Localopolis and cosmopolis: an Indian narrative

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Localopolis y cosmopolis: un relato indio
Localopolis et cosmopolis: un récit indien
Localopolis e cosmopolis: una narrativa indiana

Abstract / Resumen / Résumé / Riassunto

The peripheral neologism of the 'localopolis' is presented in this paper as an opposing polarity to the dominant idea of the 'cosmopolis' that has long been central to the narrative of human community formation. But can a rough-hewn conceit of this sort possess any conceptual purchase at all in a sophisticated e-environment that bombards us with changing information from every quarter of the globe, second to second? World discourses today have been transformed by the virtual modes of communication we now so routinely deploy. India, in particular, offers an intriguing case study of a 'non western' cultural context in which geographical location and historical identity are being radically redefined. It happens that a huge segment of this disconcertingly plural country lives in about five or six hundred 'small towns' of the subcontinent abutting 'village' India. So far, these semi-urban dwellings have been more or less invisible, operating well beneath the radar of the big city lights of a Delhi or Mumbai. Yet, turning the searchlights on such mini-urban sites whose denizens are hooked into 'world-culture' without necessarily ever having travelled to a metropolis is imperative. This is because these locations could alter our vision of the future by offering us models of crosstalk that are not only multilingual and multi-ethnic —but also multi-ethical. For this reason, my description of these cities is partly shaped as a self-reflexive conversation among concerned Indian citizens about how such locations can force the gaze of the world towards an embodied, emotional 'elsewhere' - thus ironically challenging many of our cherished assumptions about centre-periphery relations.

El neologismo periférico de la 'localopolis' se presenta en este artículo como una polaridad opuesta a la idea dominante de la 'cosmópolis' que durante mucho tiempo ha sido central en el relato de la formación de la comunidad humana. Pero, ¿puede un enigma tosco de este tipo poseer alguna compra conceptual en un ambiente electrónico sofisticado que nos bombardea con información cambiante de cada rincón del globo, segundo a segundo? Los discursos mundiales de hoy han sido transformados por los modos virtuales de comunicación que ahora desplegamos rutinariamente. India, en particular, ofrece un estudio de caso intrigante de un contexto cultural "no occidental" en el que la ubicación geográfica y la identidad histórica se están redefiniendo radicalmente. Sucede que un gran segmento de este país desconcertantemente plural vive en unas cinco o seiscientas 'pequeñas ciudades' del subcontinente colindando con la 'aldea' India. Hasta ahora, estas viviendas semi-urbanas han sido más o menos invisibles, operando muy por debajo del radar de las luces de la gran ciudad de Delhi o Mumbai. Sin embargo, es imperativo encender los reflectores en esos sitios minurbanos cuyos habitantes están enganchados a la "cultura mundial" sin necesariamente haber viajado a una metrópoli. Esto se debe a que estas ubicaciones podrían alterar nuestra visión del futuro al ofrecernos modelos de diafonía que no solo son multilingües y multiétnicos, sino también multiéticos. Por esta razón, mi descripción de estas ciudades se configura en parte como una conversación autorreflexiva entre ciudadanos indios preocupados acerca de cómo esos lugares pueden forzar la mirada del mundo hacia "otro lado" emocional y encarnado, lo que irónicamente desafía muchas de nuestras preciadas suposiciones sobre las relaciones centro-periferia.

Le néologisme périphérique de la «localopolis» est présenté dans cet article comme une polarité opposée à l'idée dominante de la «cosmopolis» qui a longtemps été au centre du récit de la formation de la communauté humaine. Mais une prétention grossière de ce genre peut-elle avoir un quelconque achat conceptuel dans un environnement électronique sophistiqué qui nous bombarde d'informations changeantes provenant de tous les coins du globe, de seconde en seconde? Les discours mondiaux d'aujourd'hui ont été transformés par les modes de communication virtuels que nous déployons maintenant si régulièrement. L'Inde, en particulier, offre une étude de cas intrigante sur un contexte culturel «non occidental» dans lequel la localisation géographique et l'identité historique sont radicalement redéfinies. Un énorme segment de ce pays pluriel déconcertant habite dans environ cinq ou six cents «petites villes» du sous-continent contigu au «village» de l'Inde. Jusqu'à présent, ces logements semi-urbains ont été plus ou moins invisibles, fonctionnant bien sous le radar des grandes lumières de villes comme Delhi ou Mumbai. Pourtant, il est impératif de tourner les projecteurs sur de tels sites mini-urbains dont les

habitants sont ancrés dans la «culture-monde» sans nécessairement avoir jamais voyagé dans une métropole. En effet, ces lieux pourraient modifier notre vision de l'avenir en nous proposant des modèles de diaphonie non seulement multilingues et multiethniques, mais aussi multiéthiques. Pour cette raison, ma description de ces villes est en partie façonnée comme une conversation autoréflexive entre les citoyens indiens concernés par la façon dont de tels lieux peuvent forcer le regard du monde vers un «ailleurs» émotionnel incarné - contestant ainsi ironiquement nombre de nos suppositions chéries sur les relations centre-périphérie.

