

Hometown: The City in the Postnational Landscape

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The nation is under siege, and the attrition comes from both without and within. The cross-border flows of capital, communication, and people produce a trans-national dynamic across the horizon of the nation, while the various regional, local, and subaltern upsurges pose a sub-national wave. This double vortex generates what has been proffered as a postnational condition and reinvigorates critiques of the nation's emancipatory potential and promise.

While postnational reflections have been useful in noting the limitations of nations and nationalism they have been less effective in elaborating alternatives to them. Although the postnational is spoken of as a new ethical condition or a political practice, its corresponding spatial configurations are hardly addressed. How might we identify the postnational spatially especially in relation to the flawed socio-spatial imaginations of the nation, homeland, and region? What are particularly left unresolved in re-framing the dynamics of national states are meaningful existential, cultural and political affiliations to space or, put in another way, notions of being-at-home.

Our point of departure is to think about affiliation and belonging to space in a way that does not privilege the national. While the relation between space and affiliation beyond the scope of the national can be theorized in more than one way, we are especially drawn to the city as a space of alterity. We are interested in both the ontological and emotive as well as the political aspects of such affiliations to specific spaces, and in the existential, cultural and political forms of belonging to cities.

Cities in South Asia may open up alternatives, or at least, another site of attachment in the postnational landscape. Our attention to cities is not generated by the obvious rising trends in urbanizations in contrast to the “eroding” nation (even though more than half the world's population is now urban for the first time in human history),¹ but reconsidering the Lefebvorean claim that the city expresses and symbolizes “our being and consciousness.” In fact, we seek to bring the declining relevance of the nation and increasing significance of the city within the same field of exploration to present the city as another viable site of affiliation and engagement. It seems that we have been too quick to concede to the romance of homeland and nation as sites of attachment and belonging (as well as loss), and leave unexplored other substantive and complex spatial structures such as the city.

But what is the scope of “city-think” in South Asia when the discourse has not gone beyond seeing the city, either as a literal urban landscape or geographical site or as a catalogue of humanly-created catastrophes and crises of capitalist-consumerisms? The city continues to be described too conveniently as a site of unmanaged growth, migration, and struggle for survival even though cities are homes to millions. The politico-economic discourse on cities is a far cry from considering the city in existential terms. Cities become distinctive or “enlivened” not only by topographical features, urban morphology or civic enterprises, but by the imbrication of one's self in the fabric of the city as a dweller or inhabitant, and in some cases a politically constituted citizen. Underscoring

the relationship between self and city, the architectural and urban historian Joseph Rykwert (1976) recalls the words of the 4th c. BCE Athenian general Nicias to his soldiers embarking on a mission to colonize distant lands: “You are yourselves the town, wherever you choose to settle. . . it is men that make the city, not the walls and shapes without them” (1976:23).

To unravel the lived, affective, and affiliative properties of the city, we deploy the term “hometown.” The implication of Nicias is that there is a mutuality of self and space that is not fully engaged in political or sociological interpretations of the city. While humans may live in cities, cities live in them as well. It is this obvious but elusive mutuality that we wish to bring forth through the conceptual framework of hometown. Hometown represents a charged relation to a particular place, which is shaped by human emplacement, affiliation, and imagination. Although any named place may become a hometown, we are especially interested in the “life-world,” or how the fundamental human condition of “being-in-the-world” relates to the city. Cities as hometowns are neither perfect nor immutable but that they are among the places in which we are embodied, and the places in where we seek to make ourselves at home. And we do so in lived and practiced ways—routinely, emotionally, and psycho-geographically.²

By discussing the city as hometown, we are emphasizing a distinction between the abstraction of homelands and nations and the lived spaces of belonging and embodiment. The important point here is that an abstract spatial constellation (whether at global, continental, regional or national scale) is always negotiated through the specifics of a social habitus. Even the attachment to nation or homeland takes shape through the particular, everyday textures of place—the call of the fish vendor at a neighborhood in Dhaka, the neon signs at an intersection encountered daily in Karachi, the smell of exhaust and the pattering of an auto-rickshaw in Delhi. In fact, we would like to argue that when one returns from travel abroad, one does not return to an India or Bangladesh per se, or for that matter an Africa or Asia, but to a specific city or place, a Lucknow, a Chittagong or a Kathmandu. A place that is perhaps hometown.

