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The Urban Village, Agrarian Transformation, and Rentier Capitalism in Gurgaon, India

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Abstract: Gurgaon, India's "millennium city", is today synonymous with India's embrace of global real estate capital and private sector-led urban development. This paper asserts that Gurgaon's spectacular urbanisation has been fundamentally underpinned by an uneven process of land acquisition, exemption and agrarian transformation. Shifting away from dispossession-centred analyses of contemporary urbanisation in India, this paper explores Gurgaon's "urban villages" to consider the uneven integration of agrarian classes into emerging urban real estate markets. Through an examination of differential experiences of land acquisition and agrarian social change among Gurgaon's landowning classes, the paper seeks to trace complex and nonlinear processes of agrarian transformation which make possible landscapes of global accumulation.

Keywords: India, accumulation by dispossession, urban studies, agrarian transitions, urban villages, articulation

In late 2015, I sat with Mukesh Yadav in Badshahpur urban village in Gurgaon in the north Indian state of Haryana. Badshahpur had been incorporated into the city in the Gurgaon-Manesar Urban Development plan 2021, bringing expanses of the village's agricultural land into the urban real estate market. In 2010, agricultural land sales in Badshahpur spiked after a group of developers lobbied the Haryana government to expand the urbanisable area to include a further 2000 acres of land in neighbouring Sohna (*Times of India* 2015). Mukesh sold his four acres of agricultural land in 2008 to Unitech, one of the largest real estate developers in the country, for 30 lakh rupees per acre, earning himself 1.2 crore from the land sale.¹ Haryana's urban planning legislation exempts all residential [*abadi*] village land from urban land acquisition and planning and development regulations, leaving pockets of rural "urban village" land, like that of Badshahpur, peppered across cities like Gurgaon. Seeking to capitalise on rumours of Sohna's pending urbanisation, Mukesh used the cash from his agricultural land sale to buy eight acres of land in northern Sohna. He remarked: "I built myself a *pukka* house and bought some land over in Sohna, let's see if we can sell it ... land is the only way we can make money these days".

Along with his investment in peri-urban agricultural land, Mukesh had joined a group of fellow villagers to invest in a new shopping mall development in central Gurgaon. The developer leading the project had drawn in 160 crore rupees of investment from around 350 small landholders like Mukesh across south Gurgaon.

Unbeknown to Mukesh, the developer had not received a license for the development. Three years after their initial investment the shopping mall was nowhere to be seen. Mukesh remarked: "We were scammed, looted. All of us here invested, each of us gave five lakh, ten lakh, twenty lakh ... the developer's in jail now". Mukesh and his friends who I sat and discussed real estate business with that afternoon were eager to impress that, despite their active participation in real estate markets across the city, Gurgaon's rapid urbanisation was no success story for the landowners who remain in the exempt urban villages. Mukesh insisted: "Listen son, we are peasants, we are in a situation without future nor past. We should never have sold our land".

Gurgaon, India's "millennium city", is today synonymous with India's embrace of global real estate capital and privatised modes of urban development (Gururani 2013; Searle 2016). This paper argues that, the "Gurgaon model" of urbanisation, which has transformed 35,000 acres of agricultural land into urban property since the 1980s (Gururani 2013), has been fundamentally underpinned by an uneven process of agrarian transformation, involving the exemption of residential *abadi* land from urbanisation, the designation of "urban villages" as rural, and the differentiated integration of landowning communities into emerging networks of urban rentier accumulation (see Figure 1).²

As my encounter with Mukesh suggests, Gurgaon's story is not one of wholesale agrarian transition, led by a unitary "carrier class" of landowning capitalists (Byres 1991), nor one of dispossession and the violent expropriation of land by the state and global capital (Levien 2013). Rather urban and industrial development in India's "millennium city" has been facilitated by an uneven process of land acquisition, exemption and agrarian transformation. This highly differentiated process of agrarian transformation in the region has mediated dominant landowning communities'



Figure 1: New residential developments on Kherki Duala village land in Gurgaon

opposition to rapid agrarian change, unevenly integrated well-placed villagers into urban land markets, while constraining others like Mukesh to petty rentiership and speculative investments in land and property across the city.³

Nowhere is this process of differentiation more evident than in the peculiar space of the urban village. In this paper I conceptualise the “urban villages”, areas of land deep within the city designated “rural”, as social and spatial articulations of Gurgaon’s uneven capitalist development (Hall 1980). In doing so, this paper explores how Gurgaon’s contemporary urbanisation is underpinned by both specific histories of agrarian reform which paved the way for the emergence of urban villages in the early 1980s, and differentiated experiences of agrarian change among Gurgaon’s landowning communities. As Mukesh’s statement suggests, processes of “global” urbanisation, characterised by some as “planetary” in nature (Brenner and Schmid 2014), are not defined wholly by logics of an eternal “urban” capital, but are rather constituted through the uneven articulation of multiple, unequal logics of land, territory and value.

In this paper I draw on Hall’s (1980) influential work on capitalist development in South Africa, alongside the Marxist agrarian transition debates (Byres 1991; Chari 2004; Hart 1998), to disrupt analyses which understand India’s “remarkable urban moment” as either coherently “urban” or dispossessive in nature, emphasising the differentiated and subversive internal relations (Hart 2006) that underscore Gurgaon’s spectacular production as a site of “global” capital accumulation. The production of differentiated landscapes of accumulation in Gurgaon, in this respect, are not simply a consequence of the uniform development of a *global* capital, but rather hold to an uneven “molecular existence” (Gidwani 2008), a dominating structure that articulates with a variety of contingent social relationships, modes of (re)production, and forms of value to produce uneven and differentiated landscapes of accumulation.

In order to explore this differentiated and spatially uneven process of agrarian change, I will first examine the agrarian transition debates which have long challenged Eurocentric dispossession-centred understandings of capitalist urban development and examine the multiple, nonlinear and locally mediated ways in which capitals develop in different contexts. Building from this, the first half of the paper will explore how Haryana’s urban planning legislation, alongside the state’s uneven agrarian transition throughout the post-Independence period came to produce “urban villages” across Gurgaon, a phenomenon which would shape the agrarian social structure in ways crucial for urbanisation from the early 1980s. The second half of the paper will then explore how the Gurgaon’s spatially uneven process of urbanisation is expressed in both uneven articulations of “urban” and “rural”, and differentiated processes of rentier accumulation engaged in by the city’s former landowning classes.

