INTRODUCTION

The City:
Experience, Imagination, and Place

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The ambition of urban theory is the generation of a formal definition of the city and a characterization of the urban experience. Once the city stood out against the landscape, walled and compact, surrounded by a hinterland. As late as the middle of the twentieth century, such a concept of the city—a center and a surround—seemed adequate. But in fact the boundaries of cities, the relations of different groups within the city to a variety of extended meanings and connections beyond the imaginary wall, are both pervasive and distinct. This has become obvious in our own time as cities sprawl endlessly outward, without a clear endpoint, indeed sometimes blending into the next city or a whole region as in the U.S. northeast. Indeed, the matter of definition and of locating the city is so daunting that there is not, as Robert Fishman has pointed out, even a commonly accepted word for the giant social aggregations of our era, while the architect Richard Ingersoll believes that “cities have become impossible to describe.”

The chapters in this book respond to this condition by turning away from the conventional markers of the city that no longer seem to mark and take a different approach to the city. They focus on how, amid such ambiguity and indistinctness, the city is nevertheless imagined as at once indefinite and a singular space and on how this space is shared by a population with various cultural commitments and translocal attachments and yet understood as a distinct entity. In other words, rather than focusing on the city’s materiality for definition, the emphasis of these chapters is on the city as a field of experience as well as the way social and physical space is imagined and thus made into urban culture. We assume, as
Kevin Lynch did long ago, that urban dwellers and users orient themselves by constructing an imagined city—what he called a cognitive map, which deviates in meaningful ways from the cartographer’s map, with its solidity and boundedness. The imaginaries explored in these chapters are richer and more pluralized than those investigated by Lynch, but they serve urban dwellers by locating the city and themselves in it. Our claim is that the city is located and continually reproduced through such orienting acts of imagination, acts grounded in material space and social practice. As such, this book leaves aside, at least for the moment, the general question of definition, accepting the sufficiency of the urban imaginary of those in the city and those using it. We seek to understand those meanings, which may lead by an alternate route to new levels and types of generalization about cities, their internal organization and division, as well as their extension. It focuses on the idea of the imagination in explaining the ways in which a city is conceived so unquestionably and obviously as a single space.

When Benedict Anderson introduced the idea of the imagination as constitutive of national communities, he may not have realized the significance of the depth and scope of his innovation. He restricted his idea of imagination to the formation of national communities. Yet after the “linguistic turn” in the humanities and social sciences, realized after his book was initially published, we can see that this concept may be expanded to explain the constitution not only of nations but also of all sorts of social and political institutions, ranging from the family to the state and, in fact, to all of social reality itself, including space. Indeed, just as nations are imagined communities, it is possible to conceive of cities as imagined places or as an “imagined environment,” as James Donald puts it. In fact, the role of print capitalism—the engine of Anderson’s interpretation of the emergence of nationalism—may be even clearer in respect to modern cities.

As elaborated by Anthony King in the introductory essay, it is impossible for the city to be experienced in its totality. Any one person’s experience of a city is bound to remain limited and partial to a fragment of the city and to their unique perspective of that fragment. Hence, as King puts it, the city “exists only in our heads.” This issue of totality and the modern city’s resistance to a totalizing account was at the heart of Walter Benjamin’s famous “Arcades project.” Walt Whitman’s poetry makes the same point. If Whitman could not or would not form the complexity of New York into a closed narrative, relying instead on great lists, so Benjamin created not a singular narrative or principle of order for Paris, leaving us instead a remarkable indexing and filing system, especially rich in images, that emphasized the multiplicity of the modern city. Benjamin’s ambition to bring the multiple images of Paris into a Marxist social analysis of the city did not reach the closure such an analysis
implied. By contrast, David Harvey’s recent and brilliantly executed Paris, Capital of Modernity, a title that evokes Benjamin’s famous agenda-setting essay, “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” probably comes as near as any Marxist—or anyone else—will to a singular, comprehensive, and theoretically consistent synthetic analysis of a modern metropolis.5