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Il neologismo periferico di "localopolis" è presentato in questo articolo come polarità opposta all'idea dominante della "cosmopoli" che è stata a lungo centrale nel racconto della formazione della comunità umana. Ma una concezione poco elaborata di questo genere può offrire qualche tipo di presa concettuale nel sofisticato e-environment che ci bombarda con informazioni mutevoli da ogni parte del mondo, ogni secondo? Oggi i discorsi mondiali sono stati trasformati dalle modalità di comunicazione virtuale che ormai utilizziamo abitualmente. L'India, in particolare, offre un affascinante caso di studio di un contesto culturale "non occidentale" in cui la posizione geografica e l'identità storica vengono radicalmente ridefinite. Succede che un enorme segmento di questo paese sconcertantemente plurale vive in circa cinque o seicento "piccole città" del subcontinent, prossime alla India dei "villaggi". Finora, queste abitazioni semi-urbane sono state più o meno invisibili, operando ben al di sotto del radar delle grandi luci della città di Delhi o Mumbai. Tuttavia è imperativo puntare i riflettori su questi mini-siti urbani i cui abitanti sono collegati alla 'cultura mondiale' senza necessariamente aver mai viaggiato in una metropoli. E' necessario perchè questi luoghi potrebbero alterare la nostra visione del futuro proponendoci modelli di conversazione non solo multilingue e multietnica, ma anche multietica. Per questo motivo, la mia descrizione di queste città è in parte modellata come una conversazione autoriflessiva tra i cittadini indiani interessati a come tali luoghi possano forzare lo sguardo del mondo verso un "altrove" emotivo incarnato –sfidando così ironicamente molti dei nostri amati presupposti sulle relazioni centro-periferia.

Keywords / Palabras clave / Mots-clé / Parole chiave

India, Cosmopoli, Localopoli, virtual communication, information, multilingual and multi-ethnic crosstalk

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India, Cosmopoli, Localopoli, comunicación virtual, información, diafonía multilingüe y multiétnica

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Inde, Cosmopoli, localopoli, communication virtuelle, information, diaphonie multilingue et multiethnique

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India, Cosmopoli, localopoli, comunicazione virtuale, informazione, conversazione multilingue e multietnica

The cosmopolis is the realm of the unfamiliar, a site for love amongst strangers; the localopolis, the territory of the unspoken, a place for the expression of tacit enmities. This is the binary I am committed to examining, if not dismantling, in this essay. 'Localopolis' is an ugly word and apologies are due at the very beginning for inflicting it upon readers. When I first suggested the concept to Didier Coste, guest-editor of this volume of *EU-topías*, it engendered in him, I believe, a combination of emotions: curiosity and excitement, perhaps - but also sheer mirth! I am uncertain whether it is de rigueur to cite email exchanges in a scholarly journal. Since it is, however, going to be part of my argument that these e-forms of communication have created new quasi-intimate verbal spaces that have generically displaced the earlier formalities of epistolary contact across the world with certain significant consequences, I will take the risk. Dislocation, indeed, is an integral part of the *topos* of the 'localopolis' as I present it here - and our journey begins with Didier's sharp dismantling of my unlovely neologism.

An extract from his email to me:

> You had no reasonable grounds to imagine that your abstract could leave me cold! Actually, I am sure you knew all the way I would be enthusiastic about it, and I am. "Localopolis" is certainly an "ugly" word (lol) and it will sound even funnier to Spanish ears, since "loca" means "crazy woman". I can also imagine, taking it one step further, a "localoopholis"! Yet you manage via this suggestion another (semi-liminal) model of circulation of languages, feelings and desires, still unnoticed to a large extent, but certainly already active and operational when you think of it!
>
> I do not know the Indian mid-size localopolises you mention, but my recent experience of Kochi-Ernakulam fits perfectly with the description. And this leads me to scan my own geographies to try to identify other comparable cases on different continents. Not easy, but it makes sense in terms of a potential taking shape. Which confirms once again, against my own doubts, my old intuitive notion of India as a prototype of good and bad things to come elsewhere, historically ahead rather than backwards, in its agitated, inexhaustible exploration of possible temporalities, spatialities and re-combination of universes of reference, when I often said and wrote, for example: if you want to know something about "Europe", observe

"India" first. I mean that your proposal is not only brilliant and exciting in itself, it fits perfectly with the scope of *Eu-topías* (at once a portmanteau word and a syllepsis, since *"Eu-"* stands both for "good", "fine", "harmonious" and for Eu-rope (the wide-eyed or broad-faced).

In this interchange, scholarly intimacy is created not only through some smart (if not necessarily politically correct puns!) - but also through friendly ribbing. Didier declares that I 'knew all along' that he would like my idea. Well, did I? Here I was - an obscure female, perhaps even a 'crazy woman' from the global South - how was Didier so sure that an agent of this description would not be prey to the myriad insecurities that plague academics from a 'developing society'? This is one among many pressure points I am going to explore in this essay where the politics of the margins and centre could interestingly collide – in this case, the possible anxieties of a gendered and postcolonial positioning confronting a stable friendship of many years where there is nothing but enormous trust and respect. Didier and I certainly share such a world of collegiality, of mutuality. He is one of the most perceptive and generous scholars of India in all its complex plurality and yet - our locations are fateful.

Today, that old, beloved ideology of cosmopolitanism, of a 'world-city' where an untarnished myth of equality prevails and no identity barriers of race, class, religion and culture divide us is under siege. I believe that we may now have to strive to imagine again not just our treasured friendships but, rather more alarmingly, our long-buried fears and suspicions of each other. Exhumation is in order as much as exhilaration.