Beyond Dispossession

Dispossession is something of a master narrative within contemporary urban studies. From Marx’s formulation of “primitive accumulation” in his study of the English enclosures, to the “new enclosures” literatures (De Angelis 2001; Sanyal 2007) and

Harvey's (2003) influential expansion in "accumulation by dispossession"; dispossessions have been understood as foundational to processes of urban and industrial development the world over (Sassen 2014). Within the Indian context, this scholarly tradition has been mobilised to understand the Indian state's attempts to facilitate capital's access to large swathes of rural land through eminent domain in the post-liberalisation period (Banerjee-Guha 2013; Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011). Sanyal (2007), for example, mobilises Marx's primitive accumulation to conceptualise "postcolonial capital" in India as a dual process of violent capitalist expulsion and state-led developmental rehabilitation, productive of the hyper-exclusionary and unequal landscapes of new urban India (Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011). For Sanyal, "postcolonial capital" is as such constituted as a "complex" of a stable, dispossession-centred capital and a distorting and marginalised non-capital.

Yet what sets Gurgaon apart from these narratives of dispossessive urbanisation is the leading role the private real estate sector has played in land acquisitions. In Gurgaon there are few outright "dispossessions", 85% of urban land in the city was bought by developers on the real estate market. Indeed an examination of the manner in which land was acquired by the real estate sector over the past 30 years (see Table 1) reveals a process of urbanisation mediated by the complex articulation of emerging real estate actors, agrarian land reforms, urban planning regulations and existing inequalities in the agrarian social structure.

In this paper, against analyses which foreground dispossession as a universal attribute of a stable capitalist urban, I seek to develop an understanding of the dialectical and uneven *internal* relations which constitute landscapes of capital in specific historical and geographical milieus. In doing so, I seek to draw from the Marxist agrarian tradition which has long sought to break from conceptions of capitalist development which centre on the unfolding of a stable European form within multiple, different contexts (Chari 2004; Gidwani 2008; Hart 1998).

Articulation and Agrarian Transitions

The classical "agrarian question" as discussed by Lenin (1964) and Kautsky (1988) was concerned with how, in different historical contexts, predatory landed property, the peasantry and feudal agrarian relations are overcome and capitalist social relations established. Central to the agrarian tradition as such has been the quest to break from the canonical English model of primitive accumulation and map out the multiple ways in which capitalism has developed in differing contexts. In this regard, Byres' (1991, 1996) influential development of the agrarian question was concerned with the particular, differential conditions which lead to "successful" agrarian transition; the conditions within agriculture which contribute to primary accumulation for the purposes of industrialisation (Byres 1991:11–12). This, according to Byres, does not *always* require the development of capitalism within the countryside, rather for Byres the agrarian question can be effectively "resolved" when the agrarian social structure no longer presents significant obstacles to capitalist development (Byres 1991:11–12). Crucially, this may be achieved through any number of means not limited to the English model of enclosures.

More recently, in an influential essay, Bernstein (2006) challenges the enduring relevance of the “agrarian question of capital” in the wake of post-colonial agrarian reform and the advent of globalisation. For Bernstein, both colonial intervention and post-colonial agrarian land reforms enacted throughout through the 19th and 20th centuries had resolved the question of non-capitalist agrarian relations globally. As such, for Bernstein non-capitalist social relations in the countryside no longer pose an obstacle to processes of proletarianisation nor agricultural capitalist development. Further, Bernstein (2006) following Byres (1996) argues that the “developmental” agrarian question, that of how to generate agricultural-industrial linkages to spur capitalist development, a preoccupation of many post-colonial governments throughout the 20th century, is today largely bypassed by the wide availability of global capital. Upon the opening up of global markets in the late 20th century, the imperative to develop national agricultural linkages to spur industrial development have weakened; the agrarian question of capital, according to Bernstein, resolved by global capital.

Indeed it has been argued that such a “resolution” can be seen in dynamics of economic transformation in contemporary India. Since formal liberalisation of the Indian economy in the early 1990s, there has been a dramatic growth in Finance, Services and Real Estate (FSRE) sectors and collapse in agriculture. In 1951 the services sector contributed a 30% share of total GDP, a figure that rose to 38% in 1981 and 60% in 2014. Within that same period, agriculture declined from 52% to 14%, while industry increased modestly from 16% to 26%.⁴ It is in this sense that scholars argue India has experienced industry-less growth (Maurya and Vaishampayan 2012). While organised manufacturing accounted for 14% of GDP and 13% of the workforce in 2012, the FSRE sector accounted for 20% and 2% respectively (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2014). Such phenomena, Lerche (2013) argues, indicates that by the 1990s the Indian economy had little need for agricultural capital transfers nor rural primary markets.

Yet such capital-centric understandings of agrarian change which purport a “resolution” to the agrarian question and successful “completion” of agrarian transition ignore the enduring internal contradictions which riddle the uneven development of capital, and underestimate the crucial ways in which historically and geographically specific agrarian determinates continue to be deeply implicated into contemporary capitalist development (Watts and Goodman 1997). Byres’ contributions to debates on the agrarian question are so useful precisely because they allow us to think about “transitions” not as unilinear, nor as unfolding from a stable economic logic, but rather as the multiple, heterogeneous *social and spatial* articulations of capitalist development within particular historical and geographical milieus. As Watts and Goodman (1997:13) argue, the intersectoral surplus flows of agrarian transitions are not only “surplus value via terms of trade ... but in social, cultural and institutional terms as well ... [their] origins are prefigured in agrarian settings”. In this regard, postcolonial Marxist agrarian scholarship (Chari 2004; Gidwani 2008; Hart 1998) draws attention to the central role in which “difference” plays in constituting capitalist social relations, and the importance of locally specific histories and social dynamics in obstructing or facilitating urban and industrial development.

