units, named after geographical regions – Dakshinapuram in the south, Uttarakhand in the north, Paschimabad in the west, and Poorvanchal in the east – are a tribute to the vastness of the Indian nation's territory until today. As distinguished from other Indian universities, where residential areas of students and faculty members are clearly separated from each other, it was the objective of the JNU Master Plan to break with those segregating structures. To further stand out from the bulk of Indian universities "where Malayali students live in the Kerala House, Bihar students in the Bihar House and so on" (ibid.), all JNU students, originating from different cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, should be accommodated together. "The experiment of putting together in adjacent rooms a Life Sciences undergraduate from Tamilnad with a History post-graduate from the Punjab and a researcher in Musicology from Assam" was seen as "full of exciting possibilities" (ibid.). Stress was laid on the creation of walkability and the provision of space for interpersonal encounter. Each walk through the campus should be "an opportunity to get glimpses of the diversity of India" (ibid.). Consequently, all four units were linked "by arteries of communication – roads, footpaths, and tracks through shrubberies. […] The informal chat […] during an evening walk along a common promenade or over a cup of tea in a common cafeteria" (ibid.) should foster teacher-students contacts and ensure that the learning environment is not limited to formal classroom situations. The JNU spatial planners' overall objective was to construct an assemblage in which places were not individually assigned to a single function, but instead would offer various possibilities of activity to all JNU members.

In July 1972, the first students moved from the Old Campus to the new campus site. Similar to the Old Campus space, Nilgiri Dhaba soon became a popular meeting spot. The building at its centre included a television room, a table tennis room, a chess room, and a reading room offering a selection of Indian and international magazines. As envisaged by the JNU Master Plan, access to the place was not restricted by the time of day or by professional status or university affiliation. Students, teachers and their families, as well as interested guests met at Nilgiri Dhaba after the classes. A 1970s Kaveri hostel resident recalls the spatial proximity

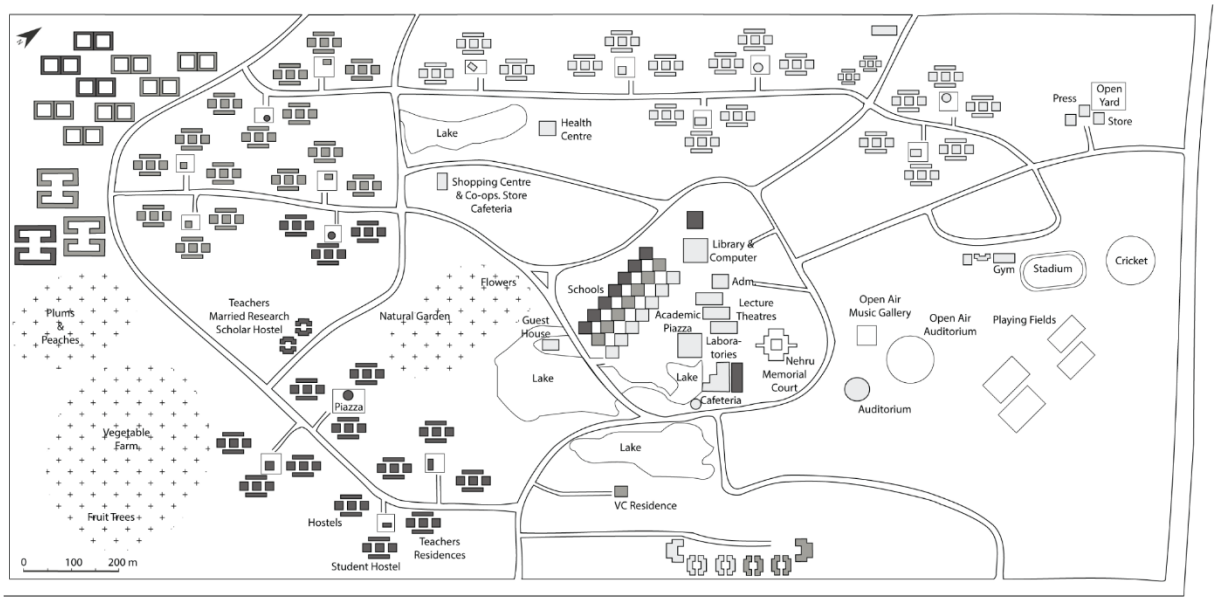
> gave a very different kind of relationship, at the social level, at the emotional level, and much more important at the level of learning. I remember my teacher; one time he was in the middle of the night correcting my paper. He just walked up to my room and said: 'What is that? I can't sleep because you write things I can't make out.' […]. JNU was the one place where teachers were always accessible. It was the one place where you can access any kind

> of an idea. And you can question your teachers in the class as well as outside (Alumni (m), personal communication, April 17, 2017).

Nonetheless, the new institution was not met with unanimous advocacy. The Hindu right wing firmly doubted the societal benefit of the liberal morals propagated on JNU Campus and criticized the construction works for being too expensive**.** At the same time, upset voices raised from within the student body:

> The University has spent Rs 49 lakhs for constructing 72 houses for teachers and Rs 61 lakhs for 600 hostel rooms for students and warden's flats. Another 10 lakh is estimated to be spent on development and beautification of this area. Buying airconditioners [sic], carpets, and expensive furniture come first in the priority list of our planners, while the hostels for students and quarters for Class III and IV employees are yet to be ready (Koshy 1973, 48).

Indeed, the gap between the vision of the JNU Master Plan (Fig. 4) and the material realities found on campus would widen in following decades. In the early 1970s, and under the patronage of the Congress, the institution is said to have been "positively affected by the liberal outlook of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's government towards JNU. […] There were no restrictions. Funding was available for expanding. The campus was built. Then her [Indira Gandhi's] politics changed" (Alumni (m), personal communication, June 17, 2017).



Source: Master Plan. Indicating Stages n.d.; Campus Committee of the Jawaharlal Nehru University n.d.; own design 2017

Fig. 4: The JNU Master Plan: JNU Campus as envisioned by the architect Kukreja and the Campus Committee in the early 1970s

In June 1975, PM Indira Gandhi declared an internal emergency. Issuing laws by decree, PM Gandhi's policy violently opposed her opponents in politics, media, economy, and academia. The government violated JNU's granted autonomy and sent police forces to campus, picking up "students randomly from the hostels and taking them to the local police station. They locked hostel rooms and students found themselves without shelter. That changed JNU's perspective on the government" (Alumni (m), personal communication, April 22, 2017). Forced by massive JNU student protest, Indira Gandhi had to resign from her post as JNU's Chancellor in 1977. Although the campus construction sites were not entirely stopped during the Emergency, constructional discrepancies regarding the original master plan occurred in the immediate aftermath. When Indira Gandhi lost the election against Morarji Desai from the Janata Party in 1977, the national budget was amended, and funding previously intended for the further construction of JNU was cut. In the first instance, shortage of money resulted in housing shortage. The research and teaching activities of JNU had been conducted for six years, new schools had been opened, and especially the introduction of the master programmes had increased the number of student admissions. Consequently, the rising number of campus inhabitants became inversely proportional to the slowed-down construction works. Accommodation space had become a limited resource. In *Kaveri* hostel, July 1977 is remembered as the month when all hostel rooms, which were originally conceptualized for single occupancy – so was the sanitary infrastructure and the allocation of water resources – became double assigned. In the opinion of former Kaveri hostel residents, the double occupancy prefigured the so-called *hostel crisis*. Until today, accommodation shortage remains among the most serious issues on campus. It caused the major deviations from the original master plan after the 1970s and challenged the original ideal of JNU to create a space for *diversity* on a common campus. According to the national vision of the institution, highly subsidised accommodation had been an integral part: JNU aspired to an outstanding pan-Indian character. A quota, anchored in the admission policy, should ensure that students and teaching personnel from all parts of India were recruited. To foster the JNU community's unity, all members, regardless of whether they could afford accommodation off-campus in Delhi's high-rent environment, lived within the campus space.

