

**CAPITAL CITY RELOCATION:
GLOBAL-LOCAL PERSPECTIVES IN
THE SEARCH FOR AN ALTERNATIVE MODERNITY**

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INTRODUCTION

Capital cities play a vital role in a nation's life and psyche. At first glance, the capital serves as a central repository of political and economic power in its role as the seat of government. In most countries, the capital is also the largest city, yet perhaps more importantly, capitals often strive to reflect the unique character and aspirations of the polity and thus play a crucial role in legitimizing the state. Determining the location for the capital is therefore an old geographic problem at the heart of both the pre-modern and modern state system. However, few academic studies seem to have contemplated the cultural and historical meanings of the capital city function itself beyond elementary applications of central place theory and musings on particular capitals that form part of a constellation of selected world cities. However, when states have decided to change their seats of government for various reasons, the debate has returned to the fore, prompting a reexamination of the very identity of the nation that has been previously grounded in its primary city. In the past century, both large and small countries have engaged in this exercise, either constructing new capitals from scratch or redeveloping smaller, secondary cities to better serve their nation building project. This has been particularly true of federations and countries seeking to better balance political power and economic development along regional lines.

This paper will thus revisit the topic of capital cities in hopes of integrating the existing literature into a comprehensive review, as well as developing tools to examine outstanding questions about recent and potential changes of capital cities. In the first section, the functions of capital cities will be developed further to embrace the political, economic, and cultural sphere within which they operate. Their role in national identity formation will also be investigated, particularly in conjunction with ideologies of modernity and progress that have propelled the construction of new capitals in developing countries. Examples from Québec, India, Brazil, and Kazakhstan, and others will be considered and situated within their specific political and cultural contexts. In the second section,

the theoretical basis for a more contemporary look at capital cities will be developed. Proceeding through recent debates around globalization, cosmopolitanism, and transnational identities, the paper will elaborate a critical approach to questions of global and local scales. For the final section, the paper will focus on a current controversy that has generated extensive debate around the meanings of capital cities. The case study involves a newly formed state of India where a movement is afoot to shift the seat of government from the current interim capital and largest city, to a much smaller town at the geographic centre of the state. While at the sub-national scale, the example of Uttaranchal, carved out of the much larger Uttar Pradesh state in 2000, shares many similarities with larger national constructs in their infancy, while reflecting key differences attributable to its Himalayan geography, political culture, and the era of globalization in which it was formed. For this, a cultural lens will be employed to examine the encoded meanings of globality and locality at the heart of the dispute and the quest for an alternative modernity and vision for the state at the root of this struggle.

CAPITAL CITIES, CITIES OF CAPITAL

As Campbell (2003) recently noted, the phenomena, functions, and identities of the capital city have long been neglected in academic literature despite the capital's pivotal role in the life of the nation-state. While in the past, economic geographers applied the central place theory to describe the contribution of the capital to regional economic development, this framework has been largely abandoned due to its numerous theoretical shortcomings, i.e., its over emphasis on geographic determinism and failure to account for social, political, economic, cultural, and historical factors (Wolfel, 2002). The recent world cities literature has also overlooked the importance of national capitals beyond those included in their various classification schemes of transnational financial centres. In an era dominated by the globalization discourse, the dearth of research has been

particularly acute in keeping with the overall focus shifting to the global and local at the expense of the national or regional scales where the capital city has figured prominently.

Moreover, while the location of capitals was often contested upon the formation and consolidation of the nation-state or federation, any controversy tended to disappear after the selection of the capital. Despite the long lasting political and economic repercussions of this choice, the capital location seems to become fixed and immutable very early on, with its primacy only ever questioned when the nation's territorial integrity would itself be threatened by civil war, conquest, or confederation (Schatz, 2003). Once selected as the national capital, a city usually experiences significant growth, demonstrating the profound demographic and economic impact of this accumulated power at the centre (Dascher, 2000). While in many cases, the capital was selected for its preexisting preeminent position (e.g., Paris, London, and Berlin), the capital city function further entrenched the city's position at the very core of political administration, economic development, and the public sphere where citizens could assemble to exercise their democratic rights.

Culturally, capital cities are usually characterized as cosmopolitan in their outlook due to the presence of international diplomatic missions, governmental institutions, and economic opportunities in the public sector that results in significant in-migration from the country's hinterland. As seats of state power, these cities serve to define a coherent and unified national identity and are often purposively planned, designed, and constructed to reflect the national ideology prevailing at the time of their inception. This all-important facet of nation building is often accomplished through cultural and architectural means, where the presence of stately government buildings, educational institutions, galleries, museums, and memorials are all geared towards convincing average citizens of the glory of their shared homeland¹. Moreover with this power, capitals can either invoke or submerge history depending on the ideological needs of the state

(Wolfel, 2002). As capitals serve to represent the country to the world, their overall “look and feel” thus becomes an important factor in asserting a distinct and positive image for the country in the international community.

Campbell (2003) succinctly summarized many types of capitals, grouping them into six major categories much like Hall had done earlier (Hall, 1993). However, Campbell also identified other characteristics particular to each nation’s history, a few of which have been listed in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 1: Types of Capitals

Classic Capitals (also primary cities)	Bogota, Caracas, London, Madrid, Mexico City, Paris, Rome
Relocated Capitals	Ankara (from Istanbul 1923), Astana (from Almaty 1998), Lilongwe (from Blantyre 1976)
Constructed Capitals	Abuja (from Lagos 1991), Brasilia (from Rio de Janeiro 1960), Canberra (from Melbourne 1927), Chandigarh (from Lahore, Pakistan 1953), Islamabad (from Karachi 1960), New Delhi (from Calcutta 1911)
Federal Capitals	Canberra, Kinshasa, Moscow, Ottawa, Washington
Split Capitals	Amsterdam/The Hague, La Paz/Sucre, Pretoria/Bloemfontein/Cape Town
Archipelago Capitals	Jakarta (on Java), Tokyo (on Honshu)
Capitals with Unique Jurisdictions	Abuja (Federal Capital Territory), Brasilia (Federal District), Canberra (Australian Capital Territory), Chandigarh ^o (Union Territory), Mexico City (Federal District), New Delhi* (National Capital Territory), Ottawa (National Capital Region), Washington* (Federal District of Columbia)

* seeking greater powers under statehood

^o disputed capital of two states

¹ For example, Washington DC was modeled after ancient Athens and Rome, yet rather than paving the way for a renaissance of Athenian democracy and Roman republicanism, the Founding Fathers may have inadvertently laid the foundations for the later emergence of an American empire.



European nation-states centralized power in traditional centres.