The postcolonial Marxist agrarian literature (Chari 2017; Hart 2006) productively speaks to and at times explicitly draws from Hall's (1980) influential work on capitalist development in Apartheid South Africa. Here Hall explores the ways in which race is put to work within a specific historical conjuncture to actively structure uneven development of capital in South Africa. Against analyses which understand economic and social relations as distinct, coherent phenomena, Hall calls for an understanding of capitalist hegemony as articulated through multiple, historically specific practices of race, class and capital. Crucially, Hall expands an Althusserian reading of "articulation" by focusing on the articulation of materiality with historically specific meanings, experiences and practices (Chari 2017). For Hall, the racialization of modes of production in South Africa is not "eternal", but under constant renewal through discourses, lived experiences and practices.

In the remainder of this paper I seek to show the ways in which Gurgaon's "urban villages" materially and discursively articulate the city's uneven and differential urbanisation; deeply entangled and augmented by regionally specific agrarian histories. As Roy (2016) notes, the agrarian question in India today is deeply entangled in the urban land question; that of translating complex histories of agrarian settlement into urban property relations legible to global and domestic capital. While sectoral linkages from the agricultural sector may have been "bypassed" in the advent of liberalisation in India, Gurgaon's agrarian transition continues to have enduring material and discursive relevance to the particular development of urban and industrial accumulation in the city.

In the following section, I will explore the particular social forces which augmented real estate capital's access to rural land on market prices. Gurgaon's peculiar agrarian change has magnified fractures within the dominant landowning caste, between those fully incorporated into urban land markets and those who tentatively participate in petty rentiership and land and property speculation. Such fragmentation draws attention to the ways in which agrarian transitions implicated in Gurgaon's urban and industrial development are highly differentiated, laminated by existing agrarian inequalities, meanings and practices. In order to understand these articulations we must first explore the particular conditions which gave rise to Gurgaon's urban villages.

The Urban Village

Planning the Urban Villages

The presence of urban villages in Gurgaon can be traced to agrarian land reforms and urban planning regulations in Haryana from the 1960s. In 1963, while Haryana remained a region of the state of Punjab, the influential Chief Minister Parthap Singh Kairon passed the Punjab Scheduled Roads and Controlled Areas Restriction of Unregulated Development Act (PSRCA). The PSRCA sought to control and regulate urban development in the state by identifying urbanisable areas within which the transferral of agricultural to urban land would be managed by a parastatal urban development authority. In the Haryana region, this was delegated to the Haryana Urban Development Authority, hereafter HUDA.

Crucially, the PSRCA excluded all village residential *abadi* land from urbanisation. Abadi lands, what are today termed *urban villages*, are demarcated from urbanisable land by the *lal dora*, a boundary line between agricultural and village residential land invented by colonial governors to distinguish residential from agricultural taxable areas. As a consequence, as rapid urbanisation began in earnest in Gurgaon in the early 1980s, the state and private sector were only able to purchase agricultural land, leaving pockets of urban village land deep within urban areas excluded from land acquisition and HUDA's development and planning regulations. In Gururani's (2013) exposition of the "flexible" planning technologies which ensconced the development trajectory of Gurgaon, the author notes that amidst the fervent political jockeying between Haryana politicians and real-estate developers in the early 1980s, the boundary lines of PSRCA-designated urban areas were routinely redrawn and improvised to accommodate the interests of various political pacts. As of 2011, there were 94 urban villages within the Gurgaon-Manesar Urban Complex (see Figure 2).

The PSRCA is characteristic of Nehruvian developmentalism that sought to protect landowners from state land acquisition, and regulate urbanisation through modernist planning and development technologies (Roy 2007). This protection is especially pertinent in Haryana, where dominant landowning caste communities, the Jats and Yadavs, are both politically and socially dominant.

In 1975 the Haryana Chief Minister, Bansi Lal, passed the Haryana Development and Regulation of Urban Areas Act (HDRUA) that allowed landowners to acquire development licenses from the State government for the purchase and development of land within controlled areas. While under the short stewardship of Bansi Lal licenses were reserved for HUDA projects, after the 1979 election of pro-business Bhajan Lal, licenses were opened up to the private sector, initiating a process of private sector-led urban development which would later come to be known as the "Gurgaon model".

HDRUA allowed developers to directly negotiate and purchase land from landowners within controlled areas. During this period Gurgaon had no municipal level government; instead the city was governed directly by municipal council through the Chief Minister's office. As Gururani (2013) notes, this centralisation of jurisdiction provided the Chief Minister significant power in negotiating with real-estate developers, improvising urban planning codes, and issuing development licenses. In this manner, while the HDRUA's initial purpose was to introduce a formal system of land development to be managed and regulated by HUDA, from the 1980s onwards successive Haryana Chief Ministers, who had sole discretionary power to authorise development licenses, utilised the legislation to authorise the sale of vast tracts of agricultural land⁵ in the region (Hiro 2015). Bhajan Lal, for example, allocated 6000 acres in development licenses to the private sector between 1979 and 1996.

The HDRUA is significant to the contemporary landscape of Gurgaon for at least two reasons. First, while the PSRCA gave the state government "powers of relaxation" in land use change, the HDRUA bypassed the requirements for land use change approvals within the urbanisable area altogether. The urbanisable areas of Gurgaon—at the time agricultural land—were at once prefigured as urban,

Land Tenure and the Green Revolution

Finally, both historic land tenure systems and the uneven impacts of the Green Revolution across Haryana from the 1950s fundamentally shaped Gurgaon's uneven urbanisation. Land ownership in Gurgaon has historically been dominated by two communities, the Yaduvanshi Ahirs, or Yadavs, and Jats. While Jats are a much more powerful political force within Haryana as a whole, Yadavs are numerically and politically dominant in the Gurgaon district, returning Yadav politicians to both national and state assemblies in every election since the state was inaugurated.