A comment made by Salman Rushdie is relevant here: Pakistan, he suggested, has emerged as a 'failed state' because it was *insufficiently imagined* when it started out as a country at its inception. It could be that, in this century, we too are charged with the serious responsibility of imagining sufficiently the terrain of our cities, our potential places of future collision, our sites of intellectual and emotional encounter. Otherwise, we could risk a tragic failure of even the best of friendships to endure. Today, the largest and most powerful

cosmopolis that we inhabit is indeed an "invisible" one, pace Calvino (1972). This is the virtual city of the Internet made up of "friends" on Facebook, guided by the search-engines of Google, mesmerized by the image-worlds of You Tube.

Not surprisingly, this is also the world that has recently produced an infamous *Oxford Dictionary* 'word of the year' in 2016 – "post-truth" just as, a few years earlier, the word "frenemy" was celebrated. It is this world that has brought out into the open armies of anonymous trolls armed with verbal chemical weapons that spew out resentment, hate, anger and fear in quantities of industrial strength. Most importantly, this world does not recognize those age-old conventions of embodied space and time. We can now 'touch' and 'poke' people with our cell-phones or computers and reach out to the unguarded spaces of small towns across national geographies. New congregations of friends can be formed in a trice and old ones neglected. In short, our old emotional antennae no longer operate quite as they did before.

My still tentative and waveringly characterization of the localopolis has emerged in such an obviously fraught scenario. As I indicated in the very first sentence of this essay, the mentality of what I am calling the 'localopolis' is inevitably infused with legions of 'tacit enmities' that infect our ideas of friendship and worth, radically reconfiguring centre-periphery relations as we knew them in the golden age of the cosmopolis. I will go on to track down this thought a little later when I discuss Richard Rorty's idea of the centrality of 'irony' in modern and postmodern discourses and his notion of 'fundamental vocabularies' and their contemporary political import. It should be mentioned here, too, that Rorty's 1998 book *Achieving Our Country* has become a sudden bestseller in the wake of Donald Trump's election to the US Presidency. Like Didier, Dick Rorty was a personal friend, one with whom it was always a pleasure to disagree and from whom one could always profoundly learn. Long ago, I'd quoted him in my editorial in a volume of the Indian journal *Biblio* dedicated to 'Cosmopolita-

nism and the Nation State'. He was prescient then and he remains prophetic today, nearly a decade after his death.

Writing in *The New York Times* of November 20, 2016, the journalist Jennifer Senior reports that in 1997, "Mr. Rorty gave three lectures that make up the spine" of his subsequent bookhttp://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/21/books/richard-rortys-1998-book-suggested-election-2016-was-coming.html?_r=0 His thesis was that no one in academia was concerned with the problems of inequality or the reduction of poverty: "Nobody is setting up a program in unemployed studies, homeless studies, or trailer-park studies because the unemployed, the homeless, and the residents of trailer parks are not 'other' in the relevant sense." Dick Rorty's seer's – and searing - insight in this sentence was that the processes of 'othering' are not confined to visible strains of identity difference but also rely on an invisible stock of internalized self-loathing within the interiors of communities that can disastrously erupt of a sudden. The paragraphs that are being endlessly re-tweeted today and have led to a hurried reprinting of his book by Harvard University Press extended this perception thus:

> [M]embers of labor unions, and unorganized unskilled workers, will sooner or later realize that their government is not even trying to prevent wages from sinking or to prevent jobs from being exported. Around the same time, they will realize that suburban white-collar workers — themselves desperately afraid of being downsized — are not going to let themselves be taxed to provide social benefits for anyone else. At that point, something will crack. The non-suburban electorate will decide that the system has failed and start looking around for a strongman to vote for — someone willing to assure them that, once he is elected, the smug bureaucrats, tricky lawyers, overpaid bond salesmen, and postmodernist professors will no longer be calling the shots. …One thing that is very likely to happen is that the gains made in the past 40 years by black and brown Americans, and by homosexuals, will be wiped out. Jocular contempt for women will come back into fashion. … All the resentment which badly educated Americans feel about having their manners dictated to them by college graduates will find an outlet.

Well, that clamorous outburst seems to have come. It has shown up in the UK Brexit vote and is manifesting itself not just in the US, but across the 'developed' countries of Europe. There is, too, in these political expressions a return of one of the earliest and most potent of cultural metaphors of the 'virus' of foreignness (see Musolff 2016), a palpable suspicion of the immigrant, the boundary crosser, the outsider. In such a world, while 'friendships' grow exponentially on Facebook (see Dunbar 2010) unreflective rage infects an immediate embodied environment in which one may have few physical ties except to a computer.

It needs no great genius to discern that the ubiquitous presence of flat-screens in our lives today could promote unhealthily flat affect. Robert Wright (1995) put it this way in *Time* magazine more than twenty years ago "The human mind--our emotions, our wants, our needs - evolved in an environment lacking, for example, cellular phones". In my book *Technobrat* (1997) I'd argued then that among the dangers of technology to which Wright was drawing our attention was the capacity of a technological society to impose a state of boredom or other lethal forms of 'flat affect' on its citizens.

