Villages and Globalisation: Introduction

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Abstract

The dominant model of global urbanisation presumes high levels of rural to urban migration and large scale, export oriented agriculture in the countryside. Within this scheme rural villages are often rendered as economically redundant. Simultaneously, images of villages are used within megacities to sell socially divisive urban forms such as gated communities. This essay argues for a model that acknowledges villages' vital roles as interface between cities and rural ecologies, elements within more complex and locally democratic rural, and rural to urban networks, which also contribute to cities' 'urbanity' and as occasional crucibles for alternative modes of existence.

Keywords: *village, urbanisation, agriculture, globalisation, settlement form.*

'Villages have been eclipsed in importance as units of human society and settlement…'

Wikipedia entry for 'Village' 2016[i]

Introduction

The recent Brexit referendum and US Presidential elections revealed political divisions between country and city voters, in the UK and USA. But at the same time defining 'urban' and 'rural' is not so clear. Physical and cultural definitions of 'urban' and 'rural' vary a lot: In Sweden, a settlement of 200 people with gaps of up to 200m between buildings constitutes an urban settlement, whilst in Mali's 2009 census, settlements of up to 40,000 are considered rural, regardless of density[ii]. Changing and complex patterns of movement, greater access to communications media, relocations and diversifications of industries mean that places once definitively rural, now have many more characteristics that were once considered essentially urban. Because of factors such as these, academic disciplines have seen a shift from studies focused on locale toward those focused on the cultural imagination of the rural, making the terms of reference even more multi-layered and difficult to position geographically.[iii] The extent to which a simple binary urban rural divide even exists is debated, as are alternative terms that could be better able to describe the variations of contemporary settlement formations[iv]. Despite such conceptual complexities, cities and their relationships with wider regional and global networks are increasingly described in terms of a kind of total generalised

urbanisation which subsumes villages, towns and cities alike. This narrative is in part fuelled by statistics about the exponential growth of the world's urban population which have become so familiar that they seem to be naturalised and regarded as inevitable now.

The narrative of global urbanisation typically assumes massive rural to urban migration, and a displacement of traditional rural village settlement economies and cultures by mega scale, export oriented farms designed to feed the growing cities and megacities. Paradoxically, within those global cities is sometimes discernible a kind of compensatory neo-ruralisation of urban space through a village imaginary that sometimes inflects the rhetoric of urban politics and certain types of planning and urban design practice. Such imagery is problematic when it is used to mask or support the social fragmentation of cities, for example by naming and styling a gated community as if it were a 'village'. The world's environmental crisis necessitates re-thinking the core DNA of human settlements, rather than the deployment of compensatory strategies for the destructive and socially divisive characteristics of the contemporary megalopolis.

At its worst, the rhetoric of global urbanisation overlooks or even dismisses the implications it has for rural society, and imagines an artificial urban-rural divide that separates cities from their rural hinterlands, ie when the model of global urbanisation being advocated presumes high levels of large scale, export oriented agriculture in the countryside. What is required as the Italian Territorialists, among others argue, is a holistic view of the metabolism of cities that includes the regional economic, social and cultural networks that they, and villages, are part of. To diminish a city's ties with such local networks, by over-emphasising global ones, not only damages rural communities, but it is argued, diminishes the cultural and public life of the city too. For example, by replacing locally supplied markets and high streets with shopping malls and chain stores more likely supplied through national and internal supply systems. The most obvious alternative to the mega-city / mega farm dialectic would seem to be one that supports the critical roles that villages and small farmers play in networks that benefit cities and as the best and most biodiverse kind of interface between agriculture urbanism and ecology.

Since 2006, when it was first announced that most of the planet's population lived in cities, statistics about the exponential growth of the world's urban population are so often repeated that urbanisation has effectively been naturalised. Repetition of these statistics deflects

attention from hot contestation of politics and economics in the countryside. The stats on their own give the impression of a smooth transition from one pattern of human settlement to another. So in this essay I refer to the work of the MST in Brazil, because in contrast to the prevailing trends, and in opposition to the politics of large plantations, they are an example of an organisation that has been setting up new settlements for small farmers, and attracting people out of favelas too.