In 2015, I carried out a household survey of 198 households across Gurgaon's urban villages (see Table 1). The survey recorded data on land sales, compensation, investments of landowning households over the past 30 years. According to the survey, Yadavs own the largest plots of land in the city, with average individual landholdings of 11 acres compared with Jats' nine acres, Gujjars' six and a half acres and Scheduled Castes' three acres. Historically, Jats in Gurgaon have held their land on *bhayacharya* tenures where land is formally subdivided non-ancestrally across the village, leading to highly fragmented, small landholdings. In contrast, Yadavs have historically held their land through *pattidari* tenures where land is held through ancestral lineage and family members own large, discontinuous plots of land, and cultivate land or supervise farm workers in common. Successive colonial land settlement reports from 1872 note that the commonly owned, large landholdings of the Yadavs produced high yields and with it high tax revenues (Channing and Wilson 1882). This system of land tenure, which favoured revenue extraction, played into colonial governors' construction of the Yadavs as an "industrious, thrifty and prudent" landowning caste (Channing and Wilson 1882). The priming of the Yadav community as a dominant landowning force, evocative of Chari's (2004) work on Tiruppur's Gounder caste, is perhaps explained by the high levels of participation of Yadav men in the colonial military and, unlike Meo and Gujjar castes who were much derided by colonial officials, low levels of participation in the 1857 mutiny in the region (Channing and Wilson 1882).

Formal land consolidation was carried out across Haryana under the East Punjab Holdings (Consolidation and Prevention of Fragmentation) Act 1948. The act intended to reduce land fragmentation and produce more productive, gridded and legible agricultural farmland, yet was itself a highly uneven and politicised process, tending to provide dominant landowning communities with larger, more productive plots and significantly reducing the availability of village common land which landless communities relied upon (Bonner 1987; Narain and Vij 2016; Oldenburg 1987).

Equally important, as Gururani (2013) notes, was the highly uneven impact of the Green Revolution across Haryana. The Indian state's attempts to induce "successful" agrarian transition in north-west India through the introduction of new technologies and high-yield seed varieties produced an uneven development of agrarian capitalism across the state. As such, the land consolidation and increases in farm work that the Green Revolution brought to other parts of the state largely bypassed Gurgaon, which was considered to have unproductive and barren soil

(Bhalla 1999; Gururani 2013). As Bhalla (1999) notes, in other parts of Haryana the Green Revolution brought consolidated landholdings within the hands of large landowners and pushed small-scale landowners across the state into waged farm work. Gurgaon's marginalisation from Haryana's agrarian transition, together with the urban growth in neighbouring Delhi and regional changes in non-agricultural wages, meant that employment patterns among landowning communities had long diversified out of land cultivation. As a result, land prices in Gurgaon were much lower than in neighbouring districts, thus negotiation over land sales was far less contentious (Gururani 2013).

In sum, the presence of urban villages in Gurgaon find their genesis in modernist planning policy and specific histories of agrarian transition in the region. It is in this manner that urban villages have come to articulate particular agrarian histories of land reform with emerging dynamics of urban accumulation following the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the early 1990s. As Bernstein (2006:453) notes, the passage of agrarian land reforms throughout the post-colonial period fundamentally altered the terrain of agrarian development, shaping the character of the peasantry in ways fundamentally distinct from previous periods:

who got land, what land, how much land, and what they were able to do with it ... often followed ... the contours of existing, typically intricate, structures of inequality in agrarian populations beyond that represented by landed property.

In Gurgaon, as will be explored in the following section, land reforms put in place in the post-Independence period would come to articulate with inequalities in the existing agrarian social structure to mediate the process of urban and industrial development in the contemporary period.

Land Acquisition

As Table 1 demonstrates, the outcomes of land acquisition for individual landowners were fundamentally shaped by existing inequalities in the agrarian social structure and the capacity of landowners to hold onto land and sell to land brokers or developers at the right time.⁷ The difference in price per acre (PPA) received by landowners provides an indication of the various factors shaping the material benefits of land acquisition to landowners. As the survey demonstrates, those whose land was acquired after the year 2000 received 182 times more per acre than those prior to 1990; and those who sold their land to private developers received, on average, eight times more per acre than those whose land was acquired by the government. While there is some inconsistency in PPA received by those with small to medium landholdings, those with more than 10 acres of land received 1.5 times more than both categories. In sum, according to the survey, landowners who received the highest price for their land either had landholdings of 10 acres or more, sold their land after 2000, or had land purchased by private developers and not acquired by the state.⁸

The dramatic increase in PPA post 2000 can be partly explained by heightened deregulation of the real-estate and mortgage sector at a national scale in the

Table 1: Taken from field research survey ($n=184$).

	Median price per acre	% of those who invested in property
<i>Landholding (acres)</i>		
3 and less	650,000.00	56
3.1–9.9	562,500.00	68
More than 10	1,034,000.00	98
<i>Year¹</i>		
1963–1989	100,000.00	60
1990–2000	650,000.00	73
2001–2014	18,750,000.00	83
<i>Type of sale</i>		
Government	325,000.00	69
Private	2,675,000.00	83
<i>Caste</i>		
Guajar	196,000.00	6
Jat	260,520.00	92
Brahmin	784,000.00	58
Yadav	1,100,000.00	80

¹Real prices adjusted to 2014 calculated for PPA-year: 3,500,000 (1960–1989); 6,000,000 (1990–2000); 36,000,000 (2001–2014).

2000s. The deregulation of foreign direct investment into real estate in 2005, and subsequent entrance of global capital into Gurgaon's real estate market, predictably coincides with a spike in PPAs. This temporal quality to land prices was equally facilitated by the state. Between 1989 and 2012 the Gurgaon urbanisable area—as detailed across four city masterplans—increased by close to 300%, from 9900 acres to 37,000 acres, opening up just over 27,000 acres of land to alienation.

The difference in PPA between government and private acquisition can in part be explained by the politics of the “circle rate”, the government-recognised value of land. State “circle rates” are purposefully set low in order to provide the government with access to cheap land by eminent domain when needed.⁹ This was described to me as a “win–win situation” by a number of brokers, landowners and state bureaucrats. The meteoric rise in market prices across the city from the early 2000s as the urbanisable area expanded, and real-estate investment and mortgage lending was liberalised, produced large differentials between government-recognised and market prices, stoking local opposition to circle rates and prompting a proliferation of lawsuits against government acquisitions.¹⁰ While government acquisitions have historically formed a minority of acquisitions in Gurgaon, amidst widespread opposition, government acquisitions in the survey fell sharply between 1963 and 2000, contributing to the higher average PPA in the post-2000 period.

