

# The King's and Queen's Tomb in Ahmedabad: Cartographies of contested heritage precincts

## La tumba del Rey y de la Reina en Ahmedabad: Cartografías del conflicto patrimonial

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Víctor Cano Ciborro, Mansi Shah, "The King's and Queen's Tomb in Ahmedabad: Cartographies of contested heritage precincts", *ZARCH 16* (junio 2021): 182-193. ISSN versión impresa: 2341-0531 / ISSN versión digital: 2387-0346.  
[https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs\\_zarch/zarch.2021165099](https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_zarch/zarch.2021165099)

**Recibido:** 08-01-2021 / **Aceptado:** 13-03-2021

### Abstract

Numerous historical monuments in the Indian city of Ahmedabad, such as the King's and Queen's tomb, are immersed in a complex web of conflict. These are places where, beyond the building itself, we find the presence of inhabitants with very different notions of what the concept of heritage means, so that dispute and resistance are more than guaranteed. The article looks at these extremely heterogeneous and controversial territories through a method —“narrative cartographies”— capable of making the space, its history and social strata visible from an ethnographic point of view. A method that brings to the surface the tensions and disputes between citizens who are marginalised by the institutional power, but who share a spatial reality that is usually ignored and made invisible. In this way, the cartographic analysis presented in both the King's Tomb and the Queen's Tomb redefines the way in which these places can be understood and studied, suppressing a dominant and/or imposing vision for one that is much more sensitive to the voices of the inhabitants. The aim is to disseminate a process that can help reveal different narratives that lead to heritage practices that are as inclusive as emancipatory.

### Keywords

Ahmedabad, Unesco, Heritage, Conflict, Bodies, Cartography.

### Resumen

Numerosos monumentos históricos de la ciudad india de Ahmedabad, como la tumba del Rey y de la Reina, están inmersos en una compleja red de conflictos. Se trata de lugares en los que, más allá del edificio, encontramos la presencia de habitantes con muy diferentes nociones de lo que significa el concepto de patrimonio, por lo que la disputa y la resistencia están más que aseguradas. El artículo se interesa por estos territorios extremadamente heterogéneos y controvertidos a través de un método —“narraciones cartográficas”— capaz de visibilizar el espacio, su historia y las estratos sociales desde una mirada etnográfica. Un método que hace aflorar las tensiones y disputas entre ciudadanos marginados por el poder institucional, pero que comparten una realidad espacial usualmente ignorada e invisibilizada. De este modo, el análisis cartográfico presentado tanto en la tumba del Rey como en la de la Reina, redefine la forma en que estos lugares pueden ser entendidos y estudiados, suprimiendo una visión dominante y/o impositiva por una mucho más sensible a las voces de los habitantes. El objetivo es difundir un proceso que pueda ayudar a revelar diferentes narrativas que conduzcan a prácticas patrimoniales tan inclusivas como emancipadoras.

### Palabras clave

Ahmedabad, Unesco, Patrimonio, Conflicto, Cuerpos, Cartografía.

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## Introduction

The walled city of Ahmedabad is recognised by UNESCO<sup>1</sup> as a world heritage site since 2017 and it is the first city that has been formally accorded the status. It has some of the most iconic heritage monuments and amongst them are the King's and Queen's tombs that form a part of the heritage complex in the centre of the walled city. They are recognised by ASI (The Archaeological Survey of India) as monuments of national importance and they are also religious monuments for the Islamic community. The management of the sites is contested as on one hand is the family who claims to have lived there for centuries and manages the monument and on the other the larger question of how to conserve these sites. With the backing of the religious community, the history of dialogues shows that there is no consensus amongst the stakeholders and the municipality.

Beyond the tomb occupation, the challenges are accelerated with what is happening in the periphery. To elaborate particularly, the Queen's tomb is surrounded by markets with blue plastic covers attached to the tomb walls, cooking and parking areas, extended living quarters and many other activities. These everyday uses, the needs of residents and their actions override what might be the permissible use of this heritage space. The issue goes beyond the conservation and protection of the mosque itself but how to take care of the many conflicting dynamics and voices.

To comprehend this extremely heterogeneous and contested territory the article will approach the sites of these two tombs: Rani no Hajiro (Queen's Tomb) and Raja no Hajiro (King's tomb) and analyse the two areas through a methodology that employs cartographing the space and its historic layers from an ethnographic viewpoint. In this way, the cartographies highlight the kind of activities, the use of space in the tomb premise, the different types and times of occupation, the way the bodies are settled in, the parts of the monument that are damaged because of inappropriate use, thus revealing the overlapping conditions.

The paper is interested in reading and understanding these tensions, messy situations, claims and cultural dynamics at play that can help in conservation and development of these heritage sites. Further taking into account not only the architecture or the conservation of the building but the intangible and living cultural heritage that is tied to protecting these areas. In this way, cartography will be understood as the method able to unveil such hidden dimensions in contested environments.

## Why do we need a different lens? Heritage, conflicts and beyond

The walled city of Ahmedabad was founded in 1411 by Sultan Ahmed Shah on the banks of the Sabarmati river. At the eastern edge centrally located sits the Bhadra citadel looking onward into a public space, today known as Bhadra plaza. The central axis originating from the Bhadra further leads to the Jama Masjid and the Tombs of the royal family. The tombs 'raja no hajiro' (Kings tomb, the burial place for King Ahmed Shah) and 'rani no hajiro' (Queen's tomb) are monuments of national importance that hold significance both in terms of Islamic architectural construction and articulation and for religious and cultural significance. They are situated on either side of the mercantile square known as Manek Chowk along a linear axis. Both are approached through a gateway that opens into a courtyard space and is surrounded by predominantly residential communities. These typologies typically known as *pol* houses align next to each other and form a dense clustered mass around the tomb where the space between the monument and houses becomes a vital ventilator and social core for the communities around (Fig.1).