Benjamin more than Harvey points to the direction taken in this volume. Once we suspend the assumption that a city is a totality, which implies conceptual and definitional closure, then it becomes meaningful to inquire how cities are imagined in more open ways, more accommodating to translocal connections, internal tensions, and generally loose ends, yet still recognized as distinct from the larger environs, social and physical. To locate, identify, and understand such a city draws the scholar, we argue in this book, toward the imagination and toward the making and remaking of public culture. Such a city culture is a shared, if not unitary, mental image of the city, however limited the particular image of the city that is held by any one urban “shareholder.”

These chapters seek to contribute in two ways to our understanding of the imagination as constitutive of social reality in general and of urban space in particular. First, this book looks at how imagination works on a collective basis. Whether it involves the constitution of national communities, or of social reality, or the city itself, the constitutive power of the imagination lies in its collective nature. Although it is obvious that imagining a nation into being involves a collective rather than an individual act of imagining, Anderson’s account does not really clarify the relation of the individual imagination to the collective one. Yet, illuminating this difference and connection is vital. It is the social production and reproduction of the nation or city that enables the reification and naturalizing of the city or nation that enables its persistence as a thing in space and over time. Anderson discusses the origins of a sense of the collective nation, but he does not deal with the social reproduction of that collectivity over time, which involves the interplay of social practices and imagination.

The making of a collective imagination is a public process; indeed, one might well speak of the making of urban public culture. Such a notion is inspired by Jürgen Habermas. His classic work, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, is not easily adapted to the analysis of the modern metropolis.6 First, except for the discussion of eighteenth-century coffeehouses, Habermas does not concern himself with the space of the public, or the space in which public culture is made. Second, as has often been remarked, the public sphere for Habermas is a highly rationalized exchange that is as cognitive as it is communicative. To understand the making of the urban collective culture, a much wider notion of communication and the public is needed, a point made particularly by social historians who have been both inspired by and critical of Habermas’s work. Geoff Ely and Mary Ryan in particular suggest a much
wider range of participants in the making of urban public culture and many more forms of communication, including simple bodily presence in a public place.\footnote{7}

The key focus common to the individual chapters in this book is to examine the ways in which the collective imagination takes place through a wide range of daily practices of urban dwellers. As different chapters reveal, the very practice of daily urban life emerges as the means through which the collective imagination that conjures up a city takes place. The collective imagination operates not only through the written text such as the newspaper or the novel as Anderson suggests, but also through a variety of different media in daily life, which is a vast field of collective experience. These urban experiences involve travels, interactions, and communicative practices of people within a city, which function to weave a sense of connectedness in space and in turn serve to imagine the city as a single place. The sorts of daily practices that are dealt with in this book include popular media, film, art, and trade and market relations or personal networks that function similarly as tools for the building of a collective imagination.

What is common in all these experiences is that they function as the media through which certain collective narratives are produced and disseminated. These narratives tell the story of the city, produce its history, set its many boundaries, define its culture, or hierarchically situate its dwellers around the categories of class, race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, and map these onto certain city spaces and remove them from others. Indeed, it is through the production and dissemination of such narratives that certain parts of a city or sometimes its presumed totality is marked as old and historical or new, traditional or modern, rich or poor, or as a “black neighborhood,” an “upper-class” part of town, or a “gay haven.” In sum, we argue that a city is produced and sustained, that is, located, in such narratives that proliferate through the daily travels, transactions, and interactions of its dwellers, thereby shaping the collective imaginary. Each of the chapters here looks at a particular instance through which narratives of a city are produced. While Yükseker examines business transactions among shopkeepers and their customers where a particular narrative of Istanbul and its borders is produced, Fojas looks at film in constituting a certain narrative of Los Angeles; Cohen uses the medium of art to read a specific narrative of Paris; Simone observes popular narratives produced through eating habits of certain drivers in Douala, Cameroon; Jaguaribe looks at novels and film toward the construction of a narrative of the favela in Brazil; and Shami examines narratives of Amman as they emerge in the daily talk of the urban elite.