The following sections elaborate on our critique of the national state as the primary site of belonging and expand on the need to foreground the city as “home,” imperfect or ambiguous

as it may be. We rely on a combination of scholarly work, relevant literary texts and selections from interviews conducted for this project to argue for a multi-tonal approach to hometown and, more specifically, make a case for the significance of attachments to cities that exist alongside discursive and material affiliations to the national state.³

State's Apocryphal Space

In the discourses of national states, the combination of space and scale normalizes the national state as the legitimate, overarching and monolithic authority. The consequence is a primordializing of the nexus of territoriality and sovereignty and a subsuming and obscuring of the significance of the local and particular (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002). Indeed, as Aditya Nigam (2009) notes, the national works by erasing various notions of spatial belonging that circulate within South Asia, such as *des*, *bari*, *vatan*, and *nadu*. Maps, for example, have been especially instrumental in normalising the space of the nation with the result of flattening, if not obliterating, a more complex cognition of places. Speaking to the shift from place to abstract space, sociologist Craig Calhoun (1997) notes how maps before the 18th century were either local, for city plans or charts, or meant to give directions to travellers, as well as aid military operations. As the model of the nation proliferated in the early 19th century, maps helped literalise and opticise territory, augmenting the pre-occupations with borders and sovereignty.

The particular spatial configuration of the national state reproduces a powerful set of discursive-material claims that continually normalize

the national state as the locus of cultural and political belonging, and that which completely and fully contains us. Space and affect, the material and representational constantly work together to appropriate the grammar of belonging and attachment to the national state. The predominant notions of belonging and attachment emerge from a synthetic relationship of affect and politics that is reproduced in the mundane as well as the spectacular spaces of the national state; daily “national news,” the national flag waving atop state buildings, war-time, and references to terrorism are among such iterations. Belonging connects us to something, giving us membership within a group or collective, but insofar as belonging connotes possessions and property, we are also the things that belong to something larger than ourselves. Thus, as much as home and nation belong to us, we belong to them. Belonging also connects us to other people and relates us to others through descent and kinship. It bridges putative distinctions between the intimate and the public spheres. Not surprisingly, then, the affective idioms of national state, much like homeland, are produced through metaphors of gender, kinship, and heterosexuality.

The concept of belonging brings together multiple affective valences of the national state—allegiance and affiliation in the politico-legal sense with affinity and attachment at an emotive level. The space of the national state is more open to such valences in comparison to the exclusionary fabric of homeland, whose discourse is narrowly about birth and descent. It is possible to be naturalized as a citizen-member even if one is never quite fully accepted within the fold of the

nation. At the same time, the racialized and religion-based exclusions that mark more than one nation of South Asia are painful reminders that some groups are excluded despite their equal claims to soil, blood, and a common past. The particular mix of affect and politics plays out in a number of different ways, mediated by hierarchies and differences engendered and nurtured by ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, language, and social class. Despite and, in fact, through these differences of belonging, spatial and affective idioms of the national state claim not only our political attachments but attachments of the heart. Nation, home, and heart are used interchangeably, just as are rights, citizenship, and state.

The key question is: What other forms of belonging to social sites and spaces exist that are not contained by the discourses of homeland and national space. We share this quest with scholars such as Mary Layoun who ends her book *Wedded to the Land? Gender, Boundaries, and Nationalism in Crisis* with the assertion that alternative ways of conceptualizing and living difference, an “otherwise,” has always existed alongside the hegemony of nationalism (Layoun, 2001). Layoun’s strategy regarding the unsaid and unmarked, however, poses a problem. Perhaps the problem is not so much in terms of what lies unsaid but the ability of scholars and researchers to pay attention to what is actively lived, experienced, and desired alongside and outside the framework of nationalism. Layoun is right to note the fissures and fractures in dominant accounts of nation and homeland that are revealed through the storytelling of the marginalized and the dispossessed.