1 Regarding Unesco, Ahmedabad "presents a rich architectural heritage from the sultanate period, notably the Bhadra citadel, the walls and gates of the Fort city and numerous mosques and tombs as well as important Hindu and Jain temples of later periods. The urban fabric is made up of densely-packed traditional houses (*pol*s) in gated traditional streets (*puras*) with characteristic features such as bird feeders, public wells and religious institutions. The city continued to flourish as the capital of the State of Gujarat for six centuries, up to the present", see: UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Historic City of Ahmadabad", <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1551/> (visited on 02/02/2021).

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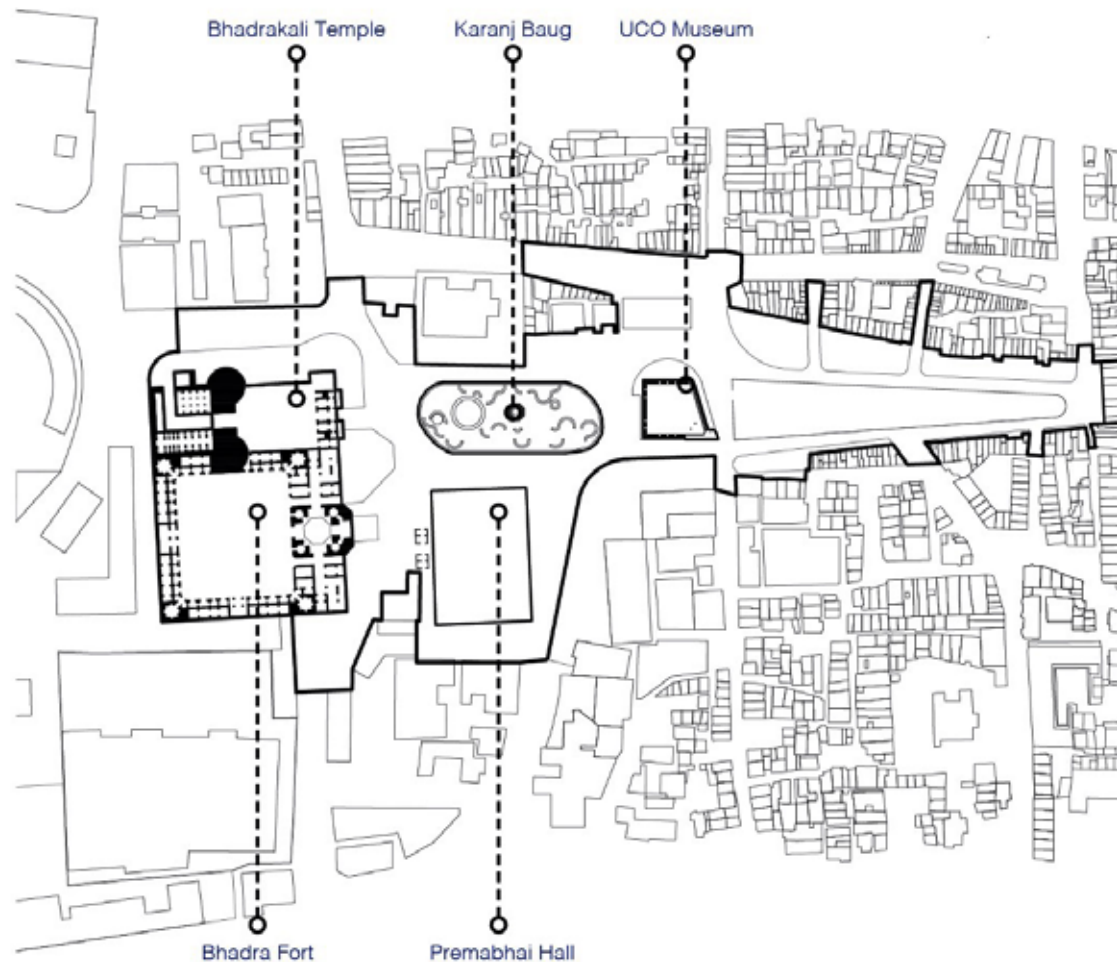


Fig 1. Context of the tomb in the walled City of Ahmedabad. Map by Authors.

To describe more specifically the context of the King's tomb, it is approached through a small gateway that is topped by a *naubat khana* (a small drum room) that was specifically used for playing traditional orchestra on special occasions. On passing through the gate the lane opens into an inner court with the King's tomb (a square-shaped structure with porticos around and edged with lattice stone windows).

The structure itself is a functioning mosque where the interior chamber is the tomb of Ahmed Shah and is the most protected part of the monument and capped with a large dome. The structure is currently managed by a family who claims to be custodians and have been residing inside for centuries. Beyond the structure, the tomb is surrounded by parking areas, storage units, many informal activities and the residual space is used by the community living around as a space for playing, gathering and working. Many private residential spaces have extended out into the public space through '*otlas*' and plinths which form a discontinuous edge around. Several families own goats and sheep and those can be seen resting on the edges and the base of the monument. Further, vendors who sell and work at Manek Chowk (which is known for its night food market) store their *laris* (small movable carts) in the periphery and cook as well in the public space. These dynamics reveal that the courtyard functions like an extension or a spillover of everyday activities. These patterns are tied to the context, lifestyle, smaller living spaces, increasing family sizes, economic activities, and the decay of existing houses, thereby producing an array of competing claims in the public space. These actions become impediments when it comes to conserving heritage and harder to establish new patterns of mutual responsibility (Fig.2).