There are also competing narratives that seek to produce very different imaginations of the same city, as LeVine illustrates in the case of Jaffa–Tel Aviv, where contestation involves not only the boundaries of the
city, but also whether there is in fact a single city or not. We also see in Çınar's and Roy's work how official discourse itself produces narratives of a city, as they attempt to direct the collective imagination into the conjuring up of a city in certain ways so as to fulfill particular goals of the modernizing state.

The second contribution of this book is to demonstrate the ways in which such collective imaginations are constitutive of not just communities and solidarities but also of space. Just as the “nation” is an abstract concept that is reified through a variety of different representations circulating in daily life, so is the “city.” However, it is easier to recognize the symbolic nature of the representations through which the “nation” is reified, due to the highly ambiguous nature of the referent, such that a person (the “national hero”), a piece of cloth (the flag), a statue, a coin, or a piece of land can all be equally effective in conjuring up the image of the nation.

Typical representations of the city are weaker than those of the nation. The reason is partly historical. The consolidation of modern nation-states significantly reduced the power of cities. This subordination of cities to nations in the modern era weakened the potency of urban symbols as well as the political and other forms of power cities had held. As a result, the “city” and the symbolic nature of representational aspects of the city’s being are more difficult to acknowledge. Despite the common knowledge that the city is socially heterogeneous and an uneven space that is difficult to represent, it is often naturalized and reduced to a map. This default representation, as one might call it, is often taken for granted, and city maps, with the unambiguous boundaries, are taken as “real,” not as representations, something that makes it more difficult to think about the city as a multifaceted imaginary space. Yet, as LeVine and Shami both demonstrate here, maps of a city can be quite inconclusive, ambiguous, and highly contested, thereby revealing that far from being objective, natural, and factual, they are equally metaphorical in functioning as symbolic tools with which a city is reified as a single tangible place in the collective imagination. In addition, other chapters demonstrate that cities are evoked and reified in the collective imagination not just through maps but also through monuments, statues, paintings, novels, films, residential projects, new schemes of urban planning, or even seemingly trivial eating habits.

As these studies illustrate, if cities are constructed through the act of collective imagination, then we need to look for the city in such media of the collective imagination as literary texts, popular media, films, the daily discursive reality of inhabitants, and numerous other forms of the public culture of daily life.

Regardless of the medium of representation, such narratives of the city produced through various acts of collective imagination serve to
construct, negotiate, and contest boundaries. Cities are products of many solidarities and boundaries. Not only territorial borders mark a city. A complex web of social, economic, and cultural boundaries operating along class, gender, ethnicity, race, and other lines concertedly shape the ways in which cities are imagined, perceived, and experienced. Such boundaries are present not only on maps, streets, and the physical structures that sustain the imagined city, but also in daily social interactions, habitual practices, images and icons, daily public discourse, and media representations. These boundaries are both internal and external—boundaries that set apart the urban from the rural, that mark and reify national territory and land, that separate ethnically, racially, or religiously defined communities, that organize class differences, that differentiate the local from the global, the inside from the outside, and map all these differences on to urban spaces, neighborhoods, and similar spatial divides.

Individual chapters explore various boundaries that constitute cities, as such boundaries become the sites of contestations and politics. They interrogate the ways in which class, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, alternative nationalisms and modernities, and postcolonial and diasporic experiences are implicated in the making and negotiation of the boundaries that constitute cities. They demonstrate that the search for the city is the search for the ways in which boundaries that constitute cities are produced, disseminated, institutionalized, contested, and negotiated in various instances of daily urban life constituting and continually reproducing the collective imagination.