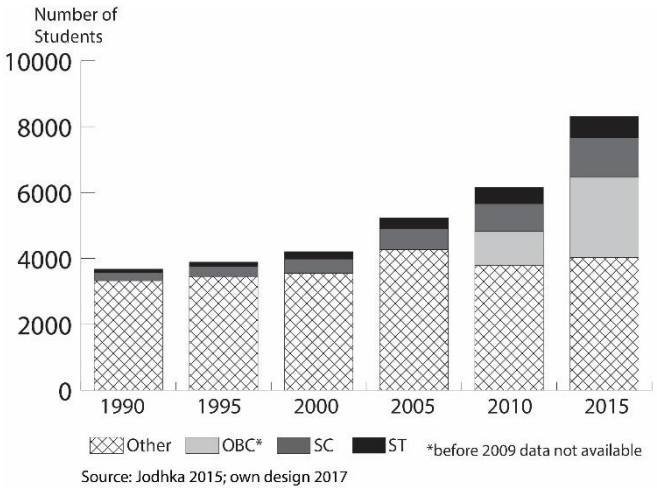


Fig. 5: Student numbers by reservation category (1990-2015)

However, with the university losing the capacity to provide rooms, JNU's founding vision proved infeasible. In other words, under the rising pressure of resource scarcity, the ideal of *diversity* – equally allocating resources to students of different regional origin, culinary preference, and native language – could no longer conceal the students' different socio-economic situation. The *hostel crisis* intensified during the 1990s, after the implementation of the Mandal Commission Recommendations. The introduction of the OBC reservations

facilitated an increased student enrolment (Fig. 5). While the administration blamed the unexpected growth of campus population for the hostel shortage, a substantial number of students accused the administration, particularly the Vice Chancellor, of misusing the OBC expansion funds for developing campus infrastructure in the Academic Block, instead of providing further hostel space. Demanding *hostel for all*, insistent student protests eventually evoked the provision of additional accommodation space. The design and arrangement of these new constructions would substantially change the appearance of the campus after 1999.

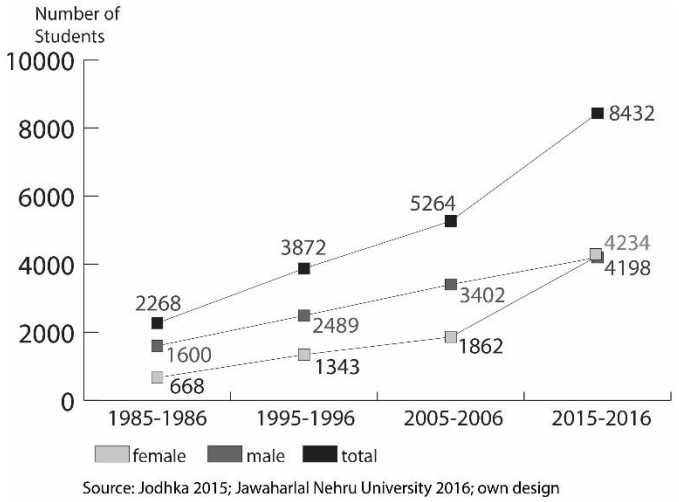


Fig. 6: Rise of student numbers (1985-2016)

3.2 Construction developments after the 1990s

A few years after India's economic 'liberalization' in 1991, JNU was granted a corpus fund, which facilitated the rapid development of the campus. The creation of housing up to the western boundary of the campus did not only change the campus geographical scale, but also altered its physical appearance. Described by critics as "massive urban slum" (Batabyal 2014, 171), the Paschimabad campus area, established after 2000, indeed differs in constructional pattern and landscape design from the previously built units. In order to accommodate the increasing number of campus residents, the previous architectural style was abandoned and high-rise buildings were developed. Whereas in the units of Uttarakhand, Dakshinapuram, and Poorvanchal residents are accommodated in interlinked assemblages, Paschimabad's housing areas are divided according to occupational groups. Here, students, *karmacharis,* and faculty members live in greater spatial distance from each other. Not only has the spacing between the single residential blocks increased, but also the distance between the individual student hostels. Especially the youngest hostel constructions on campus Koyna and Shipra (Fig. 3, no. 13 & 14), built between 2007 and 2011, show remarkable constructional deviations from the remaining hostels. One the one hand, the outwardly straight-shaped four-story buildings offer one third more rooms than previous constructions do. On the other hand, spatial planning had also considered the altering demographic patterns on campus. In 2005, most hostel beds were reserved for men; in contrast, the number of women students in campus noticeably rose (Fig. 6). Consequently, Koyna and Shipra hostel should provide space for female students. It was then argued that the provision of space exclusively for women required enhanced precautionary measures. In a bid to protect female residents, Koyna and Shipra hostel were developed as places surrounded by extensive paved areas and high fences. Contrary to the women hostels in the

Fig. 7: Different architectural styles in Uttarakhand and Paschimabad. Left picture: Sutlej built in the 1970s; right picture: Koyna built in the 2000s (Kumar 2017)

older parts of the campus, which are embedded into the residential units and well connected by streets and footpaths, Koyna and Shipra emerged as independent compartments. The two constructions on campus also differ from older constructions in terms of interior design. While older hostels provide differently sized and angled rooms, the more recent rooms are spacious, each equipped with comfortable furniture and a balcony. Referring to all three aspects – the secluded location of the hostels, the high number of inhabitants "who reluctantly meet in the mess [dining hall]" (Koyna Resident (f), personal communication, October 22, 2016) and the comfortableness of the rooms – many students allege that the specific spatial arrangement creates *anonymity*. This *anonymity* is commonly contrasted to the lively atmosphere found in older hostels, where "it's very social, everybody is visiting [and] doors are always open" (Godavari Resident (f), personal communication, November 5, 2016). Until now (2017), Koyna and Shipra are the only hostels on campus where the idea of minority protection is translated into spatial design (Fig. 7). However, this will change soon. In July 2017, the Minister of State for Development of North Eastern Region Dr. Jitendra Singh, laid the foundation stone of Barak hostel (Fig. 3, no. 16). Named after the river flowing through the North-Eastern regions of India, Barak will provide beds for an additional 400 students. It is 100% funded by the North-Eastern Council, and will have 75% seats reserved for students from the North-East. At the cornerstone ceremony, the Minister emphasised that "JNU has more than 8,000 students, out of which there are more students from Northeast than any other State outside NE region" (Press Information Bureau Government of India Ministry for Development of North-East Region 2017) and the government would strive "to bring [the] rest of India closer to North East India" (ibid.). With a reservation quota based on the category of regional and explicitly ethnic-cultural belonging, Barak will be the first hostel on campus that breaks with the original idea of jointly accommodating students of diverse regional backgrounds.

3.3 Chapter conclusions: The constructional management of demographic divisions

Walking along JNU main road is taking a walk along the timeline of JNU construction history. Coming from the northern main gate, one will pass Uttarakhand and Dakshinapuram campus unit. The units are constructional assemblages, interlinked by streets and multiple footpaths, bringing together university members at shops, restaurants, and *dhabas*. The areas are multifunctional, accessible to all campus residents, and until 2016 populated by many, day and night.[12] However, upon entering Paschimabad campus unit, one observes a change in spatial pattern. Here, the constructional developments diverged from the former assemblage-like campus character. Instead, justified by the increased need for security and minority protection, compartmentalized units were developed.