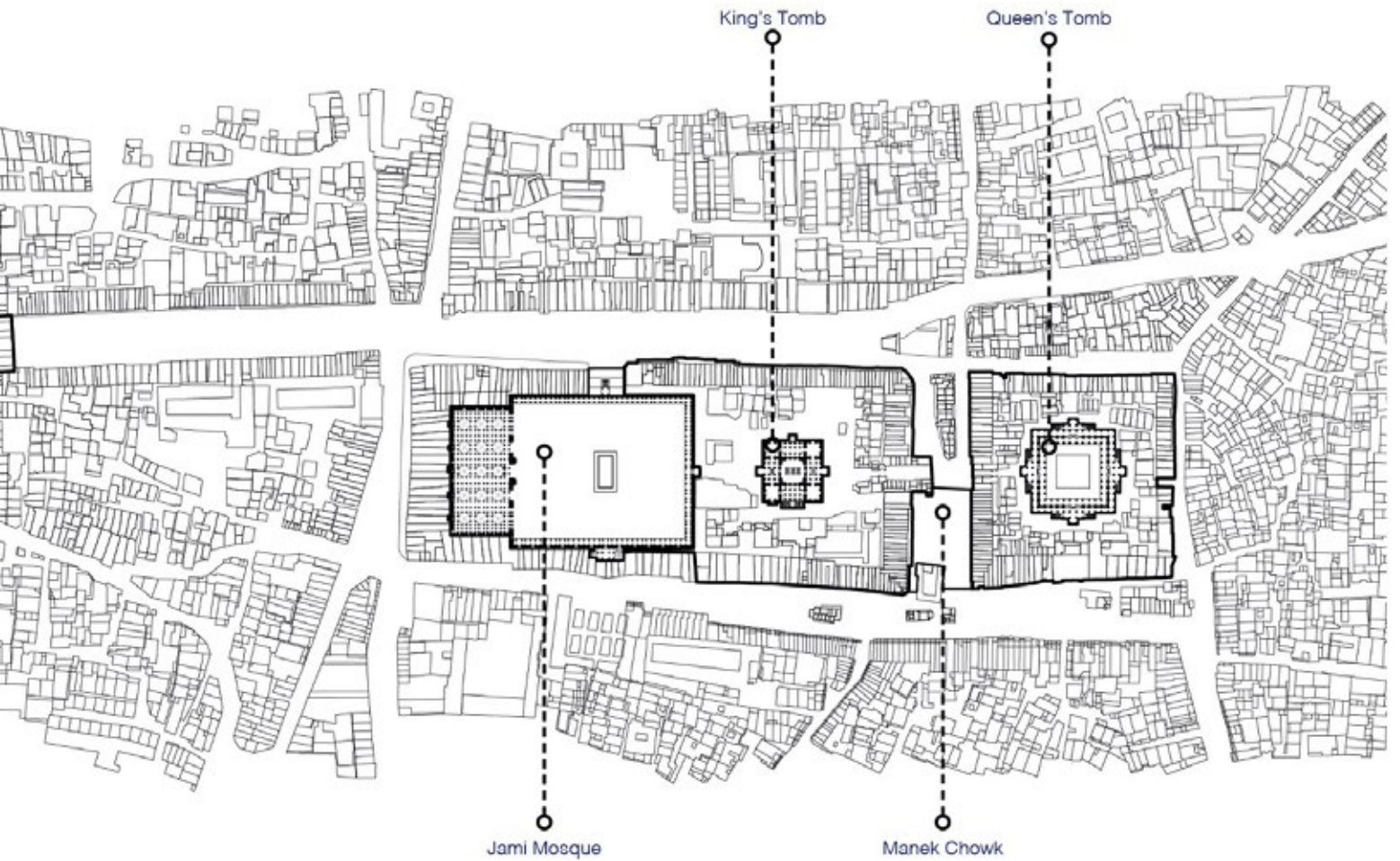


Fig 2. Set of images show the context of King's tomb. Top: The views of the entrance show the carts, storage and vending stall and lack of seating areas in front of the tomb. Bottom: Views highlight the goats, garbage and temporary occupations in the periphery. Photos by Authors, August 2019.

The Queen's tomb is more complex and is encroached more densely. The approach is lined with many tiny shops and the periphery of the tomb is tightly knit with vendors selling ethnic jewellery, parking, cooking and workshop spaces. The informal vending shops do bring vibrancy and tourists to the place but the monument is hidden between the fabric canopies or plastic sheds of the shops. Six

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Fig 3. The set of images show the context of the Queen's tomb, Top: Shows the different occupations inside the tomb particularly the shop and the home. Bottom: Show the context and tight knit narrow lane filled with parking, everyday objects, vendor stall coverings attached to the tomb walls. Photos by Authors, August 2019.

of the eight staircases to the tomb are blocked by different groups of sellers and upon reaching the monument it feels like entering a private space. The queen's tomb interior also is used for multiple activities, it is a home, a place to rest, a storage area for the community, a workshop space in the time of festivities, a place of small shops as well as a place of meeting. In one part of the tomb, a family of 4 reside, several household items are arranged for use and the cooking area and sleeping areas are demarcated decisively through different flooring. On top of the activities, several houses (owing to lack of space and growing family sizes) have extended towards the tomb and a few touch the skin of the monument. So both, the interior and exterior are extensively occupied leaving only a sliver of narrow space to walk. To conclude, the Queen's tomb is a complex collision of several factors and most importantly it is a place of income generation for many families (Fig. 3).

In response to the challenges, there has been an effort to intervene, document and conserve these sites, the ASI (Archaeological Survey of India) with the municipality have time and again sought a dialogue with the occupants of the tomb and the nearby residents but it has resulted in no conclusion and has further increased a feeling of insecurity.

So, in the context of the sites, the questions that are pertinent to us are:

*How can we think of constructive ways of coexistence of different economic activities as well as give relief to the monument and conserve it? How can we incorporate the various voices and at the same time dignify the monument? How can we make visible the cultural heritage and create dignified access for visitors to these tombs? And, how can we challenge assumptions about heritage sites and go beyond the exhausted dualism of formal/informal, private/public or legal/illegal?*

To answer these questions, there is perhaps a need to read these environments from a different lens and bring forth a methodology that sees relations, affections, perspectives that surround the heritage and elucidate narratives beyond the visible.