In sum, rather than asking what a city is, this book asks how one gains access to understanding of the urban imaginary. Where exactly does one look? With what disciplinary combinations? What is the relation of the imagined city—whether in the mind of the urban actor or the scholarly analyst—to the everyday life in cities? Who and what represents that life? Who counts as an urban inhabitant? What are the bounds of the city? What practices of everyday life are relevant? Are there some experiences that more effectively open the city for inspection by the urban scholar and enable representation of the city? Is a city ever experienced in its totality and impartially? Is the scholar, like the urbanite, captured by parts and partiality?

These questions urge us to consider how meaningful it is to talk about the city as a single place where there is a characteristic urban experience. Doubtless, position and condition produce discrepancies in the ways in which a city is perceived and experienced. Indeed, the public culture of a city is an ongoing contest over terrain. Much of the city’s social and political dynamic derives from attempts to possess and appropriate this terrain. Of course, the contest is over not only physical territory but also all manner of public spaces (newspapers, schools, places of leisure, etc.). But the prize is always relative influence, legitimacy, and
security for the meanings particular individuals and groups, whether formally institutionalized or informal, give to their own lives and to civic life. The result is the constant making and remaking of urban culture as local, private, or public concerns are brought to the broader terrain of public culture. It is a reciprocal process; private concerns brought to the public culture change that culture, even as that culture affects the local and particular solidarities that constitute it. In other words, the ways in which a city is conceived, experienced, and represented are always conditioned by politics.

Motivated by these questions that challenge the notion of a city as a unified and contained thing, the body of work gathered here builds on the assumption that there is no single definition of the “city.” The city, we are suggesting, at least metaphorically, speaks back to the disciplines, and what it says depends on where the city is and what aspects of city life are being examined. The starting premise of the book is that it is not possible to represent a city in any impartial and objective way, independent of a context of networks and boundaries and from the many and diverse ways in which the city is subjectively experienced. Of course, assuming that there are as many “cities” as there are urbanites and analysts is reductionist in its own way. There are instances whereby the ideas of the city and urban practices partially converge. The challenge of contemporary urban analysis is thus to locate them even as the restless analyst recognizes the particularity of each perception and representation. But one must begin by opening up the analytical field, and this book seeks to explore and locate different ways in which the city is conjured up in political, spatial, and ideational practices as it becomes the locus of the modern, the national, or the global. If all cities are part of the modern, the national, and the global, their relations to these large categories and solidarities are distinctive to their time and place. Hence a wide range of cities are examined here.

The chapters look at diverse urban experiences in different parts of the world and seek to demonstrate the ways in which collective imaginations become possible through diverse mediums including cinema, market relations, narratives produced via informal networks, literary and textual imaginations, or the official discourse of the state as it is inscribed on the city through various urban development schemes, monuments, and structures. As these studies illustrate, in all these diverse cases, such interventions constitute the city by shaping or contesting its boundaries, its unity, its cohesion, and its singleness.

THE CITY AND ITS BOUNDARIES

The introductory chapter by Anthony King addresses the question of imagination by tracing the different ways in which the “city” has been conceptualized in the history of urban theory. King demonstrates that the
imagination of the city depends very much on the specific ways in which the larger world is imagined. In other words, the city is always conceptualized in relation to its externality, even if that externality is internalized and represented locally. As such, cities are imagined in relation to either the colonized society where they emerge as sites of resistance and transformation, or to the metropolitan power where they are conceptualized as sites of domination and assimilation, or to the larger region defined in terms of expanding trade relations and economic activity, or to the larger empire that has shaped and transformed many cities under its reign.

King sets the terms of analysis for the study of the city, which is adopted by the rest of the chapters, in that the attempt to locate the city involves the study of its many boundaries that constitute the city in relation to its externality. Indeed, each subsequent chapter does exactly this by examining the city in question through its boundaries, whether they are founded, redrawn, contested, negotiated, or transformed through the daily interactions of dwellers.