Hostel buildings are thus spatial strategies of managing campus demographic divisions. In this context, it is particularly interesting to examine the funding structure of the constructions, or to be more precise, the dissimilar effects funding has had on constructional implementations through time. In the 1990s, additional hostel space was (partly) financed using resources from the OBC expansion funds. The OBC expansion fund constructions did not lead to the physical separation of students defined by their *social and economic backwardness*. In contrast, Barak hostel, funded by the North-East Council, will accommodate students with explicit reference to their regional and ethnic-cultural origin. Whereas the division of students in accordance with the demographic category of caste remains unthinkable, allotting students according to their ethnic-culturally or regionally defined background has become acceptable. Nevertheless, the planned transformations evoke controversial responses amongst students: On the one hand, students (from the North-East of India) frequently report ethnic discrimination against them and thus demand higher protective measures. Others fear that "if the university builds separate hostels for minorities, we all will be branded" (Student (f), personal communication, December 4, 2016). The concept of Barak hostel continues the idea of compartmentalizing and parcelling residential space. Student dissension on the matter points to the controversial question of how the campus unity will be spatially asserted in a social environment that is increasingly perceived as diverse. It moreover highlights that demographic categories when translated into public institutional space become "not just a system of cultural representation, but also constitutive of people's identities" (Das 2008, 204).

4 Where is JNU studying? Spatial aesthetics and knowledge production in the Academic Block

In the early 1970s, JNU's Academic Block emerged as the nucleus of the campus. The first ever built interlinked school buildings accommodating centres from natural sciences, social sciences and humanities should embody the "unity of knowledge" (CCJNU n.d.). Therefore,

[12] Already in the early 1970s JNU became famous for its *night culture*, including debates, discussions, *chai*, and *late-night paratha*. In the aftermaths of the *9th of Feb incidence*, the administration, relying on the intensified need for security, cut the opening hours of the *dhabas*. Consequently, public squares became less populated at night.

JNU had always relied on state subsidies and offered scholarships and low-charge education to its students. By adhering to a multi-disciplinary educational philosophy and its welfare approach, the varsity assumes an ambiguous position within present India's higher education landscape: On the one hand, JNU is still considered to be one of India's best performing universities, ranked second in the India Ranking Report 2017. On the other hand, the public university is gradually moving (or moved) to the margins of an education sector that is increasingly oriented towards economic efficiency and skilled-bases trainings. The private actors' economic demands and their ideological claims challenge JNU's curricula and research activities, which so far has derived its academic legitimacy from the production of generic and secular knowledge. As such, the (indirect) effects of privatization have become perceptible on the JNU Campus. By closely examining the constructional aesthetics of the Academic Block and the spatial atmospheres[13] it produces, the following two sections, 4.1 and 4.2, will investigate JNU's varying learning environments. Section 4.3 will briefly discuss the preceding findings with simultaneous consideration.

4.1 Inside the classrooms: The economic orientation of knowledge production

From the cynosure and centre of the Academic Block, JNU's central nine-storied library building (Fig. 8, no. 26), it is only a two-minute walk to a set of seven school buildings (Fig. 8, no. 27-32). These first ever built schools on campus equal each other in architecture: Widening towards the top and funnel-shaped, they were designed in the early 1970s by the architect Kukreja to represent blossoms "where knowledge grows, and knowledge must bloom" (Former Student of Moonis Raza (m), personal communication, April 17, 2017). Lined up in close proximity to each other, the Schools were designed to facilitate formal and informal contacts between specialists in different disciplines and to weaken inter-discipline barriers (CCJNU n.d.). The idea remains successful to this day. On the stairs in front of the School of Social Sciences II (SSS II), one can join a discussion between students of Sociology, Linguistics, Geography, and Biology before classes. The classrooms are filled with a multi-disciplinary audience and the discussions are continued. Depending on their construction year, the classrooms differ from each other in terms of interior design. While there are few newer rooms, the schools' committee rooms are equipped with air-conditioning, and leather covered chairs, the bulk of classrooms in JNU provides fans, wooden benches and blackboards to students and the teaching personnel (Fig. 9). The atmosphere created by the classroom design is perceived and interpreted differently, depending on the speakers "socialization of perception" (Löw 2008, 45). In particular, students who come to JNU for their postgraduate studies from private colleges, evaluate JNU's learning environment as *outdated* and *dingy*. Since it roots in a shared narrative on the divergent aesthetics of public and private learning environments, the classroom atmosphere becomes perceptual and thus discussable. It is the

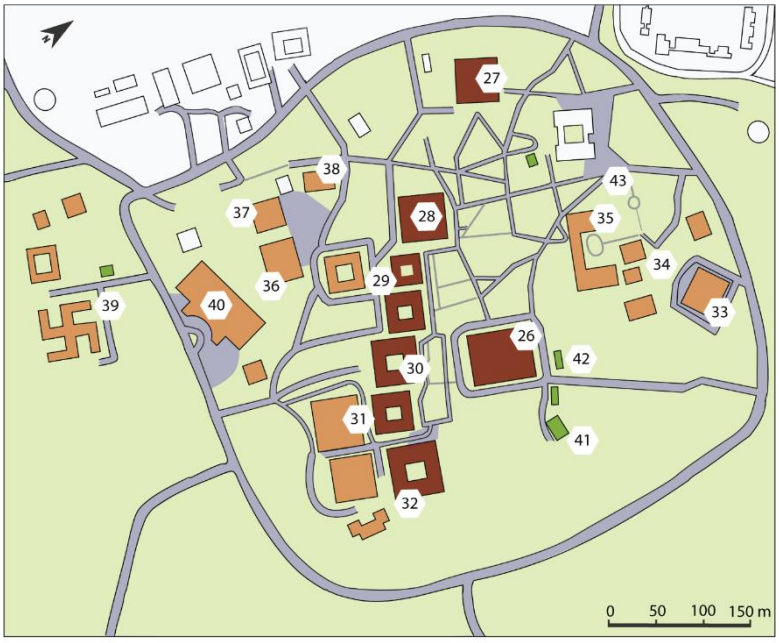
> popular imagination that always associates […] public institutions with dinginess. Everyone knows that in public institutions infrastructure development takes time, because the money

[13] In accordance with Martina Löw (2008), this work defines atmosphere as "the external effect of social goods and human beings realized perceptually in their spatial ordering. This means that atmospheres arise through the perception of interactions between people and/or from the external effect of social goods in their arrangement" (Löw 2008, 44).

> is not sufficient or not utilized properly. In that sense JNU is falling into that category. It is definitely not high tech. High tech is what you would associate with private institutions (Student (m), personal communication, November 16, 2016).

In terms of interior design and physical equipment, the distinction between private and public learning environments could only emerge during the 2000s when the number of private institutions rapidly grew. Until the early 1990s, India's higher education sector had been heavily nationalized and even privately established institutions were under the authority of the protectionist state (Agarwal 2007, 199). Following India's economic liberalization in 1991, higher education institutions were encouraged to adopt market-relevant policies. In turn, public budgets for education were constantly withdrawn. The government's gradual disengagement from the education sector is intended to encourage the active citizen to invest in his or her education and aims to get Indian citizens off the welfare roll and directly into the workforce. In view of the present MHRD, disconnecting education from the hitherto welfare approach will create "a more competitive environment in the higher education sector and foster growth, which is needed to achieve the target of 10% increase in Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)" (Centre for Civil Society 2014, 4). The aspired self-financing character of higher education, along with the enormous rise in student numbers, has gradually changed the aesthetics of academic environments.