## Cartography as essential and instrumental tool: Recording spatial and hidden dimensions

This part of the paper elaborates our approach *narrative cartographies*<sup>2</sup> for reading conflicted sites and its application that can broaden discourse and create empirical evidence and data essential for decisions. As the anthropologist James Holston says, the form of the Indian public space is the conflict and this conflict is defined by “collisions of multiple and often contradictory claims, identities, and differences that both shape and are shaped by the commitments residents make to the city as their political community of belonging in their daily lives”.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, our target is to reveal these hidden spatialities through *narrative cartographies*; a medium through which we can get proper knowledge about the site from the perspective of history, users, and spatial ethnography. In doing so, it allows us continually move beyond preconceived notions or traditional drawings to broaden representations to show components as bodies, time, movement, temporary occupations, informality, human experiences, feelings, etc.

“They [these kind of maps] inaugurate new grounds upon the hidden traces of a living context. The capacity to reformulate what already exists is the important step. And what already exists is more than just the physical one attributes of terrain (topography, rivers, roads, buildings) but includes also the various hidden forces”.<sup>4</sup>

Narrative cartographies are not just interested in the forms -shapes- of space, but rather in the forces —usually invisible— which create the particular situation of every moment in this old city. Thus, as the geographer Denis Wood claims:

“But the final possibility, that the maps be arranged narratively, to make a point, to tell a story, implies a movement from the simple desire to get things into shape to the more complex one of making of that shape something of its own”.<sup>5</sup>

So, how do you draw an architecture that is not distinguished by its forms, but by the development of the forces and sensations of the bodies that construct it? Through *narrative cartographies*; an operative concept that is no longer a mere reproduction of current buildings, streets, or objects, that is, static forms, but the masked spatial dimensions based on unstable, invisible and immaterial principles that could broaden our spatial awareness.

Narrative cartographies challenge itself: What happens if we widen the principles of conventional spatial representations? Why do not we imagine what is going on in those places instead of cartographing the morphology of a city? And what if the blackest line in the plan is not the section of the monument but rather the existing tension between two bodies or the violent relation between the body and the monument? Why do we not use our notation tools as designers not only to show the material constructions, but also the immaterial ones —such as events, actions and relationships— that every city contains?

The point is to detach from generalised representation to understand the spatiality of the usages and how this situation can be controlled and mitigated in the conservation of the tomb. It’s a process that tries to simplify complex, unseen and relational stories and dynamics of the space. Dynamics where it is fundamental to understand how bodies inhabit and perform such places to recognise their importance as main characters in the design process. Dynamics which requires particular and radical notations to depict and communicate through visualisations the actions identified according to the reality of its inhabitants.

In this way, we have to emphasize the importance of the *ethnographic drawing* in this methodology. These kind of drawings, popularized by the Japanese architect

2 The operative concept of ‘narrative cartographies’ has been developed by Víctor Cano Ciborro in his PhD Dissertation, see: Víctor Manuel Cano Ciborro, *Narrative cartographies: Architectures from the sensitive regime of resistance* (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, 2021). In 2018, he and Mansi Shah started to apply this methodology to Indian contexts, developing through a studio —Rebel Bodies Rebel Cities— at CEPT University. Currently, they are also teaching courses and developing new research projects following this instrument of knowledge.

3 James Holston, “Foreword”, in *Urbanizing Citizenship. Contested Spaces in Indian Cities* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2012).

4 James Corner, “The Agency of Mapping Speculation, Critique and Invention”, in *Mappings*, Denis Cosgrove coord. (Islington: Reaktion Books, 1999), 214.

5 Denis Wood, “Pleasure in the Idea / The Atlas as Narrative Form”, *CART Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization* 24, n.º 1 (1987): 29.

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Wajiro Kon and being contemporary adapted by Atelier Bow-Wow, which create “an architecture that, far from attempting to control the surrounding environment, is itself defined and shaped by the accidents of the site and the participation of people who inhabit it”.<sup>6</sup> A vision of architectural discipline that is very from the reality of Ahmedabad. But, what is ethnographic drawing? It is “a method of observing and drawing architecture and urban space from the viewpoint of the people who use it, rather than the architects and planners who are involved in its construction”.<sup>7</sup> This drawing “[m]ore than just transmitting building data, drawing allows us to uncover realities that would otherwise remain unseen by those who experience them”.<sup>8</sup> Realities where “object or place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses”.<sup>9</sup> Phrases that demonstrate the relationship between ethnographic drawings and narrative cartographies.

## Relations between both monuments

Before going to cartographies of the tombs, figure 4 shows the context of the two sites. The Kings and Queens tomb are connected through passageways that open into Manek chowk. The context is particularly important as vendors residing in the King's tomb precinct use the inner courts to store the *laris* and at night sell at Manek Chowk. The chowk is constantly changing through the day and these reflections of usages are critical to understanding the wider community hold, the relational dynamics between the spaces and how the economic activities create diverse temporalities in both spaces. This map presents an overall spatial structure bringing to light some of the interconnected urban functions.

The cartographies will be described further in the examples below where the process followed extensive observation and discursive method of inquiry and representation-showing practices as it appears and bodies as main characters. The source of information has been photographs, interviews, recordings of events, news and onsite drawing and final coding is represented in these narratives cartographies.

## Cartography of the Queen's Tomb

The cartography of Queen's tomb shows the different kinds of activities with particular locations in the tomb premise showing how tightly the areas are occupied by the community (Fig. 5). It also emphasises five very contentious occupations such as working, storage, selling, living areas in the corridor and play area in the courtyard spaces of the tomb. The extremely tight knit fabric of houses, extensions through *otlas*, parking and vending spaces around the tomb leaves only a sliver of space for walking and hence many everyday activities have taken over the monument. The entrance staircase to the colonnaded porticoes are blocked leaving just one accessible entry, close to the family residing in the tomb who also holds the key to see the public monument. So instead seeing the monument from one lens the cartography presents a precise and subjective analysis of the occupations. This graphic construction tries to document and transcribe every reality, being mindful of the utility of each element and the relations while calling attention to see this site from a different viewpoint, where new radical initiatives are needed to incorporate the functions while freeing up ground spaces and creating positive spaces for community.