Yet, the focus on the interplay between dominant narratives and silences, between nationalisms and its alternatives, obscures something particularly critical: that accounts of belonging, of cultural, political and spatial affiliation are by their nature multiple. Accounts of homeland, nation/state, home, community, origins exist simultaneously, sometimes neatly aligned, and in irregular lines at other times, but always numerous.⁴

To ignore the very existence of multiple accounts and to focus on the other-wise of nationalisms, or the silences and the interstices, ironically, is to leave intact the structure/edifice of nationalisms. It is in that context, we suggest fresh articulations around the spatial particularities of the city.

The City in Spatial Imagination

Salman Rushdie’s rambunctious de-construction of the nation in *Midnight’s Children* begins with this line: “I was born in the city of Bombay... once upon a time.” A later collection of essays, *Imaginary Homelands*, written as a chronicle of journeys, also begins with Mumbai and an old photograph of the house in which Rushdie was born (Rushdie, 1991). Dating it to 1946, Rushdie pauses to describe the peculiar house, with its red tiles and bougainvillea creepers, captured in the photograph and his emotions of an estranged present and a homely yet removed past. Rushdie ruminates on the haunting of loss experienced by those exiled from home and nation but also of the generalized nature of this condition that renders the past itself a country from which virtually everyone is banished (1991: 12). Still, the disjunctions of time and space are most acutely felt by those for whom ties to homes of past and present are rendered incommensurable, even contentious.

Rushdie appears preoccupied with the project of the nation and its myths in order to understand how we form affiliation to such constructs, and how they define our subjectivities. But, the opening line of the fictional *Midnight’s Children* and essays in *Imaginary Homelands* give clues to other forms of affiliations than what Rushdie explicitly dismantles. While Rushdie remains relentless in de-normalizing the nation as homeland, he has spoken more than often in agreeable terms about Mumbai (“my lost city”) and New York as sites of his domicile. It appears that for one as cynical about national allegiances and affiliations as Rushdie, the city is a more viable destination. Literary accounts are

especially revealing of subtle tension where the city appears surreptitiously, often as a corollary of the nation.⁵

The silhouette of the city also appears reluctantly in sociological critiques. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak perambulates the city while “de-singing” the national state. Spivak sees the national state ambivalently, both as a problematic and necessary buffer to the forces of the global megacity (Spivak, 2008). In Spivak’s attempts to theorize new arcs of spatial belonging, what is striking is the begrudging affiliation to two cities that are hometowns, New York City and Kolkata. Projecting these hometowns as loci of resistance, Spivak admits: “I continue to feel a clandestine comfort that the megacity-effect is resisted in New York and Kolkata is somehow resistant to it” (Spivak, 2000, 2008). The structure of the national state and the matrix of hometown are both seen as counterpoised against the global megacity.

Hometown narratives appear poignantly in real-life situations, especially at its moment of disappearance. The columnist Kuldip Nayar writes about the tragedy of a disappearing hometown, equating his family’s loss of Sialkot during partition and the recent abandonment of the town of Harsud by its residents because of the state’s forced development project (the submerging of the original town due to the Narmada dam). Loss of hometown can also be experienced without a physical dislocation. Feminist writer Urvashi Butalia recounts her trip from Delhi to Lahore to locate an uncle who did not migrate to India with his other Hindu family members following the 1947 dislocations of Partition

(Butalia, 2000). Butalia locates the uncle, Ranamama, thirty years later, still in Lahore, the city which belonged to the family for generations and to which they belonged. Ranamama is in the same house, has converted to Islam, married, raised daughters, and buried his old mother per Muslim customs. Although the uncle has remained in the same spatial coordinates, he reveals strong feelings of disjuncture. Just as hometowns may be gained, they may be lost too, and sometimes, ironically, it is precisely when they are lost that they emerge cognitively.