The rest of the chapters address three main themes in relation to cities and are grouped accordingly. The first set of chapters explore different ways in which the boundaries of a city are constructed in relation mainly to its exterior but including as well the ways divisions that may originate outside of the city affect its internal relations. Since cities are identified with place and are largely about spatial relations, place is often assumed to define their boundaries. More and more, however, the city is understood as extending beyond the local, beyond a particular place. At least, it is understood to be embedded in structures, networks, and processes that are larger than it. Since the end of the walled city, the question of what constitutes an urban boundary has been in various ways indefinite, more so now than ever, and these chapters illuminate that issue. They examine the relation of the city to its larger context, to its changing boundaries or extensions. How is the city constituted in relation to its boundaries that separate its exterior from its interior? How does the city contribute to the constitution of its larger context, whether that other context is geographical, ethnic, economic, cultural, or political? What is the extended city’s relation to the national state and state system? Questions of the definitions and relations of the “local,” “global,” and “cosmopolitan” are inevitably raised. In what way is the city present in the global and the global in the urban?

It is not only the sense of place that sets the boundaries of a city but also the movement of its inhabitants. How is the sense of place unsettled by such movement and exchange of the inhabitants of a city with its exterior? What boundaries are at stake when the movement and transactions of city dwellers increasingly involve places and people beyond the local? What are the ways in which spatial and other boundaries that are conditioned by dominant hierarchies of race, gender, ethnicity, or class
called into question and unsettled as a result of such expanding translocal, regional, and global relations?

Looking at the Laleli district of Istanbul where an informal market is formed between merchants from the former Soviet Union and local vendors, Yükseker draws attention to the city as borderland. According to Yükseker, this area of Istanbul emerges as an urban borderland because it does not belong to a particular nation or a city, but rather the space itself becomes a transnational space. It is transnational not only because the participants of this public culture formed around trade activity are from different countries in the region but also because their activity is not regulated and overseen by the state. What constitutes Laleli as a borderland is the unregulated nature of this activity, the ambiguous national affiliations of the constituents of its community, and the constancy of the movement and transnational flow of its constituents. These flows make it impossible to draw any stable boundaries that delineate the nation, its ethnicity, norms of citizenship and belonging, or even the city itself in an unproblematic way.

As Yükseker notes, Laleli is a socially constructed urban space “through the everyday encounters of people in streets, shops, and public places.” As she illustrates, a city space is formed through the daily activity and interaction of people, whereby a public culture is created that allows for the collective imagination of the city in a particular way, an imagination that comes to be institutionalized through daily activities and interactions. This notion of the borderland as a space that is created within a city shows how borders that constitute a city, or likewise a nation, are fluid, constantly changing, and porous, subverting attempts to arrive at unambiguous and clearly demarcated definitions of a city. Indeed, a borderland created right at the center of Istanbul as a space that is not really part of Istanbul, as a market that is not really national, and as a public culture whose participants do not necessarily reside in that city nor are citizens throws into question the definability of the city.

Fojas examines the construction and contestations of multiple boundaries that constitute a city, Los Angeles, through the medium of film. Basing her discussion on an analysis of several Latino films, Fojas examines subtle but powerful ways in which several borders, particularly of ethnicity and class, are produced and contested within the city as she traces them through the travels and experiences of Latinos. She demonstrates that there are at least four borders that are drawn through the daily interactions and movement of immigrants through the city.

First is the border between the national community and the Latin American immigrant where the Chicanos themselves serve as this boundary that separates the national self from its Latin American other. The presence of the Chicano, by competing with and overpowering the immigrant for jobs and belonging, serves to privilege the North American national subject. The second border is that which is drawn between

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different neighborhoods within the city that recall national boundaries. As most saliently illustrated in the film *The Border*, the border between Mexico and the United States is reproduced within the city between Mexican and Anglo-American neighborhoods. The third is the border that delineates North American national identity, particularly in contrast to the immigrant populations in Los Angeles, as these borders are drawn by immigration policies of the 1990s. Finally, Fojas explores the making of the border along class lines, dividing the city around wealth and poverty. While the wealthy neighborhoods of Hollywood remain inaccessible to them, a whole class of immigrants find themselves in a city that offers nothing but the unlivable conditions of poverty. Fojas draws our attention to another way in which a border city is produced and reproduced through a double representation: both through the experiences of immigrants and also through the medium of film.