German Reunification 1990
Capital restored to Berlin



End of Vietnamese Conflict 1975
Power remained in the North
Saigon renamed after independence leader

- ★ Capital City
- Largest City
- ★○ Capital & Largest City



Capital moved from primary city to new central locations
(name of country followed by date of move)

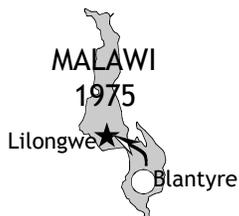


Figure 1: Countries & their Capitals

CAPITAL RELOCATION

In several key instances, countries have decided to move their capitals away from primary cities, or have constructed wholly new cities. This has been particularly true of confederations where the vagaries of national building required the choice of a geographically neutral location situated between the most significant constituent territories. While this would serve to overcome the advantages and influences of preexisting power centres, it would also help rectify demographic imbalances rooted in country's particular geography. Likewise, a new capital could provide a powerful motor in the development of the hinterlands (Dascher, 2000).

At the subnational state or provincial level, this regional balancing act has been most apparent. In the US, the longstanding tradition of choosing secondary or tertiary cities as capitals has prevailed in a majority of states (33 of 50). In a possibly unique case, Vermont convened its biyearly state assembly in different towns for the first thirty years of its incorporation before finally settling on Montpelier as its permanent capital in 1805 (Figure 2). In Canada, this trend has been apparent in half the provinces (i.e., British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Québec, New Brunswick), leading arguably to more balanced development than in the jurisdictions where the capital city has also been the primary city (Wolfel, 2002).

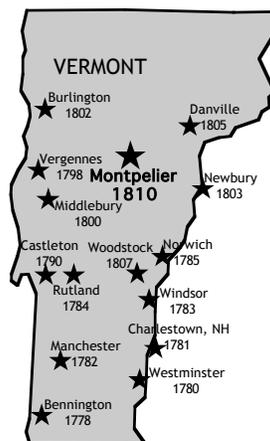


Figure 2: Vermont's Rotating State Capitals

In the case of Québec, French-speaking Québec City rather than cosmopolitan Montreal has been the capital for over three centuries. While rooted in the history of French settlement, this separation of political and economic functions has allowed the province to protect and promote a distinct national identity, unhindered by overwhelming assimilatory pressures emanating from Anglo-dominated Montréal and the rest of English-speaking North America². Situated in Québec's traditional heartland, Québec City with its majestic fortifications has thus developed into a beautiful garden city representing the French Canadian culture in full flower. Meanwhile, Montréal has remained a cosmopolitan world city and gateway for most visitors and immigrants to the rest of Québec. In the globalization era, the provincial government has also relaxed its strict language laws owing to Montreal's resurgence as the economic engine of the province after a period of relative decline. While derided at the time as an infringement on individual rights, measures adopted to protect the French language have in fact increased the self-confidence of the French-speaking Québécois majority and has allowed for a consequent shift from an exclusive ethnic to a more inclusive civic nationalism (Lecours, 2000).

Interestingly, one of the former Soviet Republics has recently moved their capital as an alternative strategy of nation building. In 1998, Kazakhstan shifted its seat of government from Almaty in the extreme south to the more centrally located Astana³ to address regional disparities, unite citizens across ethnic and clan lines, and consolidate boundaries. However, the move away from a region dominated by Kazakhs would seem counterintuitive if not understood as part of as a geopolitical strategy to thwart any irredentist claims by the large and restive Russian minority population. By bringing a capital northwards into a Russian-speaking area while retaining a Kazakh identity, the state sought to address the peculiar challenges of Kazakhstan's cultural geography (Schatz, 2003).

² English and American merchants dominated the Québec economy from the conquest in 1763 until the 1960s when the "maître chez nous" economic policies of the new Liberal government ushered in the "Quiet Revolution" and the emergence of a *bona fide* French bourgeoisie.

³ The original town at the new site was named Aqmola, or "white tombstone." Because of its grim connotations, the name was also changed to Astana, or simply "capital" in Kazakh.

The government also wished to escape Almaty's status as a Soviet era capital by making a fresh start in Astana where new architectural sensibilities could prevail. However, bridging the ethnic divide in a geographically segmented country seemed to be the primary motive for the move.



Figure 3: Kazakhstan

The move to Astana could not have come about without the backing of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, one of Central Asia's most respected but also autocratic leaders. In fact, many historic changes in capital cities were championed by strong and ambitious leaders rather than by democratic forces clamouring for change. This was due to the arduous nature of the undertaking, which involved breaking political alliances to form others and convincing the public of the merits of such a massive expenditure of the state's resources. Under tyrannical regimes, the legitimizing role of a new capital joined with the need to distance and insulate the government from the people and their expressions of discontent. Particularly megalomaniacal leaders named capitals after themselves, although only a few have persisted through history due to the intolerable hubris of the act (e.g., Constantinople⁴, Alexandria⁵, St. Petersburg⁶). Alternatively, nascent regimes did likewise for national heroes (e.g., Washington DC, Leningrad, Gandhinagar).

⁴ Established by the Greeks as Byzantium in 324 BCE, Roman Emperor Constantine renamed the city "New Rome" although it came to be known as Constantinople. With the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Ottomans in 1453, Constantinople came to be known as Istanbul which itself was a Turkish-derived contraction of Constantinople.

Table 2: Momentous Relocations

Rome → Byzantium/Constantinople	Division of the Roman Empire & Christendom
Mecca → Medina → Mecca	Mohammed's Flight & Return, Birth of Islam
Philadelphia → Washington, DC	Birth of the United States of America
Moscow → St. Petersburg → Moscow	Russia as a European Nation
Kyoto → Tokyo (Edo)	Beginning of Modern Japan
Beijing → Nanjing → Beijing	Chinese Republic (1911–1949)
Calcutta → New Delhi	Beginning of the End of the British Raj

On a number of key occasions, the relocations themselves heralded upheaval and transition in the history of nations and even whole civilizations (Table 2). Likewise, the erection of new capitals in the middle of the 20th century came to represent the hopes and dreams of newly independent states who in both their state socialist and capitalist variants had largely adopted the notions of modernity and development dominant at the time.. This was particularly true of South Asia, where large-scale dislocation caused by partition had resulted in the need to identify new seats of government while providing an opportunity for the leaders of the nascent states to imprint their ideological vision on the very geography of the subcontinent. In quick succession, Islamabad (capital of Pakistan), Chandigarh (capital of Punjab and Haryana), and Gandhinagar (capital of Gujarat) were built with the assistance of Western modernist architects such as Le Corbusier, Doxiadis, and Niemeyer. While New Delhi, Calcutta, and Bombay were planned to some degree, these new capitals were constituted wholly from scratch. As capital cities, they would thus play a decisive role in shaping the dominant ideology of the new state, summarized most succinctly in 1952 by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who hailed Chandigarh as “symbolic of the freedom of India, unfettered by the traditions of the past, an expression of the nation's faith in the future.”