Just having so many playthings distracts and leads to a strangely nostalgic craving –to actually find old-fashioned meaning in work - 'decent', 'satisfying', 'real' work. That is the paradox. My current argument is that the imaginary of the localopolis, far away from the capitals of political power, yet a constant low-key supplier of goods and backend services to glamorous cosmopolitan techno-world centres, enables us to confront this old challenge of constructing a suitable 'work-ethic' for our times. Situated within a complex of still under-articulated labour relations - intellectual labour included – the localopolis is an observation post. From this vantage point, we can observe the loves, longings and fears that plague the cosmopolis but hardly with complete detachment because our own economies of desire are implicated in the relationship.

Are these, then, 'labours of love'? Hegel, a moral philosopher over whose work Rorty had an undisputed

command, complicated this question long ago through his subtle and powerful analysis of the 'master-slave' relationship where reciprocity and mutual need – not to mention desire and perhaps even a convoluted 'friendship' - inflect the dialectic between the two. The rest of this essay - implausibly divided into two predictable sections because it eases the labour of reading, even as the logic of my argument maintains that the concepts of the cosmopolis and localopolis are inseparable in memory and interdependent in language - will concern, in one way or another, a 21ˢᵗ century return to this old Hegelian conundrum of human bondage, where 'true' equality remains a frustratingly utopian ideal whether in relationship of labour or of love.

Cosmopolitan Ancestries

This section consists of a series of memory nudges. It rehearses some of the cosmopolitan bewitchments that have long held us captive, offering a potted history of the mighty progenitor of the puny 'localopolis'. The 20th century, as we know, lovingly fashioned a variety of images of the city as antidotes to postwar gloom in Europe. A broken-backed century, split down its middle by two world wars, this exhausted century replenished its strength by engaging in the construction of postwar utopias. These were the real and imagined cosmopolises down whose arcades roamed Baudelaire's and, later, Walter Benjamin's Parisian *flaneur*, which were Jacques Derrida's "cities of refuge", and where Michel de Certeau looked down from a skyscraper in New York and beheld comfortingly crisscrossing lines of city-walkers.

In the early 21st century, Anthony Appiah (2006) takes this narrrative about the generic roots of our global, postmodern rootlessness that Michel de Certeau (1984) had observed from the heights of New York a little further when he maintains that, "we have always been a travelling species". Thus, the cosmopolitan urge to derive intellectual stimulus from travel and to encompass the intellectual pleasures of conversation could be quite as old as the immigrant descendants of

mitochondrial Eve who established early cities such as Timbuktu in Africa or Ur in Chaldea.

Speaking of Timbuktu as an early cosmopolitan city, we are bound at this point to notice that the English language manages to play a neat trick on us with this proper noun, encapsulating in it all the prejudices of a colonial period in which the charms of travel so often went hand in hand with unbridled conquest. Until I read the poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite, my own impression of this remote location, for example, was one I surely shared with other unsuspecting users of English. Timbuktu signified an outlandish wilderness, but Brathwaite's lines have since illumined and re-dignified it for me: O *city of my birth whose walls rise so certain, so secure*, he writes. Poets like Brathwaite or philosophers like Frantz Fanon fashioned for the world a decolonized version of the cosmopolis quite different from the city-spaces imagined by a Benjamin or an Eco. Yet it is undeniable that they inherited and shared the 'universal' intellectual traditions of Europe. Fanon, for instance, knows his Hegel as intimately as Rorty but is unsparingly critical of Hegel's benign interpretation of the master-slave compact, declaring that the colonial situation makes a mockery of Hegel's analysis: "For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work."

Not recognition but work – in effect, those complicated 'labour relations' that I mentioned a few paragraphs earlier. To continue with this unsatisfactorily patchy memory tour of the cosmopolis, I move now to the self-consciously postcolonial writers of the late 20ᵗʰ century, such as V.S Naipaul and Salman Rushdie, all the way, say, to Amitav Ghosh and Rana Dasgupta. These writers all strenuously labour to relocate the brave decolonizing visions of Fanon and Brithwaite to a non-western yet unquestionably cosmopolitan zone.

This is the space of the Indian city where Rushdie sets about memorializing Bombay, Ghosh Calcutta, Dasgupta Delhi and so forth. Indeed, perhaps the single most noticeable shift in the post-Rushdie era of Anglophone writing is the definitive move from earlier

portrayals of the villages and small towns of India by Raja Rao, R.K Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand to the big city. Females are conspicuously absent from this line-up; nevertheless, it can be argued that a postcolonial stance is in itself gendered in that it involves a 'female' and enslaved relationship with the former colonial power through the use of 'his' language. Such later post-colonial writers have therefore made the inextricable entanglement of language - and especially the English language - with an immigrant subject-positioning one of their central themes. But have they succeeded thereby in opening out the gates of language or simply in reinforcing the already elite cosmopolitan status of English, turning it into an even more impregnable fortress? The question remains problematic.