The textures of everyday parlance are rich with references to cities as hometowns but one has to be alert to their presence: the sights of hometown appear in readings, its sounds echo in casual conversations, in places as ordinary as the dining table and at an adjoining café table. For example, those who participated in the interviews conducted for this project spoke easily about their attachments to nations of origin, such as Siddharth, a 35-year-old man, who quickly identified himself as Nepali and spoke with pride of being from Nepal. But, his responses regarding the cities of Kathmandu and Boston were slower, even tentative as he named them as his hometowns. Gradually, through the interview, as if language lagged behind a realization, these cities emerged as meaningful to him because of the house in which he grew up, the hills and mountains in the environs of Kathmandu, the relationships that he has there as well as the ease of negotiating Boston, his car, close friendships, his work, and the life he has created in it. Subjective affiliations tie people to particular cities, and the neighborhoods, streets, food, memories,

daily routines, and relationships give these affiliations substance. In contrast to the nation, accounts of attachments to cities seem less scripted, not because national affiliation is superficial, but because urban accounts are relegated to a lower order of belonging. But, as noted in the previous section, affiliations to named places, or hometowns, make belonging to nation intelligible or comprehensible. As Preeta, another interviewee with deep attachments to Patna, India, and Narragansett, U.S., captures it rather idealistically, “I think we need a hometown. Like we need a family, we need parents, so we need a hometown. And people can grow up without parents, people can go without a hometown, but it’s a different feeling, it’s like that satisfaction that you have with parents. You belong somewhere.”

It is at these diverse appearances of the city in the nation-think (as Spivak calls it) that we are left to wondering: Why is the city discussed so tentatively in South Asia? Where is the city in spatial imagination and theorizing in the way it circulates from James Joyce to Italo Calvino, and from Henri Lefebvre to Saskia Sassen? How then to think of the city as “home” in South Asia where the city, thus far, has been framed only as a financial hub or a demographic constellation? What is required is revising conceptual and scholarly discourses of the city as both home and the “unhomey.”

Ashis Nandy’s (2001) “psycho-analytical” treatment of the modern city inaugurates a historiography of homeness in South Asian cities. In South Asia, home is caught up in a singular narrative with the city and modernity: the silhouette

of one and the anxieties of the other are like warp and woof of the national fabric. Ashis Nandy proposes “journey” as the principal trope in understanding how the making of home – or the thwarting of one – constitutes the modernity of South Asian cities. The modern South Asian city—the colonial city catapulted into a post-colonial conurbation—is constituted of two ambiguous journeys: movement from the village to the city and from the city to the village.⁶ The two journeys constitute more of an oscillation, and it is this oscillation and its various fluctuations and tensions that describe the quandary of the modern national state. The trope of journey can also be used for the Partition narrative where the journey can be seen as relocating from a specific town to an abstract nation, from the reliability of a home-world to the ambiguity of the nation-home (perhaps best emblemized by Sadat Hasan Manto’s Toba Tek Singh).

Even as Nandy works through the binaries of city and village, an important conclusion is reached—that the modern Indian city, borne of the lofty songs of the nation, of which Chandigarh is the greatest composition, instead of providing a new home, offers a “planned homelessness” (2001: 25). If the uneasy oscillation between the two spatial loci shapes the unsettling character of the modern city, it is further exacerbated by transnational and neo-liberal transactions. Beyond the oscillation between the city and village, homeness is now caught in a triangular conundrum that includes the transnational.

The contemporary city is no longer the representation of the national state, as Chandigarh was in an earlier dream-time, but the site and agent of new aspirations and attritions. The role of the city is now double-edged. On the one hand, it is the collaborative site of globalization, simultaneously shoring up the new aspirations of the national state and eroding its sovereignty. On the other hand, the city is a place connotative of a lived and imagined sense of home, which creates not just a corollary of nation-think but a potential redemption of the faultlines of the national state.

The Topography of Hometown

Although hometown defines one’s relationship to a city or town, it remains an understated and unexamined sociological and anthropological phenomenon. Although part of a lived experience, and a personal and public imaginary, hometown is yet to be located within a materialist, existential

or phenomenological framework. While song-writers, novelists and film-makers have approached hometown in a lyrical vein, social scientists, urban geographers or anthropologists have not developed any particular approach to study the phenomenon. The episteme of hometown has remained dubious because it has never been promoted from, what John Hollander describes in a different context, a geographical middle of anonymity into a representational center of active consciousness.⁷

A basic understanding of hometown comes from considering a place that is home due to generational or familial reasons. Hafiz, a 38-year-old taxi driver, notes his ancestral home-place along with the cities of Chittagong and Boston as his hometowns. Unlike his complex descriptions of these cities, the ancestral hometown is nostalgic, dominated by the affect of what Michael Ondaatje, in his narrative of return to home-places, describes as the “original circle of love” (Ondaatje, 1984).