Looking at the maps and other visual representations of Paris in the nineteenth century, Cohen examines how the ideology of the modern city shapes the boundaries, imaginations, and representations of the city. Cohen draws attention to the ways in which waterways in Paris, which played a central role in the city’s industrialization and thereby were very much part of the daily flow of urban life, have been systematically excluded from various later representations of the city. Cohen argues that this exclusion of the waterways is a product of the specific ideology of the city prevalent at the time, which celebrates stability, unity, and fixity across time and space in contrast to fluidity, disorder, and transience symbolized by waterways. In other words, the dominant ideology of modernity at the time that shapes the construction of the modern city as a place of permanence and solidity leaves no place for waterways in the imagination of Paris. Cohen also illustrates how, during the shifts and changes in the ideology of the city in the twentieth century, when the city came to be conceptualized as a place of flows and fluidity, transience and process, waterways were included back in the representations of Paris. Cohen’s account is a brilliant demonstration of the ways in which a particular imagination of a city comes to be institutionalized through maps and other visual representations and how such boundaries are drawn by the dominant ideology of the city at the time. If the prevailing ideology emphasizes constancy and solidity, the boundaries of the city exclude things that are fluid and transient, such as waterways.

**COMPETING NARRATIVES OF THE CITY: CONTESTED INCLUSIONS AND EXCLUSIONS**

The second set of chapters examines the making and remaking of cities in relation to contested boundaries and techniques of exclusions and inclusions. The boundaries of a city are negotiated not only in relation to
its externality but also to its internal others. This occurs in view of a real or imagined global or more specific gaze. A city is made and occurs remade on a daily basis through a complex network of interactions, negotiations, and contestations yielding several competing narratives and images of the city that seek to give it a particular presence and identity. These competing narratives are conditioned by underlying relations of class, ethnicity, gender, race, or religion and seek to attain a hegemonic status, or to sustain an existing hegemony by suppressing alternatives, or to emerge as a counter-hegemonic narrative. These chapters examine the making and remaking of a city around competing images and narratives that seek to either dictate the terms of inclusion and exclusion or otherwise contest existing norms and narratives that frame a city in ways that privilege a particular discourse.

AbdouMaliq Simone's chapter takes us to Douala in Cameroon, which is one of sub-Saharan Africa's largest cities, the significance of which lies in it being a commercial center rather than a place of administrative and political power. In Simone's account, what makes Douala an interesting case is how the construction of this city as a coherent and single place providing its inhabitants a solid sense of community is achieved through locally and spontaneously formed informal social collaboration and networks, rather than through formal governmental interventions and the activities of international agencies, as in the case with other African cities. Simone examines an incident that took place in July 2003 when motorbike drivers, called the bendskins, who meet the city's main transportation needs, rallied in protest of police brutality against the bendskins and literally shut down the city for eight hours. Simone demonstrates how a sense of community and solidarity is created among Doualans through the spontaneous formation of networks and collaboration that connect distant parts of the city. The specific activity of the bendskins as they “steer the roads” of the city functions as the very act by which a sense of the city as a single and connected place is created. Simone also examines the eating habits developed by the bendskins, who make conscious efforts to have their meals in different and new parts of the city, and produces narratives of this activity.