Brathwaite's ideal of a city as a place with strong boundary conditions (protected by walls, moats, reputation) and yet perfectly transitive in structure (accommodating scholar gypsies, traders, migrant labourers) has been a recurrent cross-cultural trope. Jacques Derrida's turn of the century essay on cosmopolitanism, celebrating the city as a bastion of friendship and forgiveness (2005), is a case in point. All kinds of strangers, fleeing from unimaginable persecutions and carrying with them the baggage of unfamiliar notions, could still hope to find a civil reception within the hospitable walls of a traditional European city, a *EU-topos*. At the other end of the spectrum, Umberto Eco (1992) sees the Western city as a stronghold of exclusion:

> The Latin obsession with spatial limits goes right back to legend of the foundation of Rome. Romulus draws a boundary line and kills his brother for failing to respect it. If boundaries are not recognized, there can be no *civitas*… The ideology of the Pax Romana, the force of the empire, is in knowing on which borderland, between which *limen* or threshold, the defensive line would be set up. If the time ever comes when there is no longer a clear definition of boundaries and the barbarians succeed in imposing their nomadic view, then Rome will be finished.

Eco would be pleased at the coincidence that the etymology for Delhi - the decidedly non-western city from which I write this essay - is also said to derive from the words *dehri* or *dehali* which precisely mean 'threshold'. Meanwhile, he leaves us to reckon with the end of Rome and the end of history. Too dire? Well, analyzing Kant, whose deliberations on cosmopolitanism are well known, Jean-Francois Lyotard wrote in 1993: "The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take." Barely ten years later, September 11 put that belief to the severest test possible and we entered this century through literal 'gates of fire' to borrow a poetic phrase from the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan.

Achieving a non-vacuous and non-violent, let alone new, description of cosmopolitanism in the 21st century is therefore far from easy. So many expert hands have moulded the dashing figure of the cosmopolitan intellectual that he still seems to stand undiminished as the hero of the *EU-topos*. He may have taken many knocks but he is still Rorty's charming 'liberal ironist' (1989). Empathetic but not bound by any fierce loyalties, interested but disengaged, he tends to replace the missionary zeal of the postcolonial ideologue with a basic scepticism about 'final vocabularies'. In Rorty's words:

> All human beings carry about with them a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. They are the words in which we tell the story of our lives… Those words are as far as we can go with language; beyond them there is only helpless passivity or a resort to force.

Parochial and emotive terms like 'Hindutva' in India or 'Islamic brotherhood' in West Asia and normative ones like 'ordinary decency', 'professional standards', 'scientific thinking' in the vocabulary that Western Europe has lent to the entire 'modern world' provide typical examples of the sort of semantics to which Rorty refers. His left liberal ironist, a product of the "high culture of Western democracies", as he puts it, is one deeply aware of the fragility and contingency of everybody's final gestures. Consequently, he can afford to smile at his own follies and inadequacies - a dispensation I have often taken full advantage of, despite not belonging by any stretch of the imagination to the afore-mentioned 'high culture'!

The problem, however, is obvious. It is to invest the benign, bourgeois and somewhat effete, figure of the 'cosmopolitan ironist' with the kind of forceful intensity that goes with the narrative of social commitment. Rorty himself was well aware of this dissonance. That is why he wrote the prophetic *Achieving Our Country*. At present, we know that the debate between the fervent affirmations of nationalism, which generally require resort to 'final vocabularies' and the 'questioning' stance of cosmopolitanism, has grown deafeningly shrill. The left liberal cosmopolitan seems to have been beaten back into a defeated corner. In the postwar era of the fifties, the age of decolonization in the sixties and seventies, the doughty postcolonial times of eighties and nineties, she proudly offered what Rorty called "public hope" to the whole world. Now that self-same rhetoric has been claimed by the nationalist "strongmen" whose advent he also prophesied. Under these difficult circumstances, where might cosmopolitanism seek its new heroes? Can the free-floating cosmopolitan ever manage to reconcile her private doubts about the ultimate validity of any position with the sort of incandescent faith in a 'better future' that distinguishes committed fighters for freedom?

Where does she go from this low point? My rallying cry: to the 'localopolis'!

Localopolitan Anxieties

In a recent conversation, a group of us in Delhi – an architect, a conservationist, a sanitation activist, a photographer, and a couple of journalists – reflected on the future of cities and the cities of the future http://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/going-to-xanadu/298055 We began our conversation with a short debate on my notion of the 'localopolis'. One of the "key takeaways", said one of my interlocutors, the senior journalist Satish Padmanabhan, was for him the idea that "the future belongs to *smaller cities*, like Bhopal, Nagpur or Vishakapatnam. In the digital era, you can attend a music concert, hear a lecture and visit an exhibition on the Internet. You don't have to be in New York, London or Paris to do this anymore."

Yes, Satish had caught my drift accurately despite my inarticulate and confused presentation. In the still unfolding scroll of the 21st century, my surmise was that several of our erstwhile cosmopolitan desires would be adequately met by cyberspace. Migrations would certainly continue but not necessarily to the great metropolitan centres celebrated in the annals of the past century: New York, London, Tokyo, Paris, Amsterdam. The 'Age of the Localopolis', as I saw it, could feature a powerful conjunction of the local and the virtual. By the local, I meant the small cities and towns abutting the 'countryside' – unglamorous places as yet but ones that, to my mind, could hold the key to how we choose to live in the future. In India, these would include cities like Bhopal, Coimbatore, Indore, Puri or Siliguri.

Within the larger map of the world, a contemporary *mappa mundi*, there are, I believe, such cities scattered across the world from Aarhus to Linkoping to Xinxiang. In this sense, the phenomenon of localopolises interspersed with cosmopolitan concerns is not limited to India but is, I submit, applicable to rethinking geographies everywhere. Bringing the buzz of the cosmopolis to the more leisured environs of the localopolis could, in the unlikely event that we succeed in this imaginative feat, enable us to confront the often virtual, 'borrowed from the other' anxieties that seem to populate our shared mental landscapes today - wherever we happen to live. It goes without saying that every location and dislocation is different but for the purposes of this essay let us consider as a preliminary sample set, the population structure of Indian cities.