## Cartography of the King's Tomb

The King's tomb cartography reveals the spaces occupied by a family of six members (one old woman, her two daughters, his son, and her two granddaughters) who claim to have lived there for centuries. The study shows the use of spaces in the tomb premise, the use of alcoves as spaces for storage and cooking and the

6 Momoyo Kajijima, Laurent Stalder, y Iseki, Yu, Architectural Ethnography (Japan: TOTO, 2018), 8.

7 Kajijima, Stalder, y Iseki, Yu, Architectural Ethnography, 9.

8 Kajijima, Stalder, y Iseki, Yu, 16.

9 Yi-fu Tan citado por Kajijima, Stalder, y Iseki, Yu, 20.

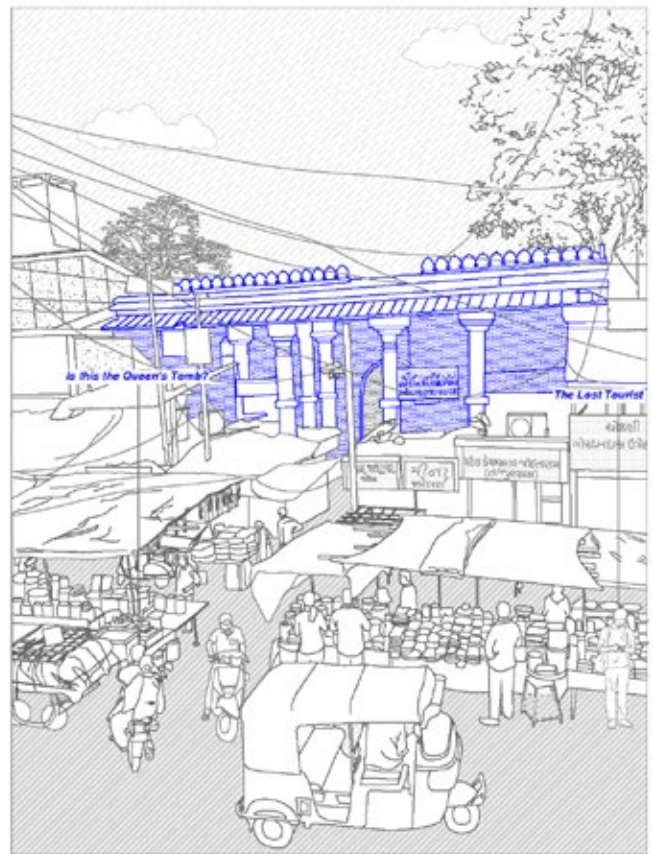
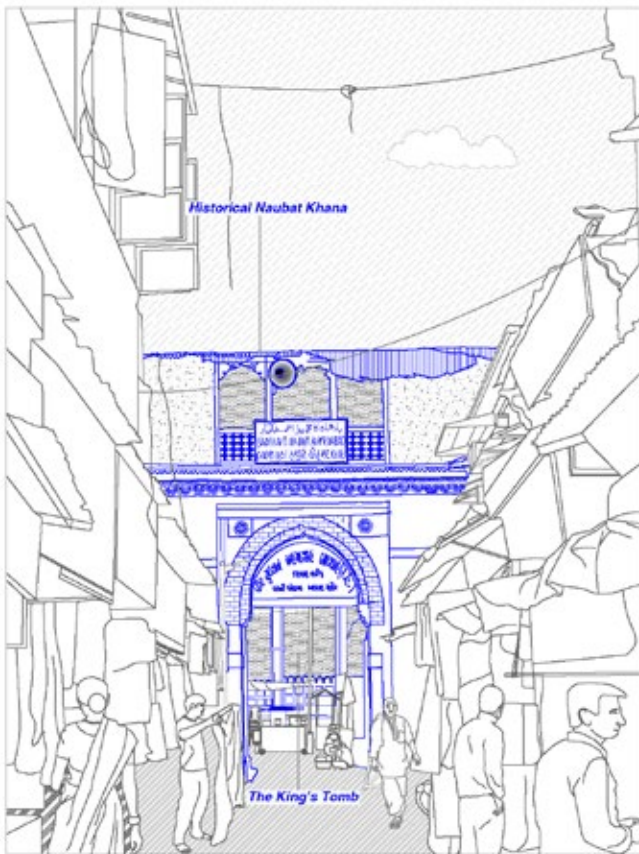
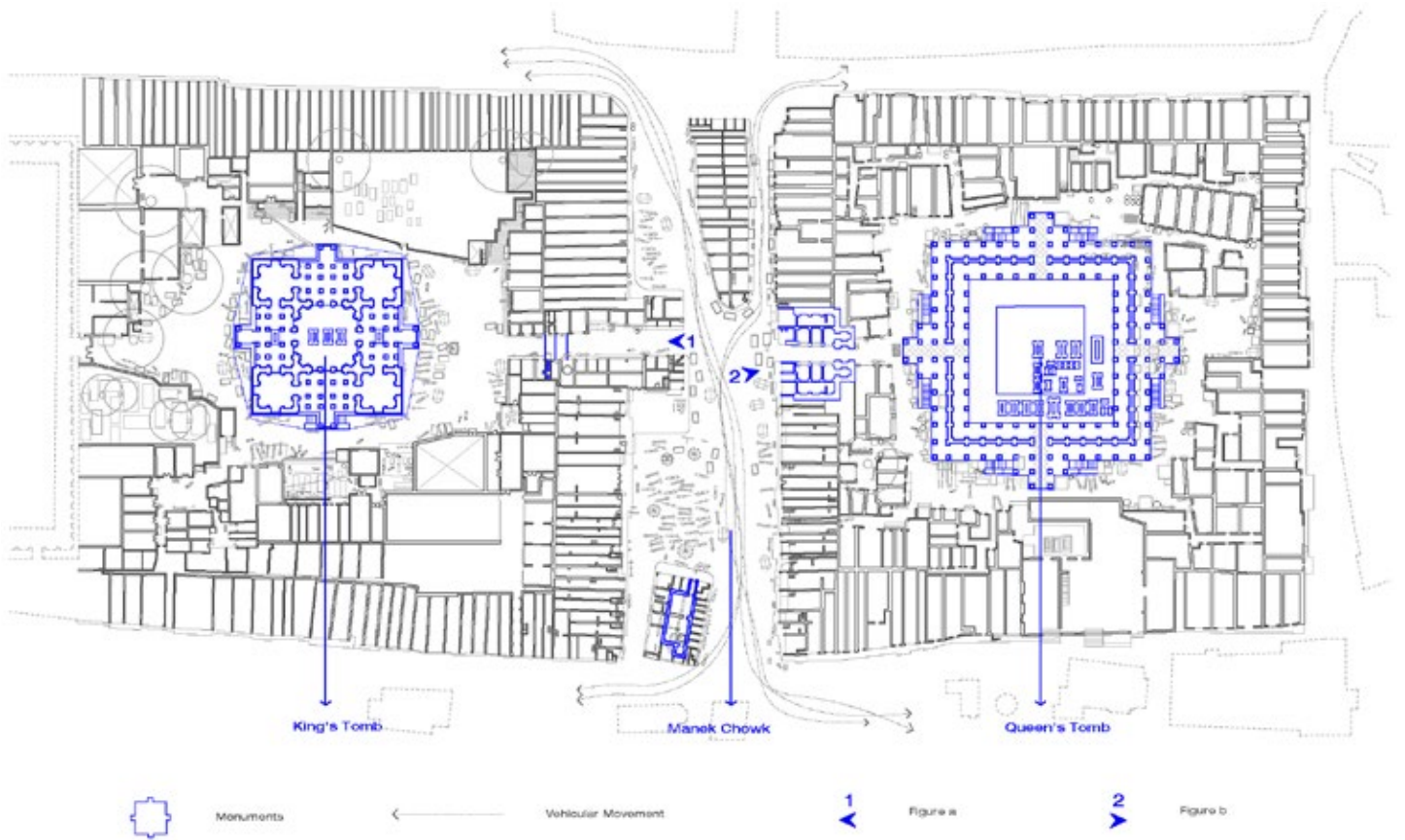
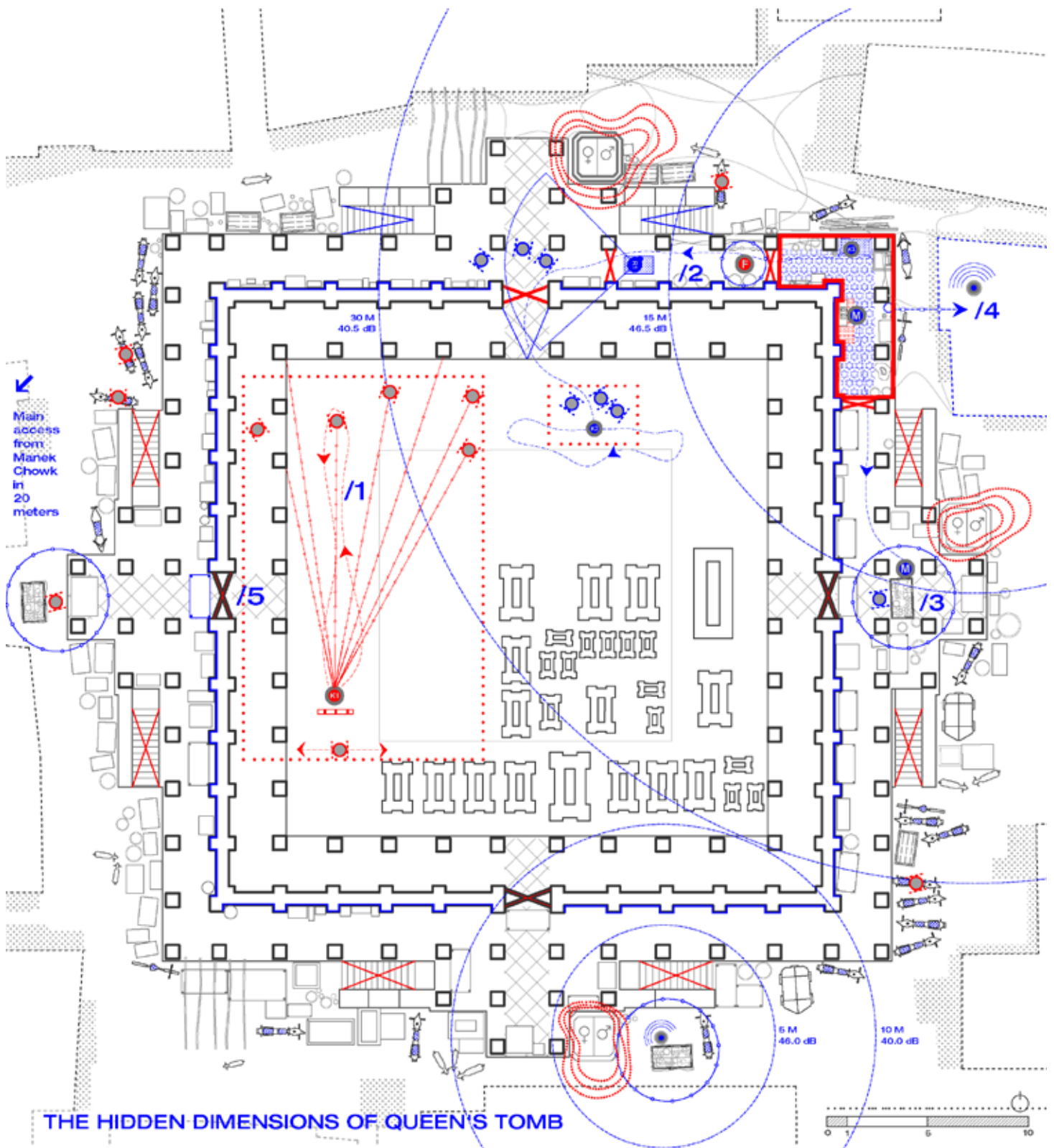