During any period spent in Gurgaon, one will become accustomed to the sight of lone villas sticking out from otherwise cleared agricultural fields, encircled by peculiarly shaped acquisition boundaries, while my conversations with landowners throughout my field research were littered with extended explanations of

negotiation and counter negotiation between landowners, brokers, developers and the state (see Figure 1). Landowners privileged with class power or social proximity to rural and urban state bodies lobby for the release of their land. Those facing state compulsory acquisitions quickly sell land to brokers or developers at higher prices, or in some cases form business partnerships with developers to push through the release of their land. Access to this kind of negotiated politics generally reflects pre-existing dynamics of class and social capital within urban villages that has been amplified by the urbanisation process.¹¹

Nevertheless, the discrepancies in the PPA received by landowners point toward significant inequalities within agrarian communities which shape particular, differentiated agrarian transitions. Those landowners whose land was acquired by the government, which is more likely to have occurred prior to 2000, have not been able to mobilize the same kinds of compensation capital as those who were able to sell their land to private developers. As such, this group of former landowners are far more likely to rely on rents and internal village property as key accumulative assets in the post-agrarian period. I call this group of former agriculturalists *village rentiers*.¹² However, those who were alienated from their land through private-sector acquisitions from the mid-1990s onwards, and as such received significantly higher PPAs, are far more likely to derive their incomes from investments in residential and industrial real estate in Gurgaon. I call this group of former agriculturalists *elite rentiers*. The difference between an elite rentier and a village rentier is at once blurred and also reflective of distinct intra-caste class hierarchies.

Despite discrepancies between the ability of landowners to profit from the land acquisition process, the data show high levels of engagement in rentier accumulation following land sales. That those who received the highest PPA invested in property and or land is hardly surprising (98% of those with landholdings of 10 acres or more invested in property and/or land). More interestingly perhaps, investment in land and or property among those who received the lowest PPA, those we might consider as lacking the class power, cultural capital and state access to significantly influence the PPA, remained at just below 60%. At the very least this demonstrates the prodigious character of participation in urban land markets by differing factions of the landowning communities from as early as the 1960s. The following section will draw on interview and ethnographic data to explore the uneven ways which emerging networks of rentier accumulation, augmented by the particular nature of Gurgaon's agrarian transition, shaped the development of urban and industrial accumulation

The Village Rentier

In early 2014, I sat on the stoop of an empty office room in Kapashera¹³ while Sanjay and three others smoked hookah on plastic chairs watching the deluge of people passing through one of the village's main arterial lanes. Around 90% of Kapashera residents are from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and migrated to Kapashera from the early 1990s in order to work in the garment-export companies in Gurgaon's *Udyog Vihar* industrial estate. Sanjay was a tall brooding man, who wore

kajal eyeliner and the white *kurta* that marked out the minority Yadav landlords from majority migrant residents in the village. Sanjay was the middle brother of three sons, all living in Kapashera. Like many elders from the Yadav community his father had been in the military. Most of the family's agricultural land was bought by private developers for luxury farmhouse development in the 1980s, leaving them with a small plot of land across the Gurgaon border. Sanjay explained to me that it wasn't until after having sold his land that migrant workers began to come to the village and his fortunes dramatically transformed. Starting in the early 1990s, along with his elder brother, the family began to develop a mixture of single-room rental lines and blocks for migrant workers on a small plot of land they owned on the western side of the village. A worker "line" of rooms typically consists of two rows of five to ten rooms separated by an open courtyard. A "block" then is a vertical development of the line incrementally built up three or four floors.¹⁴

From the mid-1990s the family were able to invest in more buildings, starting with single worker lines by the *gande nali gali* (dirty river alley) which were later developed into larger four-storey blocks. Sanjay now has 200 rooms across five buildings on rent in the village, as well as a number of lines built on agricultural land in neighbouring Dundahera village. Sanjay's net monthly income from rent alone is around 6 lakh rupees (US\$9000), significantly above the median income in the Delhi NCR. Principally deriving income from renting rooms to migrant workers within the village, having land acquired in the 1980s, Sanjay's family are an example of successful village rentiers.

After finishing up the hookah I sat in Sanjay's empty office, occupied by a small desk stacked with battered pieces of paper and two plastic chairs. Kapashera has many of these empty office rooms, sometimes used to sell cooking gas or SIM cards, other times used as temporary accommodation for workers during periods of the high labour demand. I had assumed Sanjay's room was much like the others and asked him what he sold from the room: "This is for our committee", he replied. He explained that as landlords with large incomes, they needed somewhere safe to put their money, and other landlords to invest it with. Initially the committee, which consisted of six Yadav men from the village, would collectively pool money each month to pay for the construction of new rental buildings in the village or for weddings. However, today Sanjay's committee were earning enough to invest in agricultural land in areas touted for urbanisation, and plots in Gurgaon's developed colonies. He remarked, with much pride: "In the beginning we were dealing with just a few lakhs but these days we have crores, so our ambitions are higher ... we have bought plots here and invested in a mall in New Gurgaon". Like Mukesh's village investment group detailed previously, I encountered these kinds of savings committees in urban villages across Gurgaon. In part these committees are a legacy of Yadav land tenure systems, wherein land plots were held commonly across a family. In the contemporary period Yadav families have tended to share incomes from land sales across the male members of the family and invest in common. The savings committee, then, is somewhat of a coming together of the family-based agrarian investment unit across the urban village.

Sanjay's dilapidated office, where he would sit and oversee migrant passers-by each day as if they were agricultural labourers on his forgotten fields, was used to discuss new investments, sewerage or water problems in the blocks, plans for adding new floors to buildings and issues with migrant tenants. One morning I spent an hour sitting with Sanjay and his co-committee member Praveen while they heatedly discussed the expansion of a worker line into agricultural land through a series of sketches on the back of a piece of paper. Sanjay's office doubled up as a space where problems would be worked out, day-workers could be hired, and committee meetings held.