⁵ Cities and towns from Egypt to Afghanistan have born the name of Alexander the Great and his successors. Variants include Iskander and Secunder.

⁶ Czar Peter the Great moved his capital from Moscow to St. Petersburg on the Baltic Sea in an attempt to Europeanize Russia.

Le Corbusier also served as the inspiration for Brasília, an even more fantastic attempt at constructing a positivist, technological utopia. However, the city's anti-pedestrian layout, rigid plan, and notoriety as a city of bureaucrats severely hampered its evolution into a truly vibrant capital, prompting cyberjournalist Julian Dibbell to famously comment, "Brasília seemed intended to give the impression of having been built neither by nor for mere earthlings. A race of hyper-intelligent Volkswagens, perhaps, or aliens who speak a language made up entirely of Euclidean axioms, might be expected to feel at home in this sidewalk-poor zone of perfectly circulating asphalt arteries and relentlessly clean lines of design – but not any species as puny and unkempt as homo sapiens." (Dibbell, 1992). Although the alien landscape echoed the Brazilian flag with its slogan of order and progress over a starry hemisphere, it did not match at all the culture and lived experiences of Brazilians. The same was true with Chandigarh for many years, where its architectural dysfunction as an alien Western implant into an Indian context led to many unintended consequences. Nehru of India, Ayub Khan of Pakistan, and President Kubitschek of Brazil all fervently believed that these planned cities would contribute towards building a new modernist imaginary that would lay the foundation for the future. Ironically, the plans for Chandigarh included 50 sectors with the exception of sector 13, representing how Western superstitions sneaked into the supposedly ultra modern plan of the city. Although indicative of some of the irrationalities of adopting such designs, the same vision of modernity seems to have persisted as the dominant paradigm animating developing countries in the post-developmental era. Fortunately, Astana, Kazakhstan represents a much more modest expression of the same modernist principles.

FROM MODERNISM(S) TO GLOBALIZATION(S)

The spatial politics of relocating capitals has thus brought up important questions about the interaction between notions of modernity, political integration and identity formation. However as previously noted, the regional and national scale has been recently abandoned for the global-local

binary as the principle site of academic inquiry. Likewise, modernism and modernization theory have been largely superseded by the world city and globalization literature in looking at these issues. While this has contributed to the development of vital socio-cultural and political perspectives in a hitherto economically dominated approach, it has tended to neglect the historical antecedents of contemporary phenomena. Indeed, Swyngedouw and Kaika (2003) have argued that the globalization trend does not indicate some novel postmodern configuration, but simply a massive intensification of modernity and a slackening of the forces restraining it. By this they meant the onset of fragmentation, dislocation, tensions, and reconfiguration of the body politics, made all the more intense due to the inability of the state to manage change and provide stability in the ensuing cultural and economic turbulence.

Discursively, this “Globe Talk”⁷ has had profound political implications, particularly with its emergence at a time when neoliberalism was politically, economically, and culturally ascendant. At the capital city level, its values came to be embodied by the new “London cool,” defined as a “culturally hybridized, cosmopolitan, and globally and competitively well-positioned and connected place” (Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2003). Notions of “progress, change and innovation” were wrapped up in this emergent transnational identity that was at once intensely corporate and socially liberated. On the other hand, localities and local identifications were dismissed as parochial, narrow, and backwards. Their physical and psychological isolation as well as vestigial identities were seen as a cause for concern, even as their assimilation into the global economy was seen as inevitable. Through this new dualism, the political left and right were transcended, creating powerful alliances between national politicians and transnational corporate elites while leaving those negatively impacted scrambling.

⁷ Term coined by globalization scholar Roland Robertson to denote a tightly woven network of discourse, economic policies, and cultural assumptions linked to a particular view of globalization. Arguably in most cases, globalization has been associated with neoliberalism, although it is important to acknowledge that this represents one of many possible globalities.

This divide has been further reinforced by the global-local binaries that have been frequently mapped out as detailed in Table 3:

Table 3: Classical Global-Local Binaries

Global	Local
Dominant/Developed	Reactive/Backward
Individualist	Communitarian
Hybridized Identity	Tribal/Authentic Identity
Dynamic – Economic	Static – Cultural
Open – Cosmopolitan	Closed – Parochial
Uniform, Homogeneous	Unique, Different
Gendered Masculine	Gendered Feminine

(derived from Ley, 2004; Smith, 2001)

While this binary represents a gross oversimplification of a complex ground reality marked by transgressions, networks, and flows, it does highlight how some theorists have uncritically interpreted the overall process of globalization. It has increasingly become evident that the global and local are in fact intertwined and that geographic notions of scale must be incorporated to explain policies and practices that transcend this dualism (Ley, 2004). Moreover, the connectivity of social relationships and the mobility of individuals have further frayed the already permeable boundaries between societies and place, leading to the need for a more nuanced and mutable interpretation of identities (Schuerkens, 2003).

However, in Tomlinson’s conception of globalization as “complex connectivity”, the distinction between global and local may still hold, if only in addressing the relative prominence of urban centres and capital cities in particular (Tomlinson, 1999). In this formulation, world cities enjoy the most connectivity via their highly developed transportation and communications infrastructure, financial institutions, and general cultural profile. Through these links, they would share a common transnational culture, trumping geographical proximity to the city’s hinterland as the defining “lifeworld” of many if not all of its residents. While global-local elites and large segments of the

urban population may provide a particular hue to the city's cosmopolitan identity, they would still hold more in common with other urban centres. At the other end of this scalar spectrum, poor transportation networks would serve to distance the nation's hinterlands from these large cities. While physically closer, the isolation of these smaller settlements would inevitably affect their cultural trajectory. The fact that the vast majority of the world still inhabits these local spaces as opposed to transient global space makes them important sites of study, especially as they experience "displacement" or "deterritorialization" induced by commercial and media penetration as agents of global modernity (Tomlinson, 1999).