In India's flourishing education market, private universities have started to compete for potential customers – students and their families, who are able and willing to invest in their future employability. These days, institutions advertise their "world's best […] campus design and infrastructure, learning and living spaces" created by "American architects" (SRM University 2017). JNU's physical arrangement contradicts the popular imagination that



Schools & Special Centres
26 Central Library
27 School of Computer&Systems Sciences (SC&SS)
28 School of Life Science (SLS)
29 School of Social Sciences
30 School of Environmental Sciences (SES)
31 School of International Studies (SIS)
32 School of Language (SLL&CS)
33 School of Computational&Integrative Sciences (SC&IS)
34 School of Arts and Aesthetics (SAA)
35 School of Biotechnology (SBT)
36 School of Physical Sciences (SPS)
37 Special Centre for Molecular Medicine (SCMM)
38 Special Centre for Nano Sciences
39 Special Centre for Sanskrit Studies (CSS)
40 Convention Centre

Other
41 Library Canteen
42 Bookshops
43 Jawaharlal Nehru Statue

initial construction phase
subsequent construction phases
paved area
non-academic
green area/forest land with footpaths
canteen/shop

Source: Jawaharlal Nehru University Engineer Branch 2015; Master Plan. Indicating Stages n.d.; own design 2017

Fig. 8: Map of the Academic Block

connects the concepts of job market-oriented education to a specific high-end design and equipment. JNU, designed in the spirit of *indigenous modernism*, is not equipped with the latest technology or furniture, nor does it offer undergraduate skill-based trainings, self-financed courses, or E-learning programmes. The narrative force of its learning environment aesthetics turns JNU, once developed as "thoroughly modern" (CCJNU n.d.), into a campus that is either looked upon through the lens of nostalgia or is regarded as *outdated*. JNU produces an atmosphere of "an old world in a more socialist time, with a certain sort of values of education and a diverse educational space" (Student (m), personal communication, November 16, 2016). Those *values of education* do not only contradict the popular imagination of the economically efficient university, but also conflict with the narration of the government's spirit of Hindutva, which will be further scrutinized in the following section.

Fig. 9: Classroom in the School of Language (Maxwell 2017)

4.2 Red vs. saffron: The political colours of knowledge production

The interlinked and multidisciplinary academic complex also accommodates the Centre for Historical Studies (CHS). Founded in 1970, CHS is one of the oldest centres in the School of Social Sciences (Fig. 8, no. 29) and certainly one of India's most prestigious. Established and guided by nationally and internationally successful historians such as Bipan Chandra, Romila Thapar, Sarvepalli Gopal, and Satish Chandra, the Centre for Historical Studies set new standards in historiography by developing post-colonial and Marxist[14] perspectives on Indian history. Developing further and promoting the narration of an Indian nation based on secularism, rationalism, and liberalism,[15] the CHS substantially contributed to the university's academic reputation and excellence.

Following the 1990s, the Academic Block has noticeably dispersed and grown beyond the first constructed complex of seven schools. The buildings erected after 2000 were predominantly developed at the fringes of the Academic Block. Those constructions do not only differ from the older complex with respect to spatial alignment, but also in

[14] It was the Marxist scholars' national and international success, rather than their considerable number, that earned JNU the reputation of a *Marxist hub*, or the image of a *monolithic red block*. In fact, the number of openly confessing Marxists, especially amongst faculty members, was and is small (cf. i.a. Bhambhri 1996, 84).

[15] (1) Secularism, understood as the (state's) responsibility to treat all religions equal; (2) A rationalism based on two intertwined assumptions: Firstly, that there is an intrinsic worth in knowing *the* truth; secondly that there is a belief, often based in superstition or propaganda, that must be debunked to reveal this truth. (3) A form of liberalism based on the assumption that individuals are able to think and take responsibility for themselves; it sees the free discourse as a necessary condition for academic and social progress.

architecture. Particularly noteworthy, though often overlooked due to its secluded location, is the Special Centre for Sanskrit Studies (CSS) (Fig. 8, no. 39). When leaving the academic complex in a southern direction, one must cross JNU Ring Road, pass a small *dhaba*, and traverse a fenced park to reach the Centre. The Sanskrit Centre breaks away from the other Schools and Centres in more than one way. With the support of the then-incumbent Vajpayee government, especially its Union Human Resources Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi, the CSS building was constructed in 2001 and is architecturally shaped in the form of a Swastika. Its very shape was received with controversy on campus. On the one side, the Swastika-shaped Centre is sympathetically interpreted as the long-awaited merger of "the traditional scholars/scholarship and the mainstream university" and is considered to "extend and validate the classical theories by applying them […] to contemporary Indian reality" (Jawaharlal Nehru University 2017). On the contrary, the Centre's opponents view the building as the right-wing government's institutional effort towards the *saffronization* of JNU's education philosophy.

Saffronization (often used as derogatory term) refers to Hindutva's influence on India's memory politics: It claims "a uniform, monolithic Hindu identity for Indian civilization, often defined as Aryan and upper-caste" (Thapar 2009, 96). As such, it advocates a specific form of historiography that emphasises an ancient Hindu-Indian culture, foremost by excluding other, particularly Muslim, cultural heritages existent on the Republic's territory. Historians, working in the spirit of Hindutva, derive their historical facts from 'ancient Hindu' scripts[16] and call for their nationwide implementation into curricula. Consequently, we have a continuing debate between Hindutva proponents and secular historians, who adhere to the rational principles established and elevated by the JNU's historians and sociologists. By examining the personages involved in that long-running Indian "battle over history" (ibid., 94), the provocation caused by the development of CSS becomes more comprehensible.

We have to revisit 1961, when the incumbent education minister Chagla – the very same minister who would three years later strongly support, pre-formulate, and supervise the JNU Bill – established the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The NCERT became responsible for the revision of Indian history textbooks, thus providing schools all over India with "secular and rational explanations of the past" (ibid., 87). The editorial board established for that purpose was (amongst others) joined by the prestigious historians Nurul Hasan, Sarvepalli Gopal, Satish Chandra, and Romila Thapar. Nurul Hasan would become the education minister in PM Indira Gandhi's cabinet and assign the first teaching positions at Jawaharlal Nehru University; all other named historians would become the renowned guides at the university's School of Social Sciences. When examining the personnel overlaps, we are able to understand how deeply the Indian history of historiography is intertwined with the development of Jawaharlal Nehru University's knowledge production.

Already in the 1970s, the first set of NCERT textbooks had caused aversion on the side of Hindu nationalists. However, it was only in the late 1990s under the BJP/NDA government, that Hindutva's perspective on history could also impact public institutions. Amongst the Vajpayee government's parliamentarians, the probably strongest proponent of

[16] i.a. the Vedas are cited to prove that the automobile, the television, and the aeroplane are genuinely Hindu-Indian inventions stemming from the 'Vedic age'.

'hindutvaisation' was Murli Manohar Joshi, who in his function as Human Resources Development Minister, firstly made the development of the Centre for Sanskrit Studies on JNU Campus possible. Against the background of these ideological disagreements on Indian historiography (also known as the 'NCERT textbook controversies'), it is less surprising that the arrangement of CSS was perceived as Hindutva ideology's undermining of the secular, rational, and liberal achievements of JNU's School of Social Sciences and its Centre for Historical Studies. In its secluded location, the Centre for Sanskrit Studies with its highly specialized course offer forms a unit in its own. It contradicts the philosophy of *unity of knowledge* initially developed on campus. Its exceptional architecture or its "design of commemoration" (Soja 1996, 191) embodies a nationalist knowledge that diverges from what JNU so far has been renowned for. Therefore, it is a constructional witness of India's politico-ideological shift of power in an enduring battle over historiography and knowledge production taking place on campuses all over India.