In the urban villages that surround Gurgaon's industrial estates, landlords also rented out space for informal workshops, or *fabricators*, providing production back-up to the factories in the adjacent industrial estate. There are around 300 fabricators in Kapashera and Dundaheera working with companies in the formal industrial areas of Gurgaon. Manufacturing industry in the post-liberalisation period has a highly precarious position within existing cities that have experienced both increasing land prices and political opposition from urban-elites who have sought to cleanse India's cities of "dirtying" industries (Sharan 2006). As such, the general trend in India's traditional metropolises has been the expulsion of "informal" workshop manufacturing to the urban periphery and its replacement with FSRE sector development. The transfer of manufacturing industry to rural and peripheral areas has, in turn, been a key frontier of contemporary dispossession. In Gurgaon, however, small-scale manufacturing facilities within the urban village provide a vital outlet for the city's organised garment-exports industry at times of high demand and seasonal labour scarcity. More broadly, the enclaving of village land from land acquisition provides cheap social reproduction for the city's industries.

The utilisation of worker and petty industrialist rent as capital for investing in property highlights the articulatory between uneven spaces of accumulation in the city: Gurgaon's industry which requires cheap accommodation for low-waged workers, and Gurgaon's real estate sector, which survives from the increasing profitability of land. The production of differentiated rentier networks across Gurgaon's urban villages then serves to underwrite both the urban and industrial capitalist production, and demonstrates the key role that local landowners play in managing accumulative strategies across the city.

We Were Looted

While the previous accounts highlight the integral role emerging rentier classes play in facilitating urban and industrial capital accumulation in Gurgaon, as Mukesh's account at the beginning of the paper illustrated, the boundary lines of the urban village continue to confine village rentiers to petty rentiership and land speculation; a subsidiary role in the city's political economy. For many village rentiers these very boundary lines that have shaped Gurgaon's urban trajectory, while holding the promise of social mobility through the opportunity to amass rental property, also painfully represent their exclusion from the luxury spaces of the city.

Of his savings committee, Sanjay remarked: "It is a great responsibility—only a *bahubali* [strong man] can look after this money". He clearly drew great pride from his senior position in his savings committee, and carried himself with particular authority within the village. Yet despite being a *bahubali* within the urban village, the proud and boastful manner in which Sanjay and many village rentiers across the city spoke of their property investments together with their evident power within the confines of the village boundaries starkly contrasted with frequent refrains to having been left behind and "looted" in Gurgaon's rapid urbanisation.

This disquiet concerning village rentier's relative position in Gurgaon's uneven development was expressed on two registers. In the first instance, Gurgaon village rentiers frequently railed against the social mobility that Gurgaon's new service economies had provided for lower-caste members of the villages.¹⁵ One Yadav elder in Mullahera village remarked:

These people who used to work our land, they now work in the companies in New Gurgaon and claim to have a rich ancestry. This is nonsense! The irony that we landowners have nothing and these people are rich.

Here the landowner's complaint is not that Yadav men cannot get jobs in Gurgaon's services economy, but rather that jobs and work are providing social mobility where under previous circumstances it was precisely the withdrawal of labour from which caste-based social standing was derived. Despite his claims to "have nothing" he had in fact invested in land in neighbouring Rewari and had developed rental accommodation in the village.¹⁶ In this regard, the investment in land and property by Yadav village rentiers cannot be explained solely as a functional response to industrialists' desire for cheap social reproduction nor, despite the prodigious character of village rentiership, are all rentiers able to produce large surpluses from their investments in rental accommodation and land. For many the investment in land is fuelled by the desire to retain material and social standing amidst rampant change in the social structure of the villages.

Second, while Yadav village rentiers were often referred to, and referred to themselves as *bahubali* [strongmen] in the villages, conversations with most landlords in Gurgaon were littered with references to cousins or village neighbours who had made it as *bade admi* [big men] in New Gurgaon; moving out to the private colonies of the city having successfully navigated Gurgaon's rentier agrarian transition. These men, whom I term *elite rentiers*, had often through perceived or in some cases actual good fortune, class status or patronage been able to move their families out of the village and cement their position as propertied citizens of the "urban" areas of the city.

Take for example the account of a village rentier in Rampura village on the western periphery of Gurgaon. His three-story house was encircled by gates and a lush green lawn. The house was surrounded by small dilapidated bungalows of the other villagers, and was cast in the shadow of the new *Vatika* residential towers in the distance, an image typical of the unequal landscapes of urban villages in Gurgaon. Despite his evident wealth (he had made a series of investments in

agricultural land on Gurgaon's periphery) he was quick to deride villagers who had made their money through brokering the village agricultural land to developers. Gesturing over to the *Vatika* towers he remarked that:

Here we were looted, we made a few crore but others [villagers] are making much, much more and here we're left with nothing ... a lot of people around here have been looted.

Technically these village rentiers were not "looted" or dispossessed, nor were they left with nothing; rather most are petty exploiters, drawing rents from migrant workers and small-scale industrialists. As this paper has sought to show, village rentiers play an active role in facilitating contemporary urban and industrial development. The village rentiers are "looted" only to the extent that their opportunities to accumulate capital are constrained to petty rentiership within the urban village. Here, narratives of looting become important rhetorical devices for village rentiers to reconcile their tentative and partial claims to inclusion in Gurgaon's hegemonic urban order. As Blomley (2008) argues, the utilisation of discourses of dispossession can provide a powerful "political register for naming, blaming and claiming" to those with only tentative claims to possession.

Indeed discourses of the wealthy *bade admi* which circulate among village rentiers in the urban village equally stand to disseminate and reaffirm the transformative promise of property investment within everyday discourses of the urban village. Ghertner (2015) explores how slum residents touted for dispossession in neighbouring Delhi, align themselves with "world-class city" discourses of propertied personhood; the very discourses which foregrounds their own dispossession. For Ghertner (2015:182), the slum residents' investment in a propertied future which necessarily occludes them is reflective of a broader discursive milieu which resolutely affirms social value and urban belonging to property ownership.

Similarly, while the urban village in Gurgaon provides village rentiers with an opportunity to actively participate in urban land markets, they equally represent the very boundary lines of village rentiers' exclusion from the city. The designation of urban villages as "rural" which has facilitated Gurgaon's uneven development, materially and discursively depresses village rentiers' possibilities for accumulation to petty rentiership and speculative gambles on peri-urban land. Despite this, as in Ghertner's "world-class" Delhi, the fictitious promise of urban accumulation, materialised in the luxury apartment towers and commercial districts which surround the urban villages, drive village rentiers' tentative engagements in rentier accumulation across the city. "Looting" discourse as such draws our attention to the complicated and contradictory position of the village rentier in the hegemonic space of the city; both compelled to participate in emerging networks of rentier accumulation and constrained in doing so by the urban village. Here again we can see how the urban village emerges as a particular socio-spatial articulation of the uneven conditions of capitalist development in Gurgaon (Hall 1980). Articulations which are not simply economically defined nor purely material in nature but fundamentally constituted through differentiated experiences of agrarian transitions.