It is important to note that this binary has to be careful applied, lest these distinctions reify "global talk" discourse once more. Furthermore, the connectivity thesis must include "particularity of place" as well as the borderless virtual space linking more and more localities throughout the world. In terms of transnational culture, the standardized transit corridors required by capitalism should not be confused with cosmopolitanism in general which has a much longer worldly lineage born of exile. Likewise, the lived spaces and day-to-day environment of various localities which might be invisible to business travelers, would be encountered by labour migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, backpackers, and other visitors of modest means whose lack of resources would ironically entail a deeper penetration into the local culture and thus a higher cosmopolitan consciousness (Tomlinson, 1999). Class here is important, as it determines whether individuals are kept in place by their class, ethnic, or gender position, or alternately, forced to migrate in search of refuge, security, or livelihoods.

Despite these caveats, promoters of unfettered globalization in the neoliberal mode have framed their vision along evolutionary lines, whereas local identities must give way to the global, and national sovereignty to the rule of transnational capital (Friedman, 2000). They presuppose that globalization has heralded a post-traditionalist order with no room for the old dreams of self-determination or autonomy by the various peoples of the world. While those on the right have

hailed the potential for free trade and free markets to bring about universal prosperity, many on the left have also welcomed globalization's potential to break down barriers and the petty nationalisms of the past that had twice devastated large parts of the world in the 20th century. Specifically, scholars like Anthony Giddens who have exerted enormous influence over ostensibly "Third Way" political parties has argued that local communities and traditions have all but dissolved in this era and that social processes are now taking place at the global scale. Others have added that not only is any defense of tradition ultimately reactionary, but it runs of the risk of developing into a form of fundamentalism that is rooted in the past and out of touch with the present. Instead, they have stressed that local communities and the Global South cannot be seen as simply victims of globalization as westernization, but as active agents in the absorption and modification of these influences (Schuerkens, 2003).

In response, Sklair (2001) and others have noted that transnational capitalism with its corporations and global media has sought to expand consumerism and the consumer ethos, giving credence to the notion that globalization in the current era is directly an extension of western domination. As Schuerkens (2003) noted, postcolonialist and post-development scholarship has been instrumental in teasing out the powerful ways in which neo-colonialism has been perpetuated by the large-scale adoption of western capitalism's central ideological tenets. However, by denigrating tradition and adopting a "resistance is futile" stance, some pro-global scholars have withheld the single most powerful tool by which localities can resist oppressive and discriminatory globalities. More than just age-old sociocultural practices and rituals, tradition also embraces the unique cosmovision, knowledge, livelihood, and human-environment relationship of a particular group and thus plays a vital role in the actualization and affirmation of the community and individual. It also lays the groundwork for collective action, making a shared vision and long-term struggle possible. Ironically by dismissing tradition completely, these scholars have even downplayed resistance to the global hegemony in their efforts to ascribe some form of hybrid agency to people of the non-Western

developing world. Indeed, this inability to consider the South on its own terms has led to unfortunate political incoherence at a time when a very real fundamentalisms have emerged to take centre stage.

Zygmunt Bauman (1998) also dispelled some of the optimism surrounding the emergence of hybrid cultures, pointing to the much deeper processes of homogenization reshaping human communication and consciousness. Bauman felt that any hybridization that may be taking place is operating at the level of form, while values and beliefs are being harmonized to fit the needs of the common global marketplace. While echoing Wallerstein's "westernization" thesis, Bauman decries this much deeper process by which alternative ways of life are being displaced and extirpated by the *Leviathan* of global capital. He blames the new communication and internet technologies for this ultimate in space-time compression, whereas non-western cultures are being swamped by the detritus of Western and particularly US commercial media (Bauman, 1998). Jonathan Friedman has echoed this critique, going further to call out the optimistic one world vision that forgets the enormous insecurity, fear, and marginalization engendered by the very same processes (Friedman, 2000). Similarly, Doreen Massey has taken to task this same geographic imaginary that has become detached from its own spatiality and the systemic inequalities between countries and regions widened by globalization (Massey, Jess, & Open University., 1995).

At the political level, Globe Talk has further thwarted individual agency and autonomy by ignoring the asymmetrical structure of power relations between the intangible global "commanding heights" and localities. With "action taking place at a distance", as noted by Schuerkens (2003), the new diffuse global network of circuits and flows has proven to be just as disempowering to the local community as the old centralization of power in the developmentalist era. With the local trapped in place or forced to dissolve into the migrant workforce, the consequent hybrid identities and mobility are for the most part involuntary in contrast to the transnational elite who are far better represented in the global media as well as much of the academic literature. Moreover, the triumphalism around

globalization so apparent in the late 1990s glorified these elites as inhabiting the future human cultural milieu, while the poor conveniently disappeared once again as they did in the mid-century modernist fantasies of development through technological progress.

In many ways, the central role of “militant particularities” in the so-called anti-globalization movement (prompting former Mexican president Ernesto Zedillo to coin the term “*globalophobic*”), are emblematic of the fight back on the part of the marginalized, maligned, and dispossessed. That they were able to band together despite their disparate causes and cultures in world city after world city, should have dispelled the prevailing myth that they were bitter dead-enders, reactionaries, or “neo-*Luddites*”⁸ resisting the tide of human progress. Moreover, their progressive politics found firm footing in the advocacy of a “New Localism” based not only on ethnic or cultural parameters, but also shared visions of self-determination, participation, and deep democracy in the face of the global consumerist ideology (Schuerkens, 2003).

CASE STUDY: UTTARANCHAL

As capital city relocation happens so infrequently, scholars are rarely afforded the chance to examine the circumstances and meanings attached to such change contemporaneously. Historically, the motivations and implications for relocation have been studied from a political lens as in the Kazakhstan case or from a planning standpoint as in the modernist visions of Chandigarh and Brasília. As such the complex connectivity and global-local tug of war that have only recently become prominent in the literature have been largely absent in past treatments of this phenomena. Fortunately, a recent and ongoing controversy from the Indian Himalayas touches upon these precise topics, allowing for multiple interpretations to arise from traditional political geography and globalization studies.

⁸ By using such terms of disparagement, critics of these recent movements have affirmed their continued reliance on the modernist discourse.

In 2000, the state of Uttaranchal was carved out of hill and adjoining plains districts of Uttar Pradesh state, after a peaceful struggle by its people for local autonomy (see Figure 4). At the time, Dehradun, the largest city within the geographic boundaries of the state was appointed provisional capital for an indefinite period over the objections of many of the same activists who had led the movement⁹. Since then, the idea of establishing a permanent capital at Gairsain, a tiny hamlet at the geographic centre of the state, has been kept alive by stalwarts of the movement, culminating in late 2004 in a series of fast-unto-deaths, relay hunger strikes, and foot marches across the state. The struggle has been particularly intense due to the realization that once made permanent, capitals tend to become fixed in place, thus foreclosing any possibility of fundamentally reordering the political geographic structure of the state (Negi, 2001).