One is committed by dint of one’s ancestral history, or perhaps being born or growing up there, with a kind of commitment without choice. Hafiz was neither born nor did he grow up in his ancestral hometown and has few relatives who still live there, but the lives lived and lost in this place continue to shape his emotional attachment to it. One could preliminarily speak of hometown as a generational continuity in a contiguous space, but that integrity may be ruptured by dislocation or movement away from it with subsequent reorientation of affinities and commitments. There is a commitment

that comes out of a conscious choice (or as part of conflicting choices), a decision making when one is away from hometown, and for a number of reasons – political, personal, professional, economic, nationalistic, a combination thereof – one opts to be associated with hometown, to return to it, even as return and home-space may be reconstituted.

The principal epistemic question regarding hometown is how a city is rendered or perceived as socially, materially and existentially significant, which is to say, when does it become a hometown. The point of departure for hometown is not that it supersedes the limitations of space/place or the exigencies of culture and politics, but that it opens up different possibilities of subjective attachments. First of all, it presents a kind of intimate allegiance with place that is possible to forge, modify, and replace that requires being emplaced, regardless of duration; hometown is mine, my construction, my experience. In short, what is particular to hometown is that it is one’s own.

By intimate, we do not mean only the personal and the individual, although we are interested in how individuals create these subjective attachments, rather, we mean intimate in the sense of the intrinsic attachment to place. The intertwining of self and space is not merely about physical emplacement but about imagined, affective, material, psychological, and oneiric contents. Thus, the claim of spatial “my-ness” can also be an anxious one, often disrupted, alienated, or even challenged, but meaningful nonetheless.

The Lived-Self

We have already introduced the “lived” nature of hometown is one of its defining features; it refers to how the body is in a socio-spatial surround, or *umwelt*, as described in phenomenological terms, which is to say, for an embodied subject to live is always to be in space. There is an intrinsic mutuality between self and space that the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes as “intertwining” and which, in turn, defines the living, sentient human as the “lived-body.” The lived-body is a particularly useful notion that also offers a mapping of the horizons of “experience” and “reach” in the various spatial orbits, from the house, to the neighborhood, the town, the region, and beyond, to the nation. The construction of hometown takes place in specific horizons of “reach,” taking a cue here from Hannah Arendt’s notion of “horizon of reach,” and the spatiality of the city describes a concreteness of that “reach.” Hometown is the spatial horizon of the body and its potential reaches; anything else is “outside,” not home, even perhaps an alien or “other” space. In other words, hometowns are constituted by subjective trajectories, and for the several people in our interviews who named Boston, different itineraries create different accounts of the city. These accounts and many more can be superimposed to create a collage of Boston as hometown. What we are calling into play here is the experiencing and sentient subject, the lived-self. Such a subject-oriented consideration is not indicative of a self-centered world projection but an understanding of the subject in its sociological and spatial internment in the lived world. The

lived life implies that I am here, and my life revolves around the everyday rhythm of the day and night, and that my lived experience is enmeshed in the social-spatial matrix I find myself.

The city as hometown is forged out of the rhythms and cadences of the everyday. One encounters the city or one is of the city in all kinds of nondescript and ordinary ways that run the gamut of strategies and practices that Michel de Certeau (1984) has elaborated in *The Practiced Life*. Hometown thus is not merely a sentimental production but sedimentation of the social practices, the rhythms of regular life, as well as occasional peaks and ruptures. The practice of the everyday, in large part, is characterized by a repetition, the reproduction of habits and rhythms that are most often anonymous and unselfconscious until they are disrupted. The web video project, *Hometown Baghdad*, is a particularly poignant catalog of glimpses into ordinary individuals’ attempts to recover the rhythms of life ruptured by war.⁸ But these rhythms and repetitions shape the contours of hometown: riding the bus to work, looking up the city newspaper for jobs, rooting for the local soccer team, celebrating the Ganpati festival in Mumbai, or the Pahela Baishakh in Dhaka, following the local licensing procedures, and various paraphernalia and rigmarole of living in the city. We literally become linked to our habitations through habits, through the ritual repetition and reproduction of the everyday practices.