India has just 7or 8 megacities with populations above four million (Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Hyderabad etc.) Then we have a bunch of intermediate sized cities, 40 or 50 of them, with populations between one and four million (Meerut to Mysore). Finally, we have this vast spread of cities where I locate the 'localopolis'—about 500 cities with populations of 7-9 lakhs (an Indian 'lakh' equals 100,000). How might we balance these huge population inequalities? Should we even attempt the task?

Greater Delhi, for example, has the population of Australia, believe it or not! A single urban spread with about 22 million or 23 million bumping and pushing up against each other – what the author Jan Morris once graphically described as "the blur and slither of Delhi" (Morris 2001, Nair 2001). In contrast, we have the 'localopolises' in their hundreds where I perceive a revitalizing merger of the local - local politics, unhurried rhythms of life, with markets, hospitals and universities that were familiar to all – and the virtual. If we could manage to articulate the narrative of our future anxieties in such spaces, I pleaded with the other panelists gathered around a Delhi table towards the end of 2016, this would create a new sort of city-dweller, a 'new cosmopolitan' if you will. Moreover, given the population demographics of India, where about 70% of the population was under the age of 35, we were really forecasting for the so-called 'millennials' – a population constantly on the move, hooked to their mobiles. These would be the urban denizens of the 'cities of the future'. How could we place them within the map of an imagined localopolis?

What emerged from our conversation was a robust critique of the half-baked idea I had brought to the table. Some objected, with reason, that my advocacy of the localopolis was too naively forceful: "When you say the cosmopolis has exhausted its possibilities, isn't that too absolute? If all our emotional and imaginative energies are going to be invested in creating a different locale altogether, you are practically talking about abandoning the city, like the Indus cities were abandoned or something like that. Would it make sense to take this new imagination, where there is both intimacy and newness, to reimagine the cosmopolis itself in those terms so as to give it a new life somehow?"

I had to agree after this broadside that I had not presented my case very well. I tried to explain again that I was not so much talking of deserting the cosmopolis but creating alternative spaces for the 'presentation of the self' and attendant 'stigmas' (Goffman 1959, 1962) that would address in the 21st century the cosmopolitan concerns of the 20th. This admission of guilt, this stab at clarification, I felt, cleared the air somewhat. A num-

ber of rich and varied suggestions emerged. I therefore owe that interdisciplinary and accomplished gathering much gratitude for their manifold contributions to the idea of the localopolis. A brief report of the main themes in that conversation follows:

Work and performance spaces

The senior architect Raj Rewal, who had designed large buildings in Iran and China as well as India, responded by remarking that most traditional cultures had always designated spaces for public discussion – "the Greek Agora, the town square or chowk. Rajasthan's cities still have them." Likewise, these older cities created performance spaces for public viewing such as annual enactments of "say, the Ramlila, you know… common places where people get together. The temples in south India, Madurai and Tanjore still have that feeling. Now you're saying the television is the place for debate!" Rewal accepted my points about the reach of the 'flat-screen' and digitization in this respect. However, he had a deeper worry about how any localopolis might sustain itself.

> Culture could be absorbed digitally perhaps but what about the day-to-day parameters of life? It's interesting, what you say. I go these days to a small place off Jalandhar where I'm building near Kartarpur. It has that nice small-town ambience. But is the future there? I don't know where the future is, because it's not only made by whether you can debate or see things, or get more facilities, but *whether you can find work*. This is the single most important lure of big metropolises. How can these 'localopolises' create jobs for 5 lakh new people a year? Could we somehow get the working population to move to or to stay in small towns?

Rewal's wise reservations about not so much the 'culture' of the localopolis as its capacity to generate labour seemed lead us back here to Fanon's critique of Hegel. The master-slave, centre-periphery, relationship was defined by *not recognition but work*. In considering seriously the structure of localopolis, we would have to think much harder about how it would resolve that 'paradox of labour' which I mentioned earlier in this paper.

Environment and sanitation

As the world knows - or if it does not, perhaps it should know – India, by far the world's most populous democracy, is currently in the grip of the major campaign 'Swacch Bharat' or 'Clean India.' Initiated by the Prime Minister himself, this trope is inescapable wherever we turn. Even Mahatma Gandhi's iconic round-rimmed glasses in the new Rs. 2000 notes issued by the Government in the wake of its recent and unprecedented move to 'demonetize' Indian currency anachronistically have this ringing slogan inscribed on them.

The presupposition, of course, is a familiar colonial one: India is 'dirty'. Now, it could be that the journalists on our panel, Satish Padmanabhan and Sunil Menon, both in my estimation sophisticated 'liberal ironists' in the postcolonial mode, were particularly concerned about sanitation in India in the light of these huge governmental initiatives in social engineering. Pertinently, Sunil pointed out that our current citiesseem to be based on the idea of *consumption*. Nobody bothers about its corollary, which is waste, which is sanitation. Sanitation in India was left "to chance events…in Gurgaon, pigs seem to take care of a lot of waste management! It's outsourced to the animal kingdom. The implicit meanings of that are so extreme."