4.3 Chapter conclusions: The politicizations of campus space

Upon examination of the Academic Block in its entirety, we can state that the first built complex consisting of interlinked schools and their centres is still the dominant academic construction on campus. The multidisciplinary and flexible schedule of the schools emphasises the production of discursive, generic, and secular knowledge. So far, that has served its purpose: Until 2017, JNU's "research standards, programmes, and outputs have consistently been judged to be quite excellent" (Kidwai 2017). However, within an educational landscape that is increasingly oriented towards the diverse private actors' economic demands and their politico-ideological claims, JNU's educational focus is about to diminish in national value. The public university has thus become negatively affected by the rapid privatization of India's higher education sector, not least because the respective governments after 1991, have encouraged their public institutions to engage in the process of economic and politico-ideologic knowledge reorientation. Especially the presently incumbent Modi-government considers the merger of a university's market integration and its increased orientation towards Hindu nationalism (also understood as Hindu spiritualism) as the key driver for India's national development and cohesion. The government envisions both, global market integration and Hindutva ideology, as able to turn the nation into a *knowledge superpower*. That vision is contradicted by the prevailing parts of JNU's learning environments. JNU – as already mentioned – is neither equipped with latest technology or furniture, nor does it offer skill-based trainings, self-financed courses, or E-learning programmes. On the contrary, it produces an *old world* atmosphere, thereby representing a *more socialist* form of education. In other words, JNU's classrooms do not spread a shiny *Make in India* atmosphere, yet. Thus, it conflicts with the government's narration of nationalism.

5 Where is JNU protesting? Spatial accessibility and academic autonomy

Publicly referred to as the *left bastion*, JNU has the reputation of being a "politically very vibrant campus" (Student (f), personal communication, November 21, 2016). JNU students

of the first years established a vivid political culture on campus that valued "the right to dissent the essence of democracy" (Batabyal 2014, 375). Appropriating campus space, claiming administrative participation, and inclusive decision-making processes became an inherent part of *JNU culture*. Student politics in JNU takes various forms. It ranges from the creation of student parties and yearly elections of a Students' Union, to producing pamphlets, posters, and wall art, and conducting rallies, effigy burnings, awareness campaigns, (hunger) strikes, and long-term occupations. On the one hand, JNU Campus, with its liberal outlook to student politics, has proved a successful training ground for a significant number of students who became renowned public figures, civil servants, politicians, and diplomats. On the other hand, it has brought the public institution into disrepute several times throughout its history. While in 1983 after violent outrages JNU was discussed as "the sick university" (cf. Batabyal 2014, 400), it was branded *anti-national* in the aftermaths of the *9th of Feb incidence* in 2016. Thus, JNU's student politics provoked and still provoke an India-wide discourse on whether students should be "political propagandists" (Batabyal 2014, 105), or whether the politicisation of campus space leads to a university's moral and academic "decline" (ibid.). This question transforms the JNU Campus into a matter of public interest and governmental concern and has affected its institutional design.

The following more closely examines the diverse political strategies of appropriating campus space. It focuses on the various aspects of spatial accessibility and restriction as key factors for shaping the geopolitical landscapes of JNU Campus. Firstly, in an overview of JNU's politically active parties and their forms of visibility in campus, section 5.1 investigates the changing relation of JNU towards those beyond the institution. Section 5.2 then tracks the changing spatiality of the university's Administration Block through time. Here, spatial strategies have played a significant role in defining the boundaries of acceptable political actions in public campus space. By summarizing the preceding findings, section 5.3 discusses the (de-)politicisation of JNU Campus from a spatial perspective.

5.1 The windowed walls of JNU: On the lookout for student politics

When walking on campus, JNU's walls strike the eye most. The red bricks of JNU's Schools, shopping complexes, and canteens are papered with pamphlets and posters that address late-breaking issues and invite the spectator to cultural programmes and protests. Positioned above these, huge wall art, resembling windows to the world's affairs, raise awareness for national and international, social and economic issues (Fig. 10-16). The reason why the issues displayed are not limited to campus concerns but instead link the university to broader societal struggles outside the campus walls, roots in the structuring of Indian student politics. The understanding that university members should engage in larger societal negotiations re-emerged in the mid-1960s. It was after the first PM's demise in 1964 that academia broke away with the Nehruvian paradigm of the unpolitical citizen (Roy 2007, 167) and that Indian campuses turned into forums for politics (Batabyal 2014, 104-105). By addressing issues from beyond the universities and politicising them within the campuses, academic communities claimed a greater say in defining the "problems of the society" (CCJNU n.d.). In this manner, 'society' was reimagined as a public university's national responsibility. That academic attitude altered the inside-outside relation of public

campuses, insofar as universities, by relying on their academic autonomy, redefined their relation towards the Indian state and their governmental patron. The outreach of student politics became a question of the very scope and societal standing of an institution. The reasons for those developments lie primarily in the organization of Indian campus politics itself. Most of India's student parties are either official youth organizations of nationally represented political parties, or under the ideological and financial godparenthood of broader social movements and cultural associations, which means that student politics is closely connected to a political sphere beyond its campus walls. Engaging in student politics is not only regarded as a student's societal duty, but also as a student's career springboard to state or central politics and civil services. Although JNU is still called the *left bastion*, the times in which the university's student politics was exclusively represented by socialist, communist, and progressive-liberal parties (Batabyal 2014, 330ff.) are long over. The rise and diversification of student movements started in the late 1990s. Then it split from "a monolithic block to many different topics and groups" (Alumni (m), personal communication, November 15, 2016). In 2015, more than a dozen political parties were counted on campus. Simultaneously to the diversification of political opinion, the number of *politically disenchanted* or those who publicly withhold their political opinion has grown. Thus, contrary to widespread opinion, everyone residing in the *left bastion* would heavily engage in politics, but only the minority of JNUites actively participates in party politics or protest marches. While, prior to 2012, protests with 100 to 200 participants were common, between 2012 and 2016 "hardly 20, 30 people were seen protesting in Ad-Block, shouting, sloganeering" (Left Activist (f), personal communication, December 2, 2016). Due to the shrinking number of political participants, the activists fear the "increasing depoliticization of campus space" (Activist (m), personal communication, July 28, 2016). The 'unpolitical' students' have many reasons for refraining from campus politics. On the one hand, political participation has become a factor of the students' abode. To reduce the pressure on the overstrained hostel system, students who have housing options in Delhi are not accommodated on campus. Consequently, a rising number of day scholars leave JNU in the afternoon and do not participate in the political activities – the cultural programmes and awareness campaigns, the marches, and the protests – that generally happen in the evening. On the other hand, the individuals' attendance at political events is made a concern of academic performance:

> The majority I know […] who are like into politics, they are academically very good. […] But I'm facing difficulties here in following classes, because I was studying in a different way, because we were reading different texts and didn't speak English. Now I have to read a lot. I have to sacrifice the majority of my time there [*pointing to the Central library*]. That's the problem. The whole night they are protesting. If I go to protest every day, I have to bung all my classes. You know that that's the reality (Student (f), personal communication, October 11, 2016).

Fig. 10: Wall art by the Bhagat Singh Ambedkar Students Organisation (Heyink 2016)

Fig. 11: Wall art by the Students' Federation of India: A woman menstruating on a Brahmin's head (Heyink 2016)

Fig. 12: Wall art by the Gorkha Students, JNU (Heyink 2016)

Fig. 13: Wall art by the All India Students' Association (Kumar 2017)

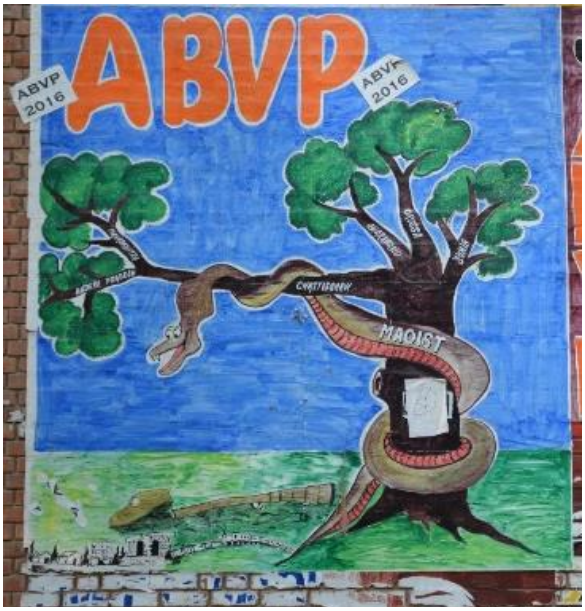


Fig. 14: Wall art by the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (Heyink 2016)