The matter of rhythms and repetitions inevitably raise the question of temporality. Hometown is encountered or represented through a split which, Elizabeth Grosz (2005) argues, is characteristic of time. Referring to the contributions of Henri Bergson, Grosz notes that time splits into trajectories, one virtual and the other, actual. While one makes time pass, the other preserves it as past; while one forms perception, the other forms memory. Hometown, also, is split into two main narrative trajectories that crisscross with these vectors of time: one of inhabitation and another of memory. These places of inhabitation are sometimes the sites of a taken-for-granted present, of actual time and perception. At other times, they belong to virtual time, one that is lived in memory. Reflections on hometown, shared by those we interviewed for the project, were simultaneously split along these two trajectories but also woven together in ways that fuse what has passed and what is passing. For example, Fowzia, a newly-married woman, unhesitatingly claimed

Lahore, Kingston (Canada) and Boston as her hometowns. One city represents perception and the others memory, one city represents the actual and the others the virtual, and yet temporalities and spatialities are collapsed as substantially different places lived during different phases of her life are given the same affective charge of hometown.

One final crucial implication of hometown is that affiliation is not immutable or monolithic; attachments to places are quite frequently multiple. Unlike the relative exclusivity of homelands and national states (notwithstanding the possibility of more than one passport), hometowns can be and often are simultaneously plural. The manner in which we form attachments to places – subjectively, intimately – inherently allows for a plurality of such attachments. Perhaps the most curious aspect of hometown is that one continues to establish new affiliations and attachments with places throughout one’s life. This is to say, new hometowns may and do emerge. Travel or voluntary and involuntary migrations mean movement away from an earlier city, whereby one’s relationship to that prior city is now open to reconsideration. One does not have to cross national borders, as a temporary migrant or diasporic subject, in order to construct hometowns afresh. Even though one dwells physically in one place, hometowns may be elsewhere, just as much as one may be living in one’s hometown while holding equally dear two other places. It is therefore that Fowzia emphasizes her attachment to Boston, alongside Lahore and Kingston. Despite the fact that she has lived in Boston for only six months, she counts it among the

places to which she belongs, because this is where she started her married life, became familiar with the neighborhood of Brookline, and knows the streets, restaurants, and stores. As she also puts it simply, “I get very emotionally attached to places.” Or, as Emiko Stock, an anthropologist from Paris living in Phnom Penh describes the nature of home-making in the city: “I made a life there.”⁹

Amplifying the Postnational

Hometown for us is not a place of giddy belonging. Hometowns, like homelands and nations, can be as exclusionary, parochial, and sites of violence.¹⁰ Hometowns can be places that some seek to flee as much as others seek to arrive into them. Given the enduring draw of the homeland and the hegemony of the national state, these belongings to hometown and to homeland or national state are not mutually exclusive but may, in fact, work in and through each other. It would also be impetuous to herald the coming demise of nations, especially in South Asia. And, yet the idea of hometown, when considered against the twin foils of homeland and national state, has profound political potential. Hometown is not an elixir for the pathology of nationalism but a way of a rethinking cultural as well as political affiliations alongside and beyond the national framework. It is in that sense that hometown extends the postnational in new ways.

The alternative/another way of belonging/affiliation does not necessarily suggest a contentious relationship with the national state for sometimes hometown narratives emerge from a national discourse. At other times,

they may be at loggerheads with each other (consider once more the regional urban chauvinism of Mumbai’s Senas), but in general, the state or the nation is not visible in the everyday rhythm of hometown. On more dramatic and usually tragic moments, such as the 2008 attacks in Mumbai, the city and nation collapse into the same space and narrative. Hometown then becomes the body where the specter of the nation finds tangibility.