Bezwada Wilson, winner of the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay and a leader of the movement against the pernicious practice of manual scavenging which persists in India 21 to this day, then deepened the discussion by pointing out that we had to have cities that *dignified* the individual. Our big cities like Delhi, or even Gurgaon "a city that's so new that it has grown in front of us" had no facilities for drinking water and few loos for women. These were not practices we could replicate in re-envisioning the 'localopolis'.

At this point, I could not help recalling Didier's casual pun on the 'loca*loo*polis'. Here it was now - being discussed with utmost seriousness. Wilson reminded us that when people migrated from Indian villages to the cities – and India has always traditionally been a place of huge internal labour migrations – "the same patriar-chy of the village is replicated. These are the hierarchical [caste] structures we carry in our head." Sunil added that, in India, "you can't think of a city without thinking of the village. It is the other of the city."

Other 'others' also came up – the 'western' city and the Indian city. For example, I myself recalled being interviewed earlier in 2016 by a student crew from the University of Birmingham. They asked me how I thought the concept of 'biophilia' (an ingrained love of nature) applied to cities so as to create a sustainable energy continuum. They were thinking, of course, of the classic 19th century western industrial town imagined without greenery. My response was that this wasn't that true of Indian cities where the walls between 'the inner and the outer' were quite porous. Everything invaded everywhere! The nature-culture boundary conditions in our cities seemed far less strict that in the EU-topos. All of these internal dissensions and conjunctions within cultures would have to be factored in when imagining the 'new localopolis' and alternative models of future cities.

Alternative models

Our conversation brought out that environmental issues were crucial and yet our imaginations were so stunted that we could only think about the cities of the future in terms of "smart cities", another current buzzword in India. Hearteningly, everyone on our panel rejected this soulless idea of a 'future city'. The photographer, Dayanita Singh, renowned for her intimate camera-portraits of life in India's slums and in middle-income housing, felt that we could, instead, treat the vast favelas and slums that had grown up, say, in Mumbai or Rio de Janeiro as models of successful migrant living. Raj Rewal, the architect, disagreed. He saw this as 'romanticizing'' the slum, while the conservationist AGK remarked that "idea was to *learn* from the slum, not *recreate* it." There was, however, general consensus that city slums "brought a bit of the village to the city." They were 'organic' in the sense that Lego apartment blocks were not – which led to an animated conversation about the loss of an "older grace and grammar of

beauty" and the search for "a distinctive new aesthetic" to take its place.

The 'localopolis' was, in my view, a perfect site for a discussion of such a new aesthetic. Dayanita presented a vision of this sort of settlement where each house would have its own septic tank, its own solar panels. Raj Rewal spoke of low-slung constructions with no high-rises dominating the landscape and of how cultural contact, even of the colonial kind, can be transformative: "Delhi, Lucknow…the British transformed them. But now what? I think there's scope for a New New Delhi, a New Lucknow, a New Bombay". AGK added: What Rewal is talking about—low rise, high density—that's frugal design. A future city must account for everything: the poor, the heterogeneity, democracy, technology."

Frugal design and the inclusive accommodative spirit – it seemed to me that we had come a long way from my limited first conception of the 'localopolis'.

Memory and conservation

AGK suggested that a dialectic that fused old stories of the city with new ones heralded a kind of hope: "We get disappointed that we haven't become like Europe. Yet our cities are evolving." The localopolis was, in a vital fashion, already embedded in the structure of the cosmopolis. I think Indian cities can't be divided into megacities and other cities," AGK stated firmly. Megacities, too, could be thought heterogeneous amalgamation of many smaller cities. It was only the decision-makers, the elites, who thought of it differently. "All they talk about is smart cities, forgetting that at the base even, say, Delhi there is a localopolis, as you call it". That's where it was so valuable to retaining 'anachronisms', vestiges of 'heritage' in modern city spaces. They were safeguards against a debilitating amnesia:

> All valued cities are those that have evident layers of history. Delhi is valuable because we have 1,000 years of history visible. Where are you living? What do you showcase? Rashtrapati Bhavan, Parliament… Who were they designed for and by? We adapt and adopt. Conservation is a vital tool in city architecture, and it's inherently future-orientated, because it forces you to root yourself.

To me, what AGK said about this need for 'roots' made immediate sense. Two images come to mind – the first, a 'future-orientated' one where a news item on November 29 offers us a glimpse of 'where one is living' that is only possible in the times of Twitter:

> The European astronaut Thomas Pesquet tweeted a night-time picture of a city from space. However, he had no idea which one. 'This was my first night time picture from space. A city at night, but I have no idea which one. Do you?" http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/astronaut-posts-stunning-photo-of-city-from-space-new-delhi-twitter-tells-him-1631831

Responses to the tweet were immediate. The luminous city the French astronaut had captured was not Paris in the EU-topos, as people assumed at first. It was Delhi on the Asian subcontinent – megapolis consisting of a myriad localopolises, as AGK hypothesized.