Fig 4. Top: Map of the context of King's and Queen's Tomb and connection with Manek Chowk, one of the most dynamic and historically important chowk in the centre of the city- known today for its night food market. On a perpendicular axis to Manek Chowk are the tombs. Currently the entrance space is encompassed by vendors and small shops, by Shriya Dhir. Bottom left: Entrance to the King's Tomb with the gate topped by Naubat khana, by Nitya Patel. Bottom Right: Entrance to the Queens tomb. Both the entrances are hidden amidst the vendor activities in the front that impede the visual access, by Shriya Dhir.

different activities settled in different parts. The tomb entrance is the most active space for the family to meet together and work and explain to the tourists about the tomb. The family expressed their sense of fear and interference of the municipality





### THE HIDDEN DIMENSIONS OF QUEEN'S TOMB

#### LEGEND

##### LIVING FIGURES

- Resident 1 - Grand Mother
- Resident 2 - Mother
- Resident 3 - Father
- Resident 4 - Son
- Resident 5 - Daughter
- Local - Male
- Local - Female
- Goat

- Local - Male
- Local - Female
- Goat

##### RELATIONS

- Economic
- Vigilance
- Private space
- Walks with storage
- Play
- Unpleasant Smell
- Sound
- Throwing ball
- Fetching water

##### ACTIVITIES

- Resting
- Cooking
- Extending private space
- Moving

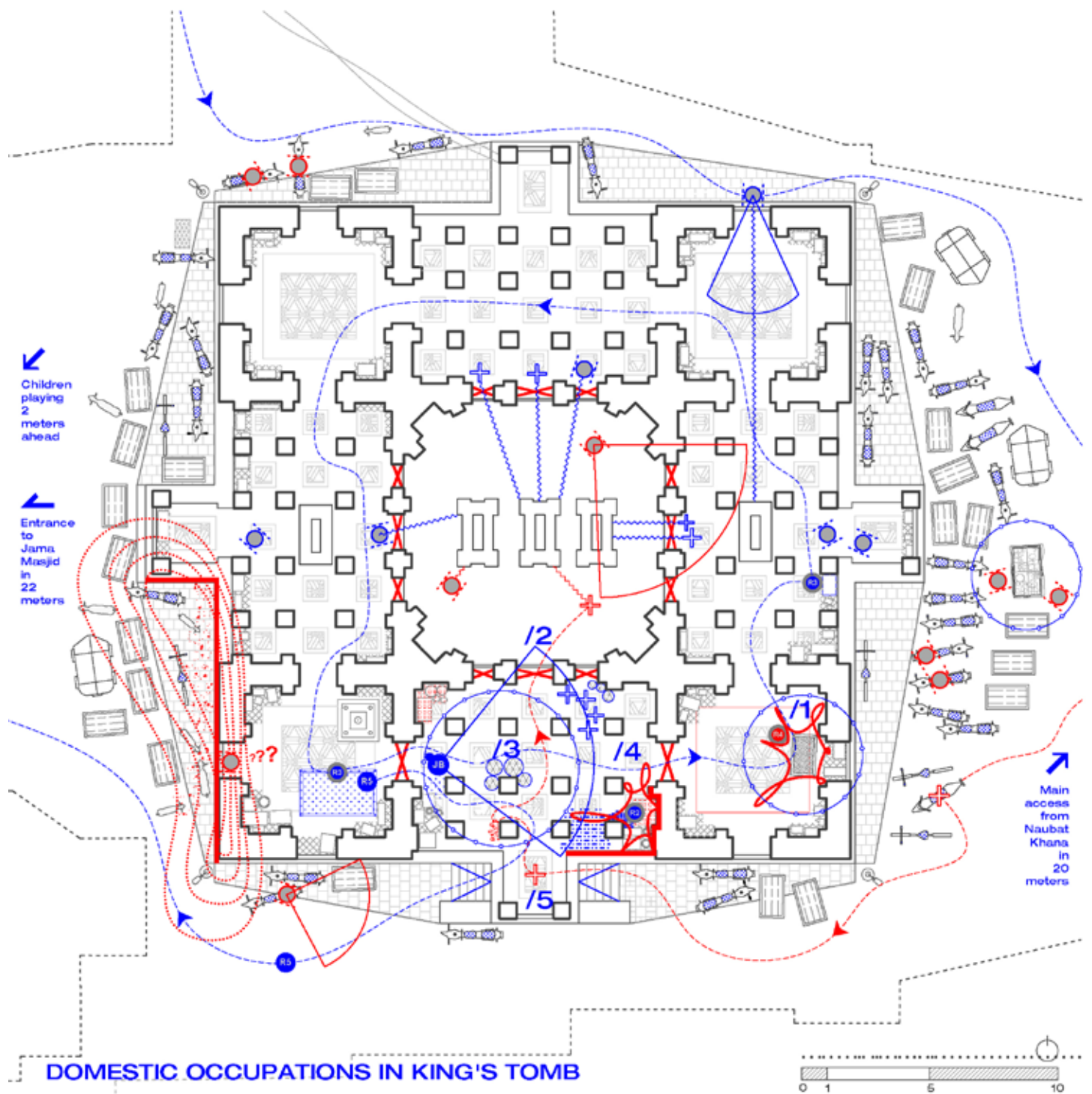
##### SPECIFIC AREAS

- Sound source
- Main Access
- Restricted Entry
- Blocked Entry
- Demarcated private space on ground

#### TEMPORAL EVENTS

- /1 Everyday playground: Children playing cricket in the courtyard of Queen's Tomb amid the tombstones.
- /2 The male resident of the tomb is engaged in basket weaving for religious purposes in the colonaded passageway at the entrance.
- /3 New claims have begun to settle in, such as small shop also within the corridor of the tomb.
- /4 The private living space is slowly being converted into a house full of amenities with water, kitchen, beds, storage and electric supply.
- /5 Only one entrance to the courtyard is open, and three others are shut because of excessive storage lined along the corridor.