From these spaces of the village rentier, from large village mansions and Sanjay's cramped, empty office one can observe the inner workings of an emergent class identity in between two prevailing features of Gurgaon's rentier agrarian transition, experiences of social and material loss and the discursive often speculative hope, implicit in property ownership, of transition from mere village rentiers of migrant labourers to fully fledged members of Gurgaon's booming real-estate economy. As noted by a village rentier from Kherki Duala, a village in west Gurgaon undergoing rapid urbanisation:

We invest in land because we have to. We cannot just keep the money, it would be spent by our children on alcohol and cars ... the government would take it. It is better to buy land ... We cannot anticipate the next boom, we can only hope to be involved.

Elite Rentiers

Finally, I now turn to the group I term "elite rentiers", the *bade admi* who were able to capitalise on private-sector acquisitions from the 1990s onwards and tend to derive incomes from the city's highly speculative urban real estate market.

In late 2015, I attended the wedding of a Delhi politician who was originally from Dundahera, a Yadav village that borders Kapashera to the south. The groom's family own a water park and a series of luxury resorts in and around the Delhi–Gurgaon border. Politicians took to the stage for photos with the bride, while drones circled the sky taking videos projected onto large screens behind the bride and groom. Informally dressed security guards with open-carry guns stood around the periphery of the tent watching events unfold. The wedding was lavish, alcohol was served, there were a number of international cuisines on offer and tables were populated by important Delhiites and real-estate brokers and businessmen of Gurgaon's elite rentier networks. While a lavish wedding is perhaps not a rarity among the urban upper classes, the wedding contrasted with those of village rentiers that I had attended; typically modest affairs held in large tents in old Gurgaon, with brash disco music, *nimbu paani* (lemon juice) and vegetarian cuisine.

That day I was a guest of Vikram Yadav a cousin of the bride who was also the president of one of Gurgaon's many industrialist associations. Vikram is a middle-aged man from a family of Yadavs who moved out of Dundahera village to the neighbouring private colony, Surya Vihar, in the early 1990s. During that time his father was a contractor developing the Udyog Vihar industrial estate and was subsequently the president of the industrialist association. Following his father's death, Vikram took over the industrial real estate business and presidency of the association. Vikram's family, whose significant wealth came after their land was acquired by private developers in the early 1990s, and typify the movement of factions of the Yadav community in industrial villages into local positions of relative power, particularly tied to construction, real estate and industry.

Along with his cousin, who was a member of the Delhi State Assembly, his uncle runs a large transport finance firm from the city, while numerous family members I met were eager to discuss their time spent studying in England. The

family owned industrial properties across Gurgaon's industrial estates, including a high-end commercial property in Gurgaon's Cyber City. Through Vikram I met former panchayat members who were leasing out skyscrapers to multinational corporations, and property dealers who have used personal connections to hold on to land in prime locations. Vikram, and those he introduced me to, are an example of what I term elite rentiers.¹⁷ Vikram's family land was acquired in the 1990s by the private sector; the family now invest in property and industrial lettings *outside* the village boundaries as key income-generating assets.

Many of Gurgaon's elite rentiers that I encountered drew incomes from leasing industrial plots to industrialists. Vikram explained the integration of villagers into industrial and commercial rentiership over the past 25 years:

At first, here in Udyog Vihar [industrial estate], there were only automobile companies, then in the 1990s came garment-exports and after 2000 IT and e-commerce. Really it wasn't until the IT companies arrived that the estate had large demand that's when we began buying plots, today around 50% of plots are leased out here by ten or so families originally from Dundahera.

Vikram explained that villager investment in industrial plots back then was far less common as property did not seem a viable business for local people. Vikram's family, however, were already involved in the construction business, working as contractors building Udyog Vihar. They had connections with businesses so investment in property was seen as a "natural" progression. He noted that by the time Gurgaon's other industrial estate IMT Manesar was built in the mid-2000s, however, local Yadav businessmen were well aware of the profitability of industrial real estate.

The Haryana Industrial and Infrastructural Development Corporation (HSIIDC), which develops and manages the state's industrial spaces, initially held relatively loose regulations on industrial plot ownership. Plot buyers were expected to produce on only 25% of the plot and run operations for a minimum of one year before reselling, a stipulation which was later replaced with a one-time 25% resale fee. The loose regulations on industrial plot ownership allowed local villagers a relatively risk-free avenue into speculating on industrial property. Vikram explained that in IMT Manesar,

... only 30% of plot owners are industrialists, 70% are people from our villages who saw what happened in Udyog Vihar, had come into money and wanted to invest. There must be at least 200 families from our villages who own plots in Manesar ... these people have no real interest in manufacturing.

According to the president of the Manesar Industrialist Welfare Association only 40% of allotments in IMT Manesar are operational. A 2012 report put the figure as low as 25%, contending that HSIIDC officers explicitly encouraged elite rentiers to draw value from land sales rather than engage in manufacturing (Khandelwal 2012).

Vikram lived in a gated apartment complex which is encircled on all sides by, what he termed, "encroaching" urban village land. I was interested in how he and his family felt toward his old neighbourhoods and their partial exclusion from the everyday life of the city. He remarked that:

The problem is both the government and the villagers. The government have no reason to extend services and provisions to the villages. The villagers are simple people, it is a question of rights not service, they will demand water, electricity, pukka roads, but they're not willing to pay for it. This is why they are not developing.

This attitude toward the urban villages was common among the elite rentiers that I spent time with. Intriguingly elite rentiers like Vikram drew no discernible identification with those agrarian pasts which had shaped their transitions into "urban citizens", nor of their enduring relationship between their own positions and that of those who remained in the urban village. As the village rentiers would poignantly remark, Vikram had forgotten the village.