The second image is a word portrait of just one among five or six hundred potential Indian localopolises. The city of Kasargod, situated at the borders of Karnataka and Kerala, is a treasure trove of memory. For example, it has one of the most exquisite forts I have ever seen. Built by the formidable warrior, Tipu Sultan, and housing within it the colonial Collector's bungalow, you can look out from the ramparts of this fort and see ships sailing on the blue Arabian Sea. Politically lively and inter-linguistically gossipy, with several southern Indian languages spoken in the district, Kasorgod also houses the country's Central Plant Research Institute and, astonishingly, has one of the worst records of HIV Aids in the country. To top it all, the Government of India has now instituted a prestigious Central University in Kasargod. Is this not a fascinating example of a localopolis to explore - even if it is not quite visible from outer space?

In short, at least two strong models of the localopolis emerged in our discussion. One is what I think of as the 'disposable city' such as Gurgaon abutting Delhi, which sprung up out of nowhere and which thinks of itself in an essentially interim mode. And then there is the city layered with historical memory like Kasargod, a sort of 'eternal city', recalling the kind of moral distinc-

tion St. Augustine made in an early 'EU-topos' between the 'City of Man' and the 'City of God'. Luckily, for us in the 21st century, we do not have to 'decide' between the localopolises of Gurgaon and Kasargod. Rather, we have to negotiate convergences in the paths they both offer as we move into the future. In Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, there is a cautionary scene where Marco Polo regales the Emperor Kublai Khan with his traveller's tales of all cities he's seen. Are these cities for real, asks the Emperor - to which Marco cleverly responds by saying that one should never confuse the words in which a city is described with the city itself. The next and final section is about the words that describe a city and the political emotions that animate it.

Politics and language

The most important thing about a polis or city, to my mind, is that which is so obvious that it is often not uttered. A polis has a *politics*. We need to continually revise how we might democratize and enliven our city spaces. Look at hostel spaces for women in our city campuses, for example, and we often come right up against a hobbling bureaucratic notion of design. Each one has a full-length mirror to herself in a single room. Why? This to me seems a kind of error in democratization. We think equality gained through being housed in little boxes, all exactly the same. No sharing, no argument!

"Middle-class flats…the very word, no grand arches, no curvature or interesting asymmetry—*flat*", Sunil adds. A city is the space for building a political consciousness; an arena to think through both little questions of praxis and the big arches of theory. We had dwelt at length on infrastructure, gadgets, smart cities and all the rest but at the nub of it was politics, empathy for 'the other' being preserved under conditions of economic or emotional stress. As we talked, we threw up 'Indian' concepts that could address such 'stress': for instance, AGK said the basic fear of death was combated by a particular conservationist belief. "In India, cities are reborn. In conservation we use the term *jeernodharan*, you give life again to cities." Another use-

ful concept, to my mind, is the culturally familiar idea of the *sthalapurana*, which postulates that every habitation in India has its own ancient, recorded story. These narrative myths, etymological origins and performance traditions result in a grounded identity. Every modern localopolis could thus have an archive, not to mention an oral history centre, that would enable its inhabitants to creatively reflect on the ways that its present history might connect with its imagined past.

Attempting to conjure up these still inchoate thought-patterns of the 'localopolis', the role of language in animating not so much the 'world city', as the cosmopolis has long been known, but what one might call a post-digital 'word-city', is crucial. The task that lies ahead is to refashion the text of the old world-city so as to create burgeoning word-cities where speakers from far-flung locations - Bishkek, Hyderabad, Timbuktu — meet and create a crisscrossing community of words which in turn journey out to other destinations. Embodied friendships in the workplace and abstract ideals of trust would be important but never un-contentious in such a localopolis (see Sen, 2005).

Once, the cosmopolis thought of itself as containing within itself the whole world, its devotees wholly committed to living within it all their lives: Barthes in Paris, Woody Allen in New York. The localopolis, on the contrary, is never free of the haunting desire for the elsewhere. Rootlessness, relocation, restlessness - all those doppelgangers of 'otherness' - are an intrinsic part of the mental makeup of this 'word-city'. In short, at the heart of the localopolis are the mnemonic anxieties of a 'city of words' where the 'local' language battles, coalesces, mates with others of unknown pedigree, creating vibrant new hybrids but sometimes dying battle-scarred.

Images of scholarship today, it is true, are routinely associated with stable 'cosmopolitan' institutional sites but, stored deep in the memory of cultures, is another approach to knowledge - emblematized by the trope of periphrasis or circumlocution. When Aristotle established his famous peripatetic school (from the Greek *peripatos*, a walk) in the 4th century BCE, or the legendary sages known as the *parivrajakas* (the Sanskrit prefix

has the same root as the Greek) moved restlessly across the Indian subcontinent, they embodied this footloose tradition, resting in small town and villages. So did the Sufis of West Asia or Australian aborigines tracing their narrative 'song-lines' on territorial surfaces. To talk as you walk expands both space and time – in the virtual world as much as a physical one. It is this spirit of verbal adventure, of irrepressible irony, of linguistic impurity, that I think might prove to be a most fecund characteristic of the localopolis.

This essay on the future of the 'localopolis', unexpected child of the ancient countryside and the avant-garde cosmopolis, of virtual walkabouts and settled localities, has sought to initiate the telling of its once-and-future story. Those twin-towers of words - liberation and deliberation, longing and belonging, rage and courage, error and terror - connected to each other via nothing more that the fragile architecture of language could paradoxically afford us the best tools we have for working out a more secure future as we move towards a new imaginary where the cosmopolis and the localopolis constitute, as it were, the exoskeleton and the endoskeleton of human habitation – but which is which?

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