While we identify the potential of hometown to deepen what Homi Bhabha describes as the “ambivalence” of nations, we also emphasize the capacity of hometown, despite its sentimental inflections, as a political practice. The understatedness of

hometown as critical discourse does not confirm its weakness but rather its qualitative disposition as an exemplar of what Gianni Vattimo considers as “weak ontology,” as something working around dominant and hardcore systems. Further, we wonder whether hometown conceptually holds up to the promise of Jürgen Habermas’ “postnational constellation” even though he refers to models that transcend the nation. Wary of political identity based on shared cultural characteristics, Habermas advocates a new frame of community, one that is formed by a civic mode of national attachment in distinction to an ethno-centric one. The description of “civic mode of national attachment” returns the political to civitas and its original reference to the space of the city, and perhaps a fresh consideration of the older notion of city-state. Considering Jacques Derrida’s (2001) conception of the cosmopolis as a “city of refuge” that offers humanist counterpoints to the exclusionary mechanism and structure of the traditional state, the notion of hometown presents another way of expanding postnational critiques, and opens a new space of political affiliation.

Notes

¹ The statistics for the urbanization of the planet is staggering: By 2030, 60% of the world population will be urban, of which “developed regions” will have 84% of the population living in cities and towns, and for “least developed regions,” about 56%. Figures for South Asia show that the urban population of India in 1951 was 17%, in 2001 it was 27%, and it is projected to be 40% in 2030. For Pakistan, it is 17.8% in 1951, 33% in 2000. For Bangladesh, it was less than 10% in 1951, 25% in 2000, and will be 45% in 2030. From Gayl D. Ness and Prem P. Talwar (2005).

² Although the Situationist movement used it in innovative ways in their exploration of and encounter with the city, the term “psycho-geography” refers to its original usage by Guy Debord and the French Situationists as the effects of the geographical environment on the behavior of individuals. The term is genealogically related to Charles Baudelaire’s notion and practice of urban wandering in the flâneur to Walter Benjamin’s expansion of the idea, and the Situationist’s strategy of “derive” (another version of urban encounters). The term has now expanded to multiple derivations of psychological and kinesthetic awareness of urban spaces.

³ For the project, we conducted thirteen exploratory interviews with South Asians living in the Boston-area of the U.S. Speaking to diasporic South Asians was especially fruitful for alongside the predictable attachments to nation, their accounts were replete with the nuances and textures of belonging to specific places.

⁴ No matter how deceptively straightforward the question—and the question is almost always deceptive—of “where are you from,” or for that matter “who are you,” the answer is multivalent and multi-directional. Consider the response by the noted litterateur U. R. Ananthamurthy: “If somebody asks me in London, who are you? I would reply I am an Indian. If in Delhi, someone asks who are you? then I would say, I am from Karnataka. In Bangalore, if somebody asks me who are you? then I would say I am from Shimoga, I would say I am from Melige (a village). In Melige, nobody would ask me who are you. Because they know not only my caste, but even my sub-caste.”

⁵ The work of a number of South Asian (or South Asia-born) writers invokes the spatial landscape of the city in the content and structure of their fiction (the textual form of *Midnight's Children*, like James Joyce's inscription of Dublin in *Ulysses*, is an analog of the rambunctious city of Mumbai), but again it remains mostly undesignated and unmapped. Works of fiction, from *Midnight Children* to Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Qurratulain Hyder's *A River of Fire*, and certainly R.K. Narayan's stories of Malgudi, all of which have been incorporated overwhelmingly within postcolonial conversations of the nation, can be re-read within a South Asian city thematic.

⁶ The journey to the city is both literal and physical (migration to cities), psychological (an inner evolution of the self from fidelity to freedom), and metaphysical (city as emblem of the nation-state, of development and "progress" of the nation towards modernity, etc.), Nandy, 2001: 7.

⁷ Hollander makes the observation while reviewing Morris Wright's photo-textual narrative on the American Midwest, *The Home Place*. Only a "powerful imagination" as Wright's, Hollander notes, could open up such geographic middle of anonymity for the active consciousness as "concentric circles of significance."

⁸ The web videos, or webisodes as they are called, are viewable at <http://chattheplanet.com/>.

⁹ Conversation with one of the authors, Honolulu, 2010.

¹⁰ Mumbai exemplifies this kind of hometown chauvinism with its history and renewed efforts of violence against "outsiders" by the Shiv Sena and the Maharashtra Nirman Sena. The common underlying refrain is that Mumbai is for Mumbaiers.

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