Fig. 15: Students campaigning in the 2016 JNUSU elections (Heyink 2016)

Fig. 16: Wall art by the Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students' Association (Kumar 2017)

That an individual's academic performance, and hence her or his possibility to politically participate in campus, is a matter of broader socio-economic *complexities* rather than a merely individual decision, is a principal argument of the student party BAPSA. The Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students Association (BAPSA) was established by members and sympathizers of the United Dalit Students Forum (UDSF) in 2014. In contrast to the UDSF, which already formed as cultural organization in 1990/1991, BAPSA was birthed as an explicitly political party. It is oriented towards the ideas of anti-caste reformers and Dalit-Bahujan[17] icons, most prominently Jyotiba Phule and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, who nationalized the issue of caste-based oppression. By assuming their political vision and making it an issue inside JNU, BAPSA's political formation was welcomed on campus with a high number of votes in the JNUSU elections held in 2016 and 2017. The party stands up for a public campus space that provides freedom from identity politics based on caste or communal belonging, and instead strives to strengthen social mobility:

> In a so-called progressive campus like JNU, the experience is articulated by the students who move in this place. But the students who come from marginalized communities have less space to move and less space to articulate themselves. For a larger background of social complexities, they haven't had the chance to learn proper English in school, so they can't participate in the debates. It is about language, it is also about dress code, about your life style, everything which matters to your presence in public. And the organizations like BAPSA provide the space for the people who are coming with this kind of cultural baggage. We provide space in pamphlets, posters, rallies, debates (BAPSA Activist (m), personal communication, December 1, 2016).

According to their slogan, *Lal Bhagwa ek hai. Saare comrade fake hain* (Red, Saffron is one. All comrades are fake), BAPSA not only politically opposes long established left parties, but also opposes rising right-wing forces, who are represented on campus by the party of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). In contrast to left or Ambedkarite politics, which explicitly derive their political legitimacy from issues outside the campus walls, ABVP proclaims a far more campus-centric view. Representing Hindu nationalist politics, ABVP wants to address the "real student problems" (ABVP Activist (m), personal communication, August 28, 2016) on campus. Although the student party already formed in 1949, the party's political ideology, oriented towards the RSS and the currently governing BJP, was rarely represented on campus until the year 2000. Then, for the first time in JNU history, an ABVP candidate won the JNUSU election and became Students' Union President. Fifteen years later, the party won a panel post again. Both times, ABVP's election success coincided with a BJP government in the Centre. With the ruling party's support, ABVP kept their electoral promises regarding the enhancements of the campus infrastructure. Because of their

[17] The term Bahujan, meaning 'the majority of people', is most relevant to contemporary Ambedkarite thought. It is part of a language that wants to foster anti-caste resistance. It roots in a specific understanding of India's structures and history of social inequality. The use of the term Bahujan shall rise awareness for the understanding that caste is not a Dalit/Adivasi problem only, but that the majority of people on the subcontinent, cutting across religion, ethnicities and geographies, is understood as caste-bound and ruled by "upper"-caste minorities. The domination of the few over the majority is referred to as 'Brahminism' (Cháirez-Garza 2014, 44ff.).

politically right-leaning set of moral values, ABVP's political dominance in a so-called *progressive campus* was prevented. Oriented towards the ideals of Hindutva, ABVP aims to "increas[e] national pride" (ABVP Activist (f), personal communication, August 28, 2016) inside JNU and places the idea of an all-Indian conformity over the leftists' *right to dissent*. This position reflects the party's own estimation of JNU's standing and position within the Indian nation: "JNU is as any other university. We are India. We are integral part of India. That's most important" (ABVP Activist (m), personal communication, November 12, 2016). That perspective on JNU as a fractal or a *model of* the Indian nation collides with the perspective of left and Ambedkarite activists, who derive their political legitimacy from JNU's exceptional model role *for* the Indian nation:

> I think there is a boundary between the rest of the society and JNU because every common sense we have in the society, it gets reversed in JNU. But the boundary is more in the sense that we want to undo everything bad that is there in the society. JNU actually represents the heart of India. It represents the soul of India in the sense that the ideas that come out from JNU represent what our country ideally should be: really democratic, really secular, really socialist kind of a way (Left Activist (m), personal communication, October 23, 2016).

The diverging perspectives on JNU's relation to the Indian nation – the university's very location, or rightful position in the nation – led to the left and right activists clash on 9 February 2016. On this day, during an event organized by a left-wing student organisation to remember the death anniversary of Afzal Guru,[18] a number of unidentified people were heard sloganeering *Bharat ki barbadi tak jung rahegi* (We keep fighting our battle until India is destroyed). Informed by upset members of the right-wing ABVP, the university's Vice Chancellor, only inaugurated a month before by the BJP-government, called the police by way of exception. The executive forces violently ended the event and arrested the then-incumbent JNUSU President Kanhaiya Kumar and two other students. The *9th of Feb incidence* became the prelude to the so-called *JNU controversy*. In the aftermath, the campus spatiality was decisively rearranged. Citing reasons of security, the administration gradually closed down hitherto open campus spaces. For example: *dhaba* opening hours were restricted and ID checks, the number of security guards, and video surveillance were increased. These measures taken should prevent protesters from gathering or occupying open squares and alter JNU's geopolitical landscape. Since 2016, the series of student and faculty member protests and the administration's counter-protests has, primarily, led to the rearrangement of the university's Administration Block. This process of negotiating space is further described in the following section.

[18] The Kashmiri Mohammad Afzal Guru was executed on 9th February 2013 for his alleged participation in the Indian Parliament attack in 2001. Until today, his legal case divides the nation into two sides. For the one side, Afzal Guru represents Kashmiri separatism and the national threat of terrorism. Conversely, the other side questions the lawfulness of Afzal Guru's execution stating that he did not receive a sufficient legal representation. For the latter, Afzal Guru's name has emerged as a metaphor for governmental injustice and structural discrimination against minorities.

5.2 At the Administration Block: The changing spatiality of protest

The protest directed against the university administration, which seen as the government's representative, is as old as the JNU institution. The students opposing state decreed regulations,[19] and thereby placing the university administration and state authority in question, substantially defined the ways in which JNU correlates to its outside. Quite often, the student protest brought the campus in public disrepute: While in 1983 after violent outrages JNU was discussed as "the sick university" (cf. Batabyal 2014, 400), it was branded *anti-national* in the aftermaths of the *9th of Feb incidence*. "Spectacles of dissent" (D'Arcus 2006, 14) have left their spatial marks inside JNU Campus. On the one hand, students' political interference led to the further development of residential constructions in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 2000s, objecting students prevented the administration from renting out campus land to private companies (which, in most of India's public campuses has become common practice). On the other hand, places accessible to political participation have visibly shrunk over the last two decades. Citing security and protection, JNU's huge afforested areas have become restricted abodes, public meeting places have been gradually closed down, CCTVs and the presence of security guards have increased over the past years. Most significantly, the spatial rearrangement of JNU's Administration Block exemplifies the key role that spatial accessibility plays in political participation. During the decade-long trial of strengths between students, faculty members, and the administration, the physical appearance of the Administration Block has remarkably altered (Fig. 17). Until the late 1990s, the administration building was located on rocky and unpaved terrain. Its driveways were not asphalted, and there was not a fenced park surround the building.