Fig 5. Cartography of different occupations in Queen Tomb. Drawn by Shriya Dhir under the supervision of Víctor Cano Ciborro and Mansi Shah. 'Narrative cartographies' research group, 2021. (Sources: Haiya Dalal, Kelly Shah).



**DOMESTIC OCCUPATIONS IN KING'S TOMB**

**LEGEND**

LIVING FIGURES		ACTIONS		ACTIVITIES		MOVEMENTS		SPECIFIC AREAS	
	Resident 1 - Jubeda Ben (Head of the Family)		Male Visitor		Economic		Resting		Man
	Resident 2 - Daughter 1		Female Visitor		Vigilance		Cooking		Woman
	Resident 3 - Daughter 2		Local - Male		Rebel		Washing		Restricted Entry
	Resident 4 - Son		Local - Female		Religious / Pray		Storage		Unpleasant Smell
	Resident 5 - Grand Daughter		Goat				Littering		

**TEMPORAL EVENTS**

- /1 The family residing in the tomb makes jewelry as main source of revenue in one of the spaces within the tomb premise.
- /2 The inner chamber of the mausoleum is only accessible to men and restricted for women.
- /3 The custodian are also engaged in making garlands and clothes for religious purposes in the main space at the entrance.
- /4 Contentious domestic activities such as cooking and washing inside the monument.
- /5 Daily movement of visitor maneuvering through the parking and storage in the public space to enter.

Fig 6. Cartography of space occupied by the family, their storage, activities, and patterns of movements making it possible to see the monument beyond its physical dimension by Shriya Dhir under the supervision of Víctor Cano Ciborro and Mansi Shah. 'Narrative cartographies' research group, 2021. (Source: Bhavya Trivedi, Dhvani Doshi, Zankhna Palmist).

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as they claim to be the protectors of the monument. The cartography shows the web of relations, everyday dynamics and opens it for interpretations (Fig.6).

The cartography also expands and shows the occupations outside the tomb. As seen the limits about public and private domains are worrying as lots of storage, parking, vending is abutting the tomb walls. Representing these spatial occupations allow one to simultaneously analyse and get knowledge about the site and the community's use of the public space.

### Application to rethink contested heritage sites

“Working *cartographically* –not to be confused with simply working with *cartographies* implies a particular orientation, one which displays at once both a social and a disciplinary project. And it enacts this possibility not by representing a particular condition, but by subverting dominant oppositions and hierarchies currently constitutive of the discourse. *Cartographic work* (...) cannot be accounted for by reapplying the conventional categories of formal or functional, critical or complicit”.<sup>10</sup>

The cartographies reveal contemporary challenges, bodily occupations and the overlapping realities that can adequately equip decision-makers to meet the real issues. With this awareness, we also recognise the variety of situations one could not then imitate western typologies, strategies and interpretations to discern utterly specific problems of the Indian context. The homogenizing wave that is currently flooding the European and American designs cannot be followed in a different spatial culture. The most interesting and mainly disregarded Indian urban morphology by designers is the how of bodies in actions, and such bodies –rebel or normative ones– should be the principal concern for urban interventions.

Extending the cartographic analysis could mediate between what is imperative in terms of heritage protection and projects that could indirectly be instrumental in heritage management –such as provision for alternate sites for tomb occupants in the same vicinity, rearranging informal structures encumbering the monument while incorporating their economy, improving the small intermediary open spaces for the community, strategic design interventions that control the expansion of private realms towards the monument, seating areas for the community and workshop areas for traditional crafts.

Therefore, drawing these realities can catalyse actions in relation to a particular place and can influence decisions that are often left unseen or disregarded as encroached or tagged as illegal activities. The issue is more than preservation and it is through the cartographies we see the livelihoods in context and the wider meaning of this place. The conservation of the heritage monuments is integral but also the integration of the families in the productive dynamics of these spaces. And, the voice of inhabitants plays a key role in the protection of the monument and can lead to overall planning and recovery.

Eventually, we question the need for absolutely deterministic decisions, the potential of these cartographies reveal the dynamism and complexity that both need to be acknowledged and celebrated.

### Conclusion

To conclude, contested heritage sites are real and wicked problems of Indian cities and are challenging for designers, planners, conversation architects and custodians. Through the paper, the attempt was to show how cartographies can move us closer to the answers by making visible unrepresented voices, by identifying issues of space vis-a-vis the dynamic changes and bringing together the different narratives.

<sup>10</sup> Robert E. Somol, “Dummy Text, or The Diagrammatic Basis of Contemporary Architecture”, 23. We have changed the concept of ‘diagram’ from the original text, by the notion of *cartography*.

It broadens the traditional ways representing a space can be used as a tool that can connect designers to unexpected possibilities, outcomes and possible hybrid programs- such as alternatives to everyday occupations, or new ways to organise marginal productivities or everyday activities supported through the provision of new infrastructures.

In such a context, further to heritage, it is the complex set of relationships that are revealed through the process- that is being mindful of the inclusion of forgotten city agents and acknowledgement of vulnerable groups. It can unlock positive influences for placemaking and management for contentious heritage sites. Finally, we think that conflicts are often avoided in design processes, and we put ourselves amid messy reality, to offer a way of cartography that can lead to an emancipatory practice.

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