These experiences of the city of Douala through the activity of the bendskins show how a city is produced through collaboration by its inhabitants by producing and disseminating narratives of urbanity and a sense of urban cohesion. The travels of the bendskins in the city serve to weave a sense of social and spatial cohesion, produce and disseminate a common narrative of community, and mark the boundaries of the city. These travels that seek to continuously expand and cover new parts of the city function to map a sense of community onto the streets and diverse corners of the city, which are significant particularly because they serve a boundary-creating function in a place that is not coded, structured, and bound governmentally through engineered urban plans and maps.
Looking at one/two cities of Israel, Mark LeVine brings forth a situation where the lack of such a social cohesion and communal solidarity results in ambiguous boundaries that throw into question the very city status of a city. Closely examining the making of Israel’s “World City” Tel Aviv and its controversial city-turned-neighborhood Jaffa, Levine explores how the coexistence of competing narratives of the city throws into question the boundaries that constitute the city and separate it from its surroundings. LeVine demonstrates how Tel Aviv was made by overthrowing and erasing the existing Arab landscape during the British Mandate period. However, while the resulting new space was recognized as a city by its Jewish inhabitants and the British administration, the Arab population living there did not see it as such and instead treated the area as their agricultural land. This failure to create a single narrative of the city among its inhabitants resulted in a lack of correspondence between the image of the city conjured up by its name and the officially delineated place. As LeVine demonstrates, it is still not clear whether Jaffa and Tel Aviv are two cities or one. This ambiguity is particularly apparent in the space between the two cities where parts and patches of land used by Arabs as agricultural land have been turned into suburban residential areas by other city dwellers. These urban and rural patches are so interwoven as to defy all attempts to clearly delineate a boundary that separates the rural from the urban, the city from its surroundings, and Jaffa from Tel Aviv.

Jaguaribe’s essay examines overlapping images and narratives of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in Brazil that are mobilized toward the construction of the collective imaginations of the city and of the nation. Exploring realist literary and cinematic representations of the favelas since the 1960s, Jaguaribe argues that such representations function to produce new images of the modern city as a site of fragmentation, multiplicity, and ambiguity. These realist representations portray the favelas simultaneously as romanticized sites of carnival and entertainment and as dangerous sites of urban life exposing its community to the threat of drugs, shootings, crime, and violence. Jaguaribe suggests that such images are mobilized in order to create the effect of realism and become the media for the negotiation of the coherence, solidarity, and mapability of the city. In other words, we see again how competing images and narratives of the city and its neighborhoods serve to subvert and contest the boundaries of the modern city and are mobilized to challenge assumptions about the coherence and solidarity of city life and its boundaries.

The City and the Vision of the Nation

The third set of chapters studies the ways in which the city and urban space are related to nationalist projects that fuse the distinct but intertwined
aspirations for nation building and modernity. The urban experience often takes shape in relation to questions of belonging and identification. These chapters explore the ways in which the city becomes a site of national identification and the articulation of alternative visions of the nation. It explores the image and identity of a city as it becomes the articulation of a particular modernity or vision of a national future wherein different groups seek a sense of belonging. As the locus of modernity and nationalism, the city becomes the site for the negotiation of what is to be included into the making of the national community and what is to be excluded. This negotiation is often articulated as a question of integration and/or resistance of the particular and historical to the new and modern, the local to the national, the marginal to the center, and the rural and suburban to the urban. How does the city become the locus of identification that provides either a sense of belonging and participation in the national community or an estrangement from it? What are the ways in which cities and city spaces become the main sites from which national identities are forged, nations are built, and issues of modernity and modernization are negotiated? These chapters explore the ways in which the city becomes implicated in the consolidation of the nation-state and the articulation of contending notions of nationhood and modernity. They address questions related to nation building, including citizenship, territorial consolidation, centralization of power, integration and assimilation, or contestations of these as they are articulated spatially, architecturally, and geographically.

Seteney Shami’s and Alev Çınar’s chapters both examine the city in relation to the nation-building project. While Shami explores the case of Amman, which emerges as an incomplete and disjointed city as a result of the inconclusiveness of the nation-building project in Jordan, Çınar looks at the building of Ankara as a capital city that is the product of a carefully forged and engineered nation-building process.