Another problem with the prevailing narrative of urbanisation / globalisation is its tendency to portray rural villages and rural culture generally as somehow outmoded and conservative. I therefore also refer to the historical association of villages with radical thought. Small scale settlements, often beyond the worst excesses of urban property markets, have had a special appeal for alternative philosophies. Their relationships with the cultural life and political awareness of cities should not be dismissed lightly. In this regard I will be paying a little extra attention to Gandhi and India. Not only because of Gandhi's epic contribution to this relationship between radical culture and villages, but because I want now to consider a few sentences, admittedly taken out of context, from a speech by Boris Johnson, made when he was mayor of the quintessentially global city of London. Many of the issues I want to raise in this essay are conflated within his words, and so they serve as an example of the kind of rhetoric of globalisation and urbanisation that I want to take issue with.

Eden? What Eden?

In a widely reported 2011 speech, at a property developer's trade fair in Cannes, Boris Johnson, then Mayor of London, said;

"There is one overarching philosophy behind everything we do in City Hall that can be traced to a saying of Mahatma Gandhi, who prophesied in 1948 that the future of India lay in its 700,000 villages." But: "As anyone who has been to India can testify, Gandhi was wrong. It is unromantic but true that the future of the world lies in cities, but he was right in this deeper sense that people yearn for the memory of the village…(and the)…Eden from which we were all expelled….so everything we do is about putting the village back into the city."[v]

This part of the speech (which was widely reported in the Indian press)[vi] may have taken its cue from Harvard economics professor Edward Glaeser's influential book 'Triumph of the City', published in the same year and which includes the following lines;

'Echoing antiurbanites throughout the ages, Mahatma Gandhi said that "the true India is to be found not in its few cities, but in its 700,000 villages" and "the growth of the nation depends not on cities, but [on] its villages." The great man was wrong. India's growth depends almost entirely on its cities. There is a near-perfect correlation between urbanization and prosperity across nations'. [vii]

Unlike Johnson, Glaeser does not soften his hard-edged dismissal of Gandhi with notions of villages being re-created in the city, his vision in contrast, embraces the dynamism and vivacity of the big metropolis, and (in a separate interview) he advises;

'The right response to the problems of megacities is not to get misty-eyed about village life, but rather to work to improve the quality of infrastructure in those growing urban areas' [viii].

No real analysis of villages or rural economics is offered in *'The Triumph of the City'*, the key to its condemnation of rural life, is a reading of statistical evidence that suggests there is more poverty overall in rural societies than in urban ones, and on this basis Glaeser argues that migrants into cities are doing the 'sensible' thing[ix]. So, reading between the lines, it can be assumed that the countryside in his scheme is losing people to the city, and that, perhaps these are mainly people of younger professional ages looking for better prospects in the city, and possibly leaving elderly and children behind. This would accord with a dismantling of agricultural and settlement systems oriented to small farms and villages in favour of mono crop mega farms which require a smaller work force and which are oriented to export markets. Because farms in this scheme increasingly target global markets, cities therefore lose much of their economic connections with their own hinterlands and the complex social interactions associated with those connections. The model for planetary urbanisation being rolled out therefore, is one of megacities serviced by megafarms who supply the supermarkets, shopping malls and chain stores that are the logical distributors for large scale multinational producers.

'Time to Think Urban', was the title of a preparatory document for UN Habitat III, which urged a change of mindset away from a negative perception of cities; *'........towards a new and more positive view of urbanization as an opportunity and a sustainable source of development.'* [x] The same document also says '…*cities and metropolitan areas are the major*

drivers of national economies…'[xi] Cities drive global economic systems too, beyond the confines of traditional state mechanisms, and are emblematic of what Mouffe has described as a *'post-political' 'consensus….around the idea that there is no alternative to neo-liberal globalisation'.*[xii] If cities drive national and global economies then urban architecture projects; regeneration schemes, new opera houses, stadiums, airports and the like are among the key drivers of city economies, attracting inward investment and helping to heat up their property markets. About such projects, Erik Swingedouw says;

'Contrary to the mainstream argument that urban leaders and elites mobilize such competitive tactics as a response to the assumed inevitability of a neo-liberal global economic order, I insist that these strategies in fact construct and consciously produce the very conditions that are symbolically defined as global urbanism.'[xiii]

If, as Swingedouw argues, urbanisation should not be understood as an inevitability, but as a project, then a corollary of urbanisation is that the assumed decline of small rural settlement forms is a project also: Neo-liberal global urbanisation assumes the decline of traditional rural societies, and the need for massive scales of agriculture and resource extraction in order to supply the rapacious consumption patterns of globally oriented cities.

It is a confusing scenario that advocates