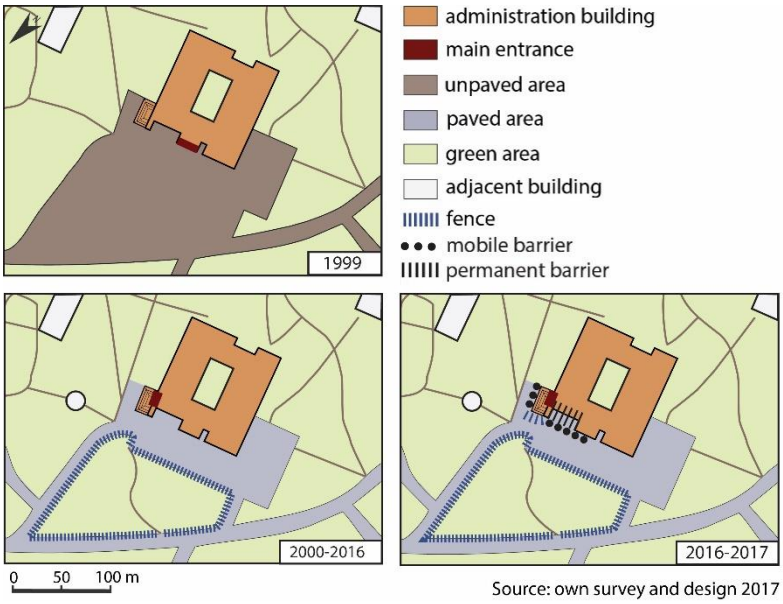


Fig. 17: Spatial rearrangements of the Administration Block (1999-2017)

[19] i.a., in 2009, JNU rejected the Lyngdoh Committee's recommendations that targeted the reformulation of the student election regulations; in 2015, JNU students, leading the Occupy UGC movement in Delhi, protested the University Grants Commission's decision to terminate financial support for thousands of post-graduate students. Despite the protest, both regulations were eventually implemented in 2016/2017.

The main entrance, unlike today, was located at ground level, immediately next to a roofed terrace, where protesters would settle in for long-term occupation. Consequently, administrative officers including the Vice Chancellor unavoidably encountered the protesters when entering or leaving the building. These spatially induced encounters are said to have fostered the exchange of arguments between the two antagonist parties and thus are thought to have had a mediating effect on the disputes. In 1999, a huge student protest, primarily addressing the *hostel crisis*, took place at the Administration Block. In the course of events, the administration ordered armed police forces to campus. The police violently ended the occupation and arrested several students. In the aftermath, the Administration Block was spatially rearranged. Citing the need for infrastructural develop-ment, modernization, and beautification, the square was asphalted and a fenced park was created. Consequently, protest space shrank. Further, the main entrance was relocated to the northern side of the building. The occupied protest zone then turned away from the main entrance and no longer served as a space of encounter between the two antagonistic parties. During the 2000s, the Administration Square was further equipped with CCTV. That functioned as a deterrent to protesters who were "scared of punitive measures" (Pinjra Tod Activist (f), personal communication, December 2, 2016) to be taken by the university administration. In the opinion of present and former student activists, the space then had become *sanitized* and *securitized*. Consequently, openly articulated protest at the Administration Block decreased. The *9th of Feb incidence* changed the landscape. After the Student Union's President Kanhaiya Kumar was arrested and JNU was branded *anti-national*, faculty members in solidarity with thousands of students gathered at the Administration Block. Under the banner of *What the nation really needs to know* a lecture series on nationalism was established, welcoming invited speakers from JNU and academics from other Indian institutions, politicians, and activists.[20] By taking the classes to the Administration Block – taking education out of place – demonstrated its effect. After appropriating the *Admin Square*, the protesters renamed it *Freedom Square*. Banners fixed on the building walls displayed the square's new name and claimed the university members' *right to dissent*. The roofed terrace was re-occupied by students on hunger strike. Tents were erected at the foot of the stairs where students protested against the *hostel crisis*. JNU students and teachers had appropriated the Administration Block, turning it into a place of dissent. Pictures of the protest, countless times reproduced in newspapers and television, also went viral on the internet. *Freedom Square* became both the proof of JNU's *anti-national* character and the symbol of a university's successful defence of its academic autonomy.

The square was rearranged again by mid-2016. *Freedom Square* was gradually turned back into *Admin Block* and protest was subdued by spatial means. The administration ordered the erection of barriers, rendering the square almost inaccessible. The previously occupied roofed area was fenced with an iron grill. Mobile and permanent barriers in front of the building's stairs prevent groups of people from gathering or approaching the main entrance of the administration building. The latest building developments have transformed the angled architecture of the administration building into a straight, assessable, and thus

[20] The lectures are published in the following: Azad, R., Nair, J., Singh, M. & Roy M. S. on behalf of JNU Teachers' Association (eds.) (2016): What the Nation Really Needs to Know: The JNU Nationalism Lectures. Noida: HarperCollins

protest-free area. The spatial rearrangements of the Administration Block have become the "normative frameworks that define the boundaries of acceptable behaviour in public space" (D'Arcus 2006, 29).

5.3 Chapter conclusions: A public university caught between Admin Block and Freedom Square

Following the changing geopolitical topography of JNU Campus, one can track its changes over the past decades. Initially contested by left leaning (communist, socialist, and liberal) parties, the campus was used by university members to negotiate matters of wider societal concern. It was that understanding of a 'societal mission', vital on campus until today, from which activists derived their duty and privilege to impact the university's administrative decisions. Over the past two decades, this privilege has become curved. By rearranging, i.e. parcelling, and thereby functionally converting places, protest space has noticeably shrunk. The more the campus became parcelled, the more it was perceived as *depoliticized* by those who argued in favour of their *right to dissent*.

During the 1990s, the political spectrum broadened on campus. The rising number of university members that refrained from taking a political position or proposed a more campus-centric political agenda called JNU's 'bastion-like exceptionalism' into question. Thus, the diversification of political opinion enlarged the number of possible perspectives from which the university could be viewed in its relation to the outside: the government, a society at large, and hence the Indian nation. The divergently articulated understandings of JNU's positioning within the Indian nation in turn impacted the possibilities to evaluate the legitimacy of political action taken inside campus. Controversies about the legitimacy of political action eventually led to the clashes between left- and right-wing forces, such as took place on 9 February 2016. The *9th of Feb incidence* is thus not that much a discussion about oppressed politicization or illegitimate depoliticization of JNU. It rather is the question that asks "which sorts of politics the campus should be used for and to which sorts of politics the campus should be familiar with" (Activist (f), personal communication, December 6, 2016). The spatial rearrangement of the Administration Block exemplifies how actors negotiate this question and define boundaries of action by spatial strategies. In this case, space is no mere arena for political participation. Political action literally takes place. Spatial strategies shape "often-intense disagreements about the nature of legitimate dissent; of who is allowed to do what, where, with what kind of symbolic and political effect and weight" (D'Arcus 2006, 15). In the context of such way of thinking, the question whether JNU is a politicized or depoliticized space loses significance. The actual question is: Which position should JNU take within the Indian nation? Should the institution stand as a pioneering *model for* India. Or should it rather become a *model of* a (somehow) uniformed nation?

6 The changing tracks of India's higher education development

The previous three chapters closely examined the JNU Campus as public institutional space. They related the concepts of demographic categorisation, knowledge production, and power

allocation to the three geographically approachable aspects of building distribution, constructional aesthetics, and spatial accessibility. Thus, they have tracked the changes of India's higher education development and highlighted their impact on JNU's spatial development. We have seen how the concepts of nation have changed throughout the past four and half decades. This final chapter aims to further interpret the findings by positioning them according to their common reference point, that is the Indian nation. By making JNU's national exclusion a question of positioning, this chapter will summarize the perspectives from which the university can be viewed. This will provide answers to the question: Where is JNU? On that basis, I want to reflect on the applicability of the theoretical framework applied to conclude with some final remarks.