Shami demonstrates how the urban elite in Amman continually draw their urban identities from other cities in the region rather than Amman. She also shows how the lack of a consistent and hegemonic national project results in the changing of urban planning schemes from one administration to another, which in turn results in the lack of a consistent and overarching urban discourse and hence negates Amman’s identity as a city. One of the most revealing signs of this inconsistency and the lack of a hegemonic urban discourse is the continual displacement of the city center that marks Amman as a city with no center.

The significance of Shami’s discussion is further emphasized by Çınar’s study of the making of Ankara, where the nation-building project initiated and engineered by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk resulted in the construction of a new city in the image of the nation where every statue, monument, square, and avenue was built and named so as to create a new nation and constitute its citizens. Çınar demonstrates how the
city of Ankara was built with the central concern of constituting and institutionalizing the founding ideology of the new Turkish state and establishing the state as the agent of modernity that inscribed the nation into space. Examining the building of the city center, erection and placement of monuments, and the making of Atatürk’s Mausoleum Anıtkabir and other significant urban sites, Çınar illustrates the ways in which Turkish nationalism, secularism, and official modernism were instituted against their alternatives through the construction of the city, the arrangement of its spaces, the engineering of its appearance, and the regulation of the flow of daily life. Çınar argues that this carefully engineered creation of a new national city and a modern urban life in Ankara was in effect the material consolidation of the new nation.

Looking at the construction of the steel towns of India (namely, towns conjured up by the national state around steel plants so as to provide residential areas for the workers), Srirupa Roy diverts our gaze to new urban spaces that are created by postcolonial nationalism between the center and the boundaries of the nation. These steel towns created “elsewhere,” outside the center, also have boundary drawing functions in the sense that they carry and expand the limits of the nation beyond what is constructed at the center. Roy draws parallels between the construction of such steel towns and the Nehruvian nation-building process at the time, such that the steel towns were erected as symbols of “progress and growth of the nation through the planned guidance of the state” toward the fulfillment of the national dream that the new Indian state promised its citizens.

Tracing the trajectory of these towns from promised dreamworlds into sites of disintegrated communal solidarity, Roy explores how these steel towns turned from being sites of the national promise to a “national problem.” During the 1960s when most of India was struck by interreligious violence, similar riots and demonstrations also resulted in the rapid disintegration of the communities of the steel towns. Roy argues that the failure of the state to effectively address the issue of interreligious violence in India was replicated in the reform plans of the steel towns, resulting in failed attempts to resolve the communal fragmentation. Roy’s account once again demonstrates the ways in which the construction and transformation of cities and urban communities are an integral and constitutive part of the nation-building process.

The last chapter in this section also draws attention to the close-knit relation between the making of a city and nation building. Writing on the reconstruction of Beirut and particularly the city center after the civil war, Maha Yahya explores the place of the city in shaping the contours of modernity and defining national identity. Yahya demonstrates how the rebuilding of the city is inextricably linked to the rebuilding of the nation in Lebanon after the country was torn by a bloody civil war that lasted
fifteen years. Yahya illustrates the ways in which the making of a new city center in the absence of a clearly defined national identity involved the careful erasure of all memories of the civil war and of all the deaths—both the deaths of citizens and the death of the city. The post–civil war Lebanese state sought to build a new national identity and history that omits the civil war experience altogether. Yahya argues that this “clean-slate” view of a new national project is reified in the making of the new city center in Beirut.

Notes


5. David Harvey, Paris, Capital of Modernity (New York: Routledge, 2003). It is worth noting that while Harvey has Benjamin very much in mind, his proclaimed model is the classic history of Vienna by Carl Schorske, which reveals the dissolution of a common, civic sense in Vienna (Carl E. Schorske, Fin de Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979]).


8. The development of modern maps as the bird’s eye view of space, thereby giving the impression of objectivity, is discussed by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983), 163–86.