At first glance, Dehradun and Gairsain seem to occupy the extreme ends of a socio-cultural spectrum that defines the Uttarakhandi identity making them the ideal pair for examining issues of scale and connectivity (Uttarakhand being the ancient name for the hill region). Their geography is also salient to this study, whereas Dehradun is situated in the renowned Doon Valley in southwestern lowland periphery of the state and Gairsain deep within the hills proper. Although, Dehradun was only the 12th largest city in the erstwhile mega state of Uttar Pradesh, its sociocultural characteristics and history reflect a distinctiveness far exceeding its size. Gairsain on other hand is barely distinguishable from hundreds of other villages in Uttaranchal, although it comes close to occupying a central geographic position as well as straddling the main routes that connect the western and eastern portions of the state. Moreover, while other cities with a multiplicity of features are also located in the state (see Table 4), the main contest appears to be between the Dehradun as the status quo globally-connected capital and Gairsain as the radical choice of an empowered local.

⁹ Five years after statehood, Dehradun's status remains provisional.

Table 4: Other Past & Future Capitals of Uttarakhand

Hardwar	Site of the Khumb Mela, preeminent Hindu pilgrimage site
Rishikesh	“Yoga Capital of the World” (visited by the Beatles, 1968)
Kotdwar	Gritty industrial centre Gateway to lower Garhwal that has experienced heavy out-migration
Kalagarh	Gateway to the Corbett National Park South Central foot of Himalayas
Nainital	Hill Station & Scenic Lake
Mussoorie	Hill Station & “Queen of the Hills”
Srinagar, Tehri, Narendranagar	Erstwhile seats of the Garhwal Rajas (Tehri submerged under dam reservoir)
Champawat, Almora	Erstwhile seats of the Kumaon Rajas
Joshimath	Seat of the medieval Katyuri Dynasty

Dehradun was chosen as interim capital for fairly obvious reasons. While peripherally located in the state, Dehradun is a city of over half a million residents, while the population of the district has reached 1.3 million (Indian Census, 2001). Gairsain by comparison has a miniscule population of less than five thousand people and is not even a district capital. As a major railhead, Dehradun enjoys excellent rail and road connectivity with Delhi and the rest of the plains, although its transportation links with the rest of the state and especially the east are far more tenuous. Owing to its geographical position as the gateway to the Himalayas, it has become a major cultural and regional commercial hub as well as the headquarters for myriad non-governmental organizations¹⁰. The British located many of their premiere institutions in the heart of the city including the Forest Research Institute, Wildlife Institute of India, Zoological Survey of India, Survey of India, Indian Military Academy, National Indian Military College, and many more. Their elite schools¹¹ dotted the now urbanized corridor linking Dehradun with Mussoorie, a popular hill station during the time

¹⁰ Many of these NGOs are headquartered in the wealthier wards of the municipality, reflecting a rather affluent position arising from their linkages to international donors.

¹¹ The late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi attended the Doon School, while the Woodstock School in Mussoorie has developed an extensive global alumni association. Elite Catholic schools that have traditionally catered to the Anglo-Indian community also remain in business.

of the Raj. Independent India retained these institutions and built even more including the Oil & Natural Gas Commission, Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, and National Institute for the Visually Handicapped, making Dehradun and the Doon Valley nationally and internationally renowned. It has enjoyed a reputation for a salubrious climate, although this has been strained in recent years by air and noise pollution from motor vehicle traffic, which doubled from 1991 to 2001.

Politically, some of the reasons for Dehradun's ascent were more elaborate. Due to opposition to inclusion into the new state expressed by many plains residents, Dehradun's location in the southwest corner of the state and in the plains, was far more likely to alleviate irredentist claims. In this way, Dehradun would simulate Astana in attempting to assuage a restive minority population that was included in the state with some opposition¹². However, this occurred without first affirming the central identity of the new state, leaving many hill people unhappy in the bargain. The most critical regarded Dehradun in the same light as Lucknow, the erstwhile Uttar Pradesh state capital, in terms of its physical and psychological distance from the lived reality of the hills (Negi, 2001). The fact that a massive bureaucracy and vested interests were already entrenched in Dehradun inspired little confidence that the new government would be able to break out of the straightjacket of the old order. This was particularly disappointing to those who saw statehood as a step towards grassroots democracy as most of the social movements to arise in the region over the past few decades all objected to remote decision-making and fought for the restoration of local rights over resources.

¹² This opposition from residents of the heavily populated plains districts of Hardwar and Udham Singh Nagar threatened to derail the central government's plan for state reorganization in 1998. Some difficult manoeuvring including naming a Sikh as the state's first governor overcame their apprehension although tensions between hills and plains remain to this day.