Importantly for this paper, the accumulative strategies of elite rentiers are made possible by an activist state creating accumulative landscapes through agrarian and urban planning reforms, inserting both agricultural land and landowner subjectivity into logics of speculative property-based accumulation. Like village rentiers, it is within this articulation of an uneven agrarian social structure, state planning and the emerging urban imperatives that elite rentiers engage productively in the urbanisation process. Yet there remain key material and discursive fractures between the experiences and economic interests of village and elite rentiers shaped precisely by their uneven positions within Gurgaon's political economy. Yadav rentierism, as an emergent intra-caste class project at the heart of Gurgaon's urban hegemonic alliance, might as such be understood as constitutive of a "ruptural unity" that has both enabled capital accumulation and might also confound or provide its limits (Gidwani 2008).

Conclusion

This paper has sought to demonstrate the deep implication of agrarian social conditions in urban and industrial accumulation in the region. Drawing from Hall's (1980) work on articulation alongside literature on agrarian transitions in the global South (Chari 2004; Hart 1998), I have sought to examine the uneven and differentiated manner through which urban and industrial capitals are reproduced across the city. In this regard, I have conceptualised the urban villages, pockets of land designated "rural", which pepper the city's landscape, as socio-spatial articulations (Hall 1980) of agrarian histories with logics of urban accumulation (Chari 2004). An examination of Gurgaon's urbanisation as articulated, in turn, draws attention to the tentative and speculative attempts by landowning communities to capture processes of accumulation, retain social status and get to grips with rapid urban transition in the contemporary period.

In doing so I have sought to demonstrate the differentiated and nonlinear nature of rentier agrarian transition in Gurgaon. In contrast to analyses that conceptualise new urbanisation in India solely through the lens of dispossessions and exclusions (Banerjee-Guha 2013; Sanyal 2007; Sassen 2014) and those which might foreground urban development as a unitary, "resolved" agrarian transition, an examination of Gurgaon's urbanisation reveals the enduring implication of identities and spaces, formally excluded from urban Gurgaon, into the vernacular

practice of making the city. I have shown that these networks of rentier accumulation are fundamentally differentiated. While *elite rentiers* have been able to capitalise on large landholdings or social and political power to reap large gains from land sales, *village rentiers* are held in a state of stasis, indexed to the subordinate space of the urban villages.

Reading Gurgaon's urbanisation as augmented by nominally "rural" designations of land and community serves to disrupt narratives of India's "remarkable urban moment" (Shatkin 2014) as constituted through coherently "urban" logics of accumulation. Rather I have sought to show how even in Gurgaon, a city celebrated as metonymic of India's embrace of global urban capital and privatised modes of urban development, the making of landscapes of accumulation are tightly wrapped up in the uneven and differential articulation of capitalisms. It is precisely within the material and discursive articulation of nominally urban and rural dynamics in Gurgaon that the city's celebrated private-sector-led urbanisation takes place. Such articulations are not simple geographical arrangements of political economy, but are rather entangled with multiple, locally articulated meanings and experiences of agrarian change.

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Endnotes

¹ 1 lakh = 100,000; 1 crore = 10,000,000.

² While there is hitherto scant scholarly analysis of the role of urban villages in contemporary urban development in north India (see Sheth 2017), there is a wealth of scholarship on the forced designation of land as rural in China's contemporary urbanisation (Hsing 2010).

³ Here I am thinking with Doshi (2013) which explores differentiated experiences of eviction in a Mumbai slum.

⁴ Share of total GDP at Constant 2004–2005 prices (data taken from the Government of India Planning Commission: <http://planningcommission.nic.in/data/datatable/index.php?data=datatab>).

⁵ All land outside of the *lal dora* boundary.

⁶ As Gururani (2013) notes, Gurgaon's urbanisation in the early 1980s was shaped by changing urban development regulations in neighbouring New Delhi. The ambiguous planning and development jurisdictions around the Delhi–Gurgaon border together with heightened regulation of urban development in New Delhi in the 1970s pushed private developers, including Delhi Land and Finance (DLF), the developer synonymous with Gurgaon's change, to the city's flexible and negotiable land market.

⁷ The survey shows some impact of caste belonging on PPA. The data I collected on caste are however somewhat skewed given that 56% of my respondents were from the Yadav community, the dominant landowning caste group in Gurgaon, and 100% of Jat respondents—who make up 30% of the Haryana population and are more politically powerful in the state outside of Gurgaon—came from one village (Jharsa). This made it difficult to compare prices received by the two communities across the city.

⁸ While the vast majority of Gurgaon's agricultural land was acquired by the private sector, the state *did* acquire land for industrial and infrastructural development from the 1960s up until the late 1990s.

⁹ According to land brokers, revenue department officials and real-estate agents interviewed.

¹⁰ See *Times of India* (2014).

¹¹ See Donthi (2014) for analysis of land sale negotiations *during* the acquisition process.

¹² It is also the case that those selling land to private developers prior to the 1990s may well also rely on internal village property for income and would also fall into the village rentier category.

¹³ Kapashera is officially in Delhi and is enclaved and categorised by the Delhi Municipal Government as a "rural village" and therefore no Kapashera land can formally be "urbanised". Yadav families in Kapashera own and build on land both in Kapashera, and across the liminal Delhi–Gurgaon border and as such are also affected by Gurgaon's controlled areas. Furthermore, following the development of Udyog Vihar industrial estate adjacent to Kapashera, the village became the primary workers neighbourhood for the industrial estate.

¹⁴ See Naik (2015) for a more extensive discussion on Gurgaon's low-wage housing typologies.

¹⁵ My discussions with migrant workers and scheduled caste community members, during 10 months living in Kapashera urban village in 2015, were littered with stories of landlord violence and intimidation.

¹⁶ The further irony is that the experiences of the village rentiers' tenants—migrant workers—of hypermobility, agricultural decline and highly volatile working conditions might more closely align with the experience of being "looted".

¹⁷ Vikram and elite rentiers involved in industrial rentier accumulation in Gurgaon are reminiscent of Chari's (2004) Gounder industrialists. Yet unlike the Gounders, Yadav elite rentiers have no specific history as workers, but rather emerged from well-placed factions of Yadav communities as suggested in the survey.

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