"Boundaries which separate people are never shown on maps."
Discuss.
By Natalie Chee Wen Hui (17S51)

The United Nations geoscheme organises countries into specific geographic regions, such as Southeast Asia, North America and Europe. A country is also constricted by its own boundaries, both on land and sea. In this way, we would naturally associate certain people with certain places; the Chinese live in China, and the Indians originate from India. However, people can also be separated in ways that cannot be geographically defined. Without doubt, not all boundaries that exist in the world can be plotted onto maps. These include racial or religious segregation; hierarchy within societies; as well as the central idea of a group identity.

Some boundaries that separate people can be easily displayed on a map. For example, people with similar income levels tend to live in the same areas. In Singapore, the working and middle income groups tend to live in HDB (Housing Development Board) flats, while those who earn a higher income usually would reside in landed property like bungalows. In Northern Ireland, the boundary between the Protestants and Catholics can be clearly mapped: it is represented physically by the Belfast Wall. Though what remains of the Berlin Wall are mere fragments, it was once the boundary that separated East and West Germany, due to the different political beliefs. However, there are many instances where the boundaries between people cannot be mapped.

With increased mobility and advanced technology, the majority of countries now consist of a multicultural society, with people from all over the world living together. A high inflow of foreigners would predictably cause the locals from the 'in-group' to find themselves straying away from the 'out-group' of unfamiliar faces. Segregation is the result, causing a gap between the two groups that is only socially, but not physically, present. For example, from 2000 to 2010, the increase in foreigners in Singapore was 2% of Singapore's population in 2000. Although Singapore actively promotes the integration of immigrants to form a peaceful and harmonious society, the segregation between locals and foreigners remains profound. In schools that accept Chinese scholars, such as Anglican High School and Temasek Junior College, it is clear to many that the different nationalities are immiscible. Intrinsic communication between the two groups is rare, and in an interview conducted by the Straits Times, a Singaporean Permanent Resident (PR) even commented that he does not feel Singaporean despite living in here for over 20 years, and would prefer to retire in China, his homeland, rather than the country he spent majority of his years in. We can therefore conclude that the segregation between different races or nationalities occurs, but it is impossible to display the distinct clusters of people topographically.

In addition, classes or even hierarchies may exist within countries. Though some would claim that these are rare in urban societies where people are educated and taught not to repeat the mistakes of the past, there are many concrete examples of their existence. One would be that of the infamous caste system in India. In urban circles, the term 'community' is used instead of 'caste', thus giving the impression that the system no longer exists. In rural areas and small towns, the system is even more pronounced, as the people there see no purpose in concealing the system. Even if urban Indians argue that the system only exists in villages, they are more often than not oblivious to the fact that 70% of Indians live in villages, therefore implying that it is still a dominant phenomenon in the country. Hence, the lower and upper classes may live in geographically different areas due to the

various types of housing their income permits them to purchase; but a hierarchy is a social barrier that is manifested in the mindsets of the people and this cannot be physically plotted on a map.

Economists, in the study of choice and scarcity, abide by the principle of marginalism, which states that by rationality, people would only buy items if the benefit they gain outweighs the price they pay. Likewise, people would flock to those who can make them feel good about themselves. In order to feel appreciated and gain a sense of belonging in society, people would seek those with common interests as them. Hence, this creates a social boundary which separates people. By no means is this detrimental: it simply implies that people would make friends with people they like, and vice versa. Within schools across the world, it is common for students to form 'cliques' with the people who provide them emotional and moral support. Many adults also have their own groups of friends, and interest groups are common. Accordingly, such relationships that connect people cannot be mapped.

The boundaries between people can be plotted on maps, if there are physical barriers or different regions that separate them. However, the distinctions between people can also occur because of the variation in personalities and preferences. Every human is unique to himself; and therefore, it would not be possible to map the reasons that govern our behaviour, and as a whole, our lives.

Comments:

Well done! You picked a seemingly easy topic and demonstrated mature understanding of the issue proposed. A good scope covered with a couple of insightful evaluations. Could do better with a wider range of examples.