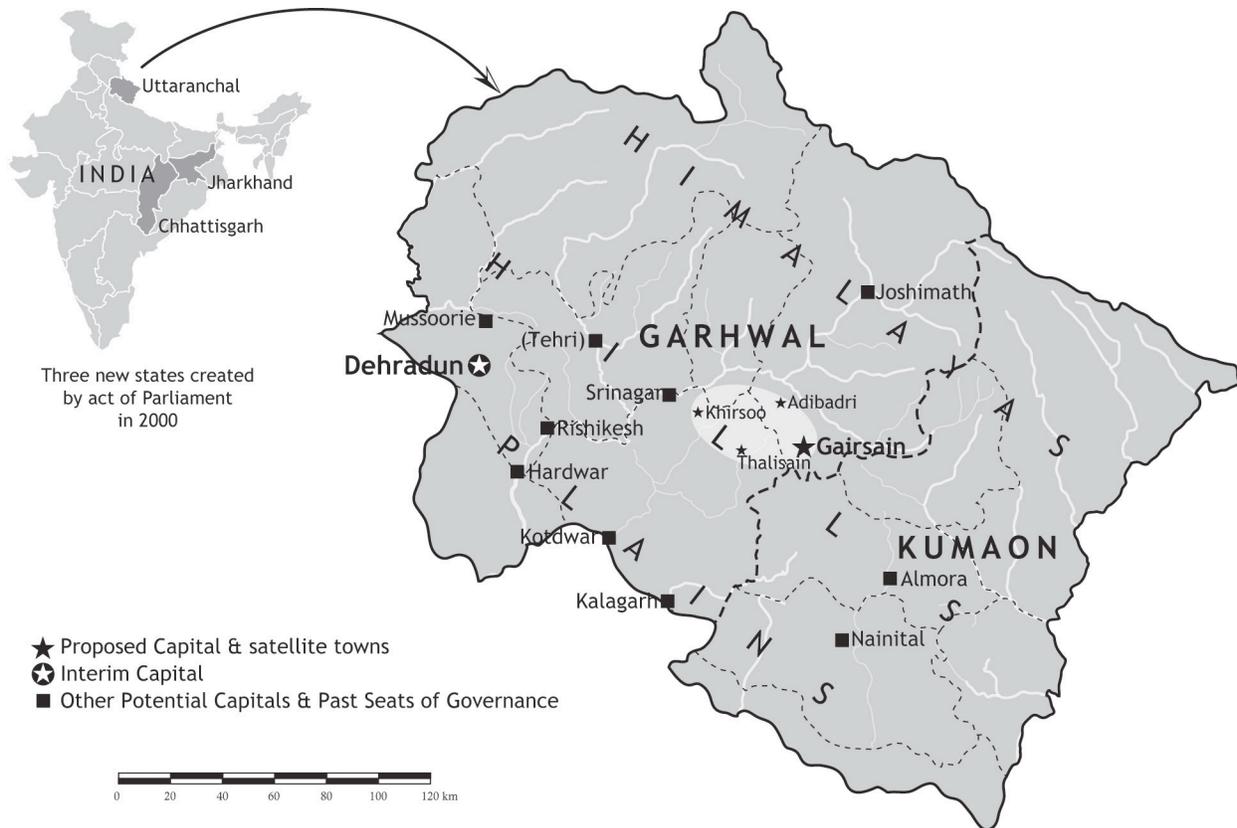


Figure 4: Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal)

Dehradun is also far more cosmopolitan in character than similar mid-sized cities. The central Paltan Bazaar market is most representative of this diversity, bringing together merchants of all faiths and ethnic backgrounds for the singular purpose of retail commerce (Sahgal, 2002). Originally, Garhwalis from the surrounding hills had settled in the city, although this migration increased significantly when the British pacified the region in 1815 after a century of raids and counter raids by the neighbouring rajas that had left the land desolate. The population however remained small until Independence when the turmoil of partition brought a flood of Punjabi refugees to the region. Many of them in turn invited their families to join them, setting off a chain reaction of migration that has seen them come to dominate the fertile *terai* belt spanning the state's southern lowlands from the

Nepal border to Dehradun district¹³. Soon after, Tibetans came to the Doon Valley after 1959, setting up various educational institutions in the region such as the ornate Sakya College, and occupying a central market in the city centre where the best Western goods could be purchased. However, this migration remained small, as the Dalai Lama soon after shifted the Tibetan government-in-exile from Mussoorie to Dharamsala in neighbouring Himachal Pradesh¹⁴. More recently, people from as far as poverty-stricken Bihar and Bengal have found their way to Dehradun in search of work. Nepalis have also arrived in great numbers, settling in the proximity of the adjoining military cantonment where one of their own Gurkha regiments is stationed.

However, these waves of migrations have created a social system stratified along ethnic lines. Beginning with the colonial heritage that continued well into the post-independence era, a great number of officers and retirees formed a highly educated English-speaking elite at the centre of the city's civic life. Together with Mussoorie's prominent inhabitants that included scions of royal families, a large Anglo-Indian population, and the summer homes of the well-to-do, this overclass in fact came to represent Dehradun and the Doon Valley in the Indian postcolonial imaginary that had also percolated into the officer corps of many governmental institutions still operating along colonial lines. Thus the cosmopolitan ideal came to be seen through the eyes of the elite classes, while Dehradun's growing underclass was not likewise honoured for its "worldliness."

In the five years following the formation of Uttaranchal, Dehradun's capital city function has been in full effect drawing in migrant workers and sending real estate prices soaring. Yet even before statehood, the city was witnessing tremendous growth. Satellite data from 1996 and 2000 revealed that the number of slums in Dehradun increased by 50 per cent, with 90 out of 113 developing along the beds of the two non-perennial streams feeding the city and the rest along the railway lines or

¹³ Punjabi culture has come to dominate much of North India as well as the international diaspora most visibly represented by the large scale adoption of Bangra music and the *Salwar Kameez* as casual dress in place of the traditional *Sari*.

¹⁴ Tibetans that chose to remain in the Doon Valley have largely settled in the outlying suburb of Clement Town.

arterial roads (Sur, Jain, & Sokhi, 2004). By the 2001 Indian census, 200,000 residents were living in slum conditions, accounting for almost half of the overall urban population. While rudimentary efforts have been made to notify these colonies and afford civic amenities, fears persist that the municipal corporation might take a hardline attitude and initiate slum clearances. In other cities where the ecological footprint of middle class homes is far larger than that of temporary shanty dwellings, it is the latter that have felt the wrath of new city planning and beautification projects. Moreover, this dark underbelly of Dehradun's stratified society has witnessed wealthy retirees building monster homes and middle class families operating multiple motor vehicles, while the poor have had to scavenge for a place in the interstices of city.

As such, the resulting social and environmental strains on the city have pushed even enthusiastic Doonites to oppose permanent capital status for Dehradun. In fact, many ordinary residents were originally skeptical about assigning the city with additional functions, feeling that the influx of politicians and requisitioning of buildings for the state bureaucracy would disturb the relative calm of the city, clog traffic, and overburden the resource base of the valley. The extent of this disaffection is unknown, as the increase in employment opportunities and infrastructure investment has definitely benefited some and convinced others of the need for Uttaranchal to develop via Dehradun as a powerful economic engine for growth. However, despite significant sums having been spent in "sprucing up" Dehradun to fulfill its mandate, the increase in pollution, congestion, and sprawl has still outpaced the city's capacity to cope (Pant, 2004; Reuters, 2000). More ominously, attempts to beautify the capital's image as seen in the road widening exercises of the Public Works Department could parallel events in New Delhi and most dramatically in Mumbai¹⁵, where slum clearances

¹⁵ In late 2004 and early 2005, the state government in conjunction with the municipal corporation of Mumbai set about demolishing the homes of 300,000 people, rivaling the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami in its destruction. While the demolition drive was halted by the intercession of the central government, activists are afraid that a precedent was set for even more draconian actions in the future in big and mid-sized cities across India.

converged with the attempt to construct an instant modernity intimately linked with its status as the national capital (Baviskar, 2003).

GAIRSAIN

In contrast to all this vigorous cosmopolitics in Dehradun that has rivaled the more prominent big cities of India in its liveliness and connection to the global scene, Gairsain represents almost a caricature of a typical hill village. Relatively remote and isolated, Gairsain does not even rank amongst the top 50 cities and towns in the state, although it is the administrative centre of the local development bloc. However, Gairsain represents a unique case in that its claim is supported by a small, but radicalized portion of the population. While both the governing Congress and opposition BJP are either conflicted over or oppose any move, all the regional and left parties are united firmly behind Gairsain. Most vocal is the *Uttarakhand Kranti Dal* (Uttarakhand Revolutionary Party), which initiated the separate state movement, but currently holds only 4 out of 71 seats in the state assembly. It was they who as early as 1992 chose the site as equidistant between Garhwal and Kumaon, the two titular nationalities of Uttarakhand (Gupta, 1997). For Garhwalis and Kumaonis, breaking this psychological division was vital in the construction of a unified highland identity that could fight for autonomy and separate state status. Without this unity, the movement would have quickly floundered in regional rivalries that had been stoked for years by the political class (Negi, 2001). Interestingly, all of India's communist parties have also supported Gairsain, bringing to bear concerns over social and economic justice in what has otherwise been described as conflict of cultural geography.

The most important group lobbying for Gairsain however has been the activists of the *Uttarakhand Mahila Manch* (women's forum), who have loyally stood by the decade-old demand. It is they who took out a massive 15,000 person rally for Gairsain ahead of the official raising of the state in November 2000, and have been periodically staging protests ever since. Women form a majority in

the hill districts, but a minority in the plains where male migration has skewed the demographic balance for decades¹⁶. In Dehradun, the male-female ratio is even more lopsided thus adding an interesting gender dimension to the contest between the two sites. Dehradun has also long been the centre for state and market power in the region where women have been traditionally excluded. However, their numerical domination of the hill districts, involvement in rurally-based social movements, and constitutional reforms that have enforced gender equality at the village council level, has contributed to the emergence of a significant cadre of women leaders sympathetic to the Gairsain cause.

The Gairsain movement is also unique in that it has no strong central leadership, but consists of a diffuse network of activists all over the state. Even the Mahila Manch at the forefront of the struggle is composed of activists from both Garhwal and Kumaon. That the long-time convenor, Kamala Pant, in fact hails from Dehradun, itself symbolizes the leap in consciousness beyond vested interests. Moreover, by mobilizing on the basis of geography, the original Uttarakhand movement was able to construct a civic nationalism that succeeded in transcending ethnicity. Like other militant particularisms, the movement could have turned in an entirely different direction. Initially a student protest against the reservation policies of Uttar Pradesh state, the early stages of the movement found its most potent cache of resentment and anger in anti-plains sentiment. Despite these real and imagined economic grievances, these feelings remained for the most part inchoate, never fully crystallizing into open violence. Thus no *Shiv Sena*-type ultranationalist movement of unemployed youth or strident calls for “Garhwal for Garhwalis” ever garnered much support in the region. Fortunately, veteran left-leaning activists in the region were able to steer the mass movement away from parochial divisive issues, to a more generalized demand for autonomy (see Figure 5).

¹⁶ In 1991, the female-to-male ratio of Dehradun was an astoundingly low 851:1000, while in rural areas of the state, the ratio showed a female majority of 1049:1000. In Uttaranchal as a whole, the sex ratio has dropped significantly from 1991 to 2001 owing to the rise of female foeticide commonly linked to assimilation into plains culture and perhaps also the increase in the migrant worker population that favours men.

Their farsightedness diffused a potentially explosive social situation and got to the root of the region's problem as the last Himalayan jurisdiction without any form of local government (Tewari, 2001).

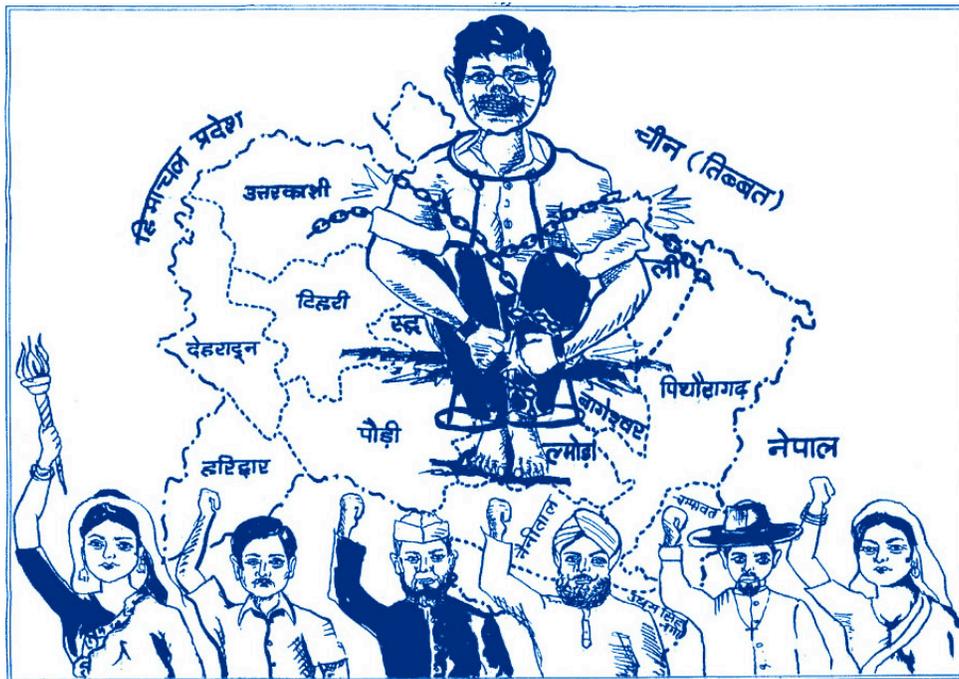


Figure 5:
1998 Poster from the Uttarakhand struggle highlighting outreach efforts to minority communities. Depicted below the caged representation of the state are two women flanking four men identified through their facial hair and headgear as a Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian respectively.

Unlike previous high profile relocations, the modernist impulse for a brave new capital is lacking, particularly in an era of lowered expectations on the part of the state. Instead, preliminary plans drawn up in conjunction with a respected environmental NGO, calls for the development of three satellite cities (villages of Adibadri, Thalissain, Khirsoo) within the traditional trekking route surrounding Gairsain to prevent the capital from growing into an oversized urban agglomeration that the sensitive ecology of the region could ill afford (Agarwal & Narain, 2000; Pedeutour, 2005). The vision that has animated Gairsain's supporters situates some if not all the administrative apparatus of the state in these villages, thereby inhabiting the "lifeworld" of the most marginalized citizens. Advocates believe that Gairsain's relative isolation and small size would require politicians

and bureaucracy to earn their legitimacy by trekking into the hinterland and holding court in typical hill villages. While there, the space-time compression apparent in bigger and better connected cities may actually expand, leading to a more deliberative decision making process and policies reflecting Himalayan geography and *La Realidad* of rural poverty (Pradhan & Tiwari, 2000). This would stand in direct contrast to the current mode of governance where the people's representatives and especially the civil servants remain aloof from the public. In Dehradun, this separation is made worse by the size of the city that mitigates against average citizens interacting with their government (Chandola, 2000). The fact that powerful lobbies and criminal syndicates have also made Dehradun their base, has rendered attempts by citizens to gain redress from the state fraught with peril.

While this geographic proximity argument for good governance may seem overly deterministic, establishing the capital in the centre of the state would serve to tackle the severe underdevelopment in the hills simply through its capital city function. In fact, the prevention of further out-migration from the interior has long been a priority of social activists from the region (Uniyal, 1999). However between buttressing the flagging subsistence economy and generating gainful employment through new schemes, policy makers have had few tools to staunch the flow that has shown no signs of abating. While the creation of the new state promised to address this ongoing crisis, most economic activity has still taken place in the southern plains. In this way, Dehradun as the capital has not proven any different from the previous regime. The state government has even tacitly accepted the unavoidable eventuality of this downhill migration, and rather than fulfilling its much ballyhooed promise of all-round development, has instead chosen to focus on developing the already most developed districts of the state.

Therefore as geographic factors will always favour the plains, activists feel that a capital in the hills would at least partially compensate for the highland's disadvantageous terrain. It would also contribute to developing a radial or networked pattern of governance, rather than the existing north-south linkages between cities in the plains and the rugged Himalayan interior that have served to

render the hills politically and economically dependent on the urban centres in the past. Moreover, a policy focused on building up smaller market towns could also help sustain a viable rural economy rather than the current clustering of the rural population in a few large cities. Dispersed growth could alleviate the ecological and economic pressures on metropolitan areas, preventing the further rise of social conflict and dislocation as seen in Delhi and potentially Dehradun (Uniyal, 1999). Gairsain thus presents a pivotal step towards evolving new urbanization model.

At the sociocultural level, Gairsain's supporters have also attempted to vest their capital city with a particular type of universal locality in contrast to Dehradun global cosmopolitan ubiquity. As a rather insignificant hamlet in a remote region of the state, Gairsain would best represent every village in the hills, and thus constitute a very real step towards acknowledging and alleviating the long neglect and alienation of the Himalayan hinterland. With its function as a necessarily cosmopolitan capital city, Gairsain could also engender interest in this "translocal" identity, with the "webs of memory and history" working to network similar villages and hamlets throughout the state. Indeed, many of Uttarakhand's villages have stories to tell, some of which have had a powerful impact internationally. The Chipko movement that took place in so many localities in Uttarakhand has inspired environmental struggles around the world. Similarly, many villages have witnessed inspiring grassroots community development projects¹⁷. Linking them together could provide a framework for imagining an "alternative modernity" based on sustainable stewardship of resources, communitarian values, and cultural plurality (Linkenbach, 2000). As such, the decentralized "small is beautiful" approach which was the tacit goal of the separate state movement would be finally realized, which is one reason why Gairsain as capital was always a chief demand of the most dedicated of the Uttarakhand state activists. Furthermore, this could lay the ground work

¹⁷ One successful organization cum social movement, the Doodhatoli Lok Vikas Sangathan, has successfully reforested areas of the neighbouring Doodhatoli mountain range over the past twenty years, as well as developed leadership skills amongst the women of the region. The group has done this with little outside help, while far surpassing the government's own conservation and rural development programs Kapoor, 2000).

for a wholly different mode of endogenous development which would overturn the cultural and economic marginalization of hill villages as geographically remote sources of migrant workers. It would fulfill what Canclini calls the “democratization of cosmopolitanism” where jumping scales and embedding the local in the cosmophere could overcome the urban-rural divide and by extension the global-local binary (García Canclini, 1995). And rather than a static localism, Gairsain would also transcend this binary with an identity based on a “rooted translocality” that could account for both the migratory nature of its current population and its unique meaning and contribution to the global struggle from below.

Therefore, the success of the Gairsain movement will rest on the ability of its proponents to articulate a clear and distinctive vision in keeping with their ideals and aspirations. The fact that utopian dreams have led to modernist debacles of the past, should not dissuade social activists, progressive planners, and scholars from collectively envisioning what Swyngedouw referred to as an “alternative urban future.” (Swyngedouw & Kaika, 2003). The most exciting prospect is that Gairsain could come to reflect the experiences of social movements and their environmental awareness as opposed to the will of the state and developers that have dominated bigger cities with their steel and concrete. This would fundamentally rearrange the scales of interaction by helping return true agency to the local even while contributing to a new global discourse based on cultural pluralism, innovative urban design principles, and alternative models of decentralized development. The ensuing geographic reorganization of the state would also create new forms of connectivity, transcending the asymmetrical relations currently existing between urban centres and their rural hinterlands. As such, the region’s distinct Himalayan identity and historic role as a crucible of social innovation would be reaffirmed, leading to a definitive break with business-as-usual that statehood alone could not accomplish.

However, in light of the relative powerlessness of Gairsain’s proponents as well as the overwhelming inertia of the Indian bureaucratic apparatus, the success of the movement is far from certain. The

move to Gairsain would also have to contend with stark political and economic realities, including the divide that now exists in the state between hills and plains and the significant investment in infrastructure that would be needed to bring the new capital online. Navigating these challenges will undoubtedly be difficult, particularly in the face of potentially stiff opposition from the political class, bureaucracy, and capitalist interests. Unlike capital relocations in the past, Gairsain does not enjoy the patronage of an influential leader. It also directly contradicts the tenets of neoliberal globalization that favours the consolidation of political and economic power in transnationally integrated urban centres. The out migration of the hill population to cities like Dehradun has further exacerbated this polarization, leading to the abandonment of villages and continuing hardships of families divided by economic circumstance. Given these constraints, the Gairsain movement may well have to stress the inherent particularist themes of identity and self-determination in tandem with the more universal demands for democracy and social justice. By doing so, it would join a vast network of movements struggling to save unique cultures and forge alternative globalities to the current order, one that has only exacerbated and not bridged the divide between global and local, rich and poor. Indeed, by positing the Gairsain issue in this global context, the movement may ironically achieve the traction it has hitherto lacked since the heady days of the Uttarakhand movement. This would bring full circle the global-local debate in a way where the commonalities of a multitude of distinct struggles would take centre stage in the building and design of a decidedly different future.

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