6.1 Viewed from different angles: The multiple locations of Jawaharlal Nehru University

The late 1960s' post-colonial nation-building efforts made the concepts of nation a benchmark of institutional design. It was the goal of Jawaharlal Nehru University's founders to translate their own vision of nationhood into campus design. JNU's planning was based on distinctive assumptions regarding India's demographic structuring (*diversity*), its economic framework (socialism), its philosophy of knowledge production (secularism, rationalism, and liberalism), and administrative power allocation (academic autonomy). Translating a historically and politically unique vision of the Indian nation into spatial design lastingly interlinked the public institution with the concepts of nation, which defined the concepts of Indianness or nationhood as the basis for legitimacy of the institution. Rejecting colonial structuring of higher education, the establishment of Jawaharlal Nehru University in the 1960s became an institutional flagship project. It aimed to redefine the relationship between the Indian government and the Indian citizen per se. Thus, JNU's foundations were laid on an administrative intersection point: On the one hand, the varsity was established as central university. At the same time, it was granted an unprecedented degree of autonomy. This division of power made JNU Campus the meeting place of two potentially powerful actors – the government and the university's academic community. Positioning JNU on that very intersection point was interpreted as democratic and constitutional, thus *truly national*.
Officially, JNU's positioning has not altered up to now. The university is still formally rooted in this democratic intersection point of the government and the academic community. Nevertheless, the very configuration of the two intersecting lines – the Indian government and the academic community – has fundamentally changed over the past four and a half decades. The reconfigurations in the state-citizen relation have altered the possible perspectives from which the role of the public institution and its position within the Indian nation can be evaluated. Insofar it has broadened the possibilities of localizing JNU.

Envisioned to become a university that would be "different from all other universities in India and therefore be unique in itself" (Education Minister (1969–71) V.K.R.V. Rao as cited in Batabyal 2014, 27), JNU Campus indeed emerged as a model space *for* India. It was during the 1990s, India's political and economic watershed decade, that other visions of the nation gradually gained in interpretive power inside public institutions and thus entered the JNU Campus. The previously dominant concepts of *diversity*, socialism, and

rationalism/liberalism were supplemented by ideas of social differentiation (i.e. the demographic consideration of caste or cultural-ethnicity), and diverging forms of knowledge. Hitherto dominant educational values were challenged by privatization and marketization. Negotiating the university's adjustment to the new imperatives of economic efficiency and democratization has altered its constructional patterns. The constructional assemblages of Uttarakhand, Dakshinapuram, and Poorvanchal were supplemented by the residential compartments found in Paschimabad. The first ever academic complex consisting of interlinked Schools and their Centres was extended by new Centres developed at the fringes of the Academic Block. Spatially secluded units, such as the Special Centre for Sanskrit Studies, have made room for diverging educational ideologies on the JNU Campus. The increasing privatization of India's higher education landscape has changed the understanding and perception of *modernity*. JNU, once conceptualized as *thoroughly modern*, has become subjected to depreciation. Since 1991, Indian governments have aimed to merge the socio-economic processes of democratization and marketization. India's integration of the higher education sector into the global education market demanded the enhancement of national coherent standards. Standardization became the attempt to transform JNU from a *model for* Indian university into a *model of* Indian institution. Therefore, in the governments' view, the need for standardization justified the gradual withdrawal of the varsity's granted autonomous administrative structures. Hence, following the 1990s, one can observe the incremental parcelling of space. The compartmentalization of space coincides with the allocation of power away from the academic community and towards the administration. It was within those negotiation processes that JNU's exceptionalism eventually could undergo a process of reinterpretation: Hitherto seen as an institutional role model, it then could also be interpreted as a national misfit. In the words of its accusers, it has become *anti-national*, or a *hub of terrorism and treason*.

By examining the campus in its entirety, we can state that JNU today accommodates two dominant spatial patterns: The constructional assemblages developed before the 1990s and the compartmentalized units developed after the 1990s. However, the two spatial patterns do not contradict each other. Only in their joint composition do they form the one common place that is JNU Campus. Within that common place, people gather in solidarity or controversy, in public spaces, in joint canteens, or separate from each other behind hostel fences. Similar to the two spatial patterns that stand in proximity, the diverging understandings of JNU's location within the Indian nation must be understood as complementarities. Their common reference concept is the Indian nation. This, however, is viewed from different perspectives. The one perspective defines JNU's position as exceptional. It is thought to be "the microcosm of India" (Activist (f), personal communication, April 12, 2016) or a place where "every common sense we have in the society […] gets reversed" (Activist (m), personal communication, October 23, 2016). This idea of JNU's exceptionalism is countered by those who understand the nation as a holistic entity. In order to maintain national harmony, a single institution must not stand out but be consistent with its outside. In this perspective, any form of violation of the national code of conduct called *dissent* must be sanctioned with exclusion. Dissent is marked as *anti-national* and the culprit is normatively dislocated on the enemy's side. He, she or (in case of an

institution) it should *go to Pakistan*. On 9 February 2016, those two powerful perspectives collided and evoked a nation-wide controversy about JNU's very position: Inside or outside the Indian nation? Was JNU *the ideal nation* or an *anti-national hub*? Considering the power that the *9th of Feb incidence* had on the institution, JNU's location on the intersection point ultimately revealed its potential for conflict. In the 1970s, the participation of the government and the citizens were considered truly "democratic" (CCJNU n.d.). In 2016, the question of participation became the lever for change of the institution or its potential breaking point. It has turned JNU into a place where choosing *site* means to choose *side* (Soja 1996, 191) in a long-lasting and enduring battle over Indian forms of nationalism.

6.2 Final remarks: How Looking on nationalism makes a difference

The body of literature on nationalism is immense, and seems to grow every day, which is reasonable since "nationalism is too diverse to allow a single theory to explain it all" (Calhoun 1997, 123). Justifiably rejecting the political project of naturalizing or essentializing the nation, critical public and scientific discourse on nationalism, however, often reduces nationalism to groundless propaganda. That perspective then becomes itself the political project of debunking the nation as 'imagined', thereby locating nationalism in an abstract realm somewhere beyond 'the real' or 'truth'. Intellectually drawing a hierarchically distinction between the 'imagined' and the 'real' thus risks overlooking the material effects that the construction of nation and nationhood have in our everyday lives. While limited in scope, this work aimed to contribute to the debate on nationalism by proposing a simultaneous possibility of examining the phenomena of the 'real' and the 'imagined'. By combining conceptualizations and physical structures, and by analysing their practiced correlations or inconsistencies we are able to examine the very concreteness of the concepts of nation, nationhood, and nationalism. The work of architects and spatial planners, often taken for granted, have always contributed to those negotiations. The changing way that space has been imagined, constructed, used, and regulated, offers instructive insights into how rights and responsibilities, boundaries and relations, are understood within the nation. The texture of the nation, similar to the territory to which it is attributed, is never fixed and always under construction. Nevertheless, it has a powerful material dimension to it that is locatable. Nationalism affects us not in spite of, but exactly *because of*, its constructedness.

There are different notions of nation. These notions are in no way arbitrary, but are bound to spatial structures, spatial negotiations, and relations. The plurality of powerful perspectives and interpretations eventually make places locatable. Because the 'imagined' and the 'real' are inseparable phenomena rather than distinctive entities, the work in hand was a more pragmatic and less rational approach. That is to say, its findings do not need to remain an experiment of thought. Questioning location by using 'Where?' as a relational question is an effective tool to track viewing angles and positioning processes. It offers perspectives beyond the idealization or demonization of the notions of nation. It makes space approachable to empirical work and opens further areas of action. How is space arranged to manage and justify demographic divisions? And how can the arrangement of buildings contribute to social coexistence? How do spatial designs empower or weaken the

value of knowledge? Which role do spatial strategies assume for the allocation of power and, in turn, who is afforded the opportunity to participate and appropriate space? With regard to the project of finding differentiated and thus socially relevant answers, the look at space will definitely *make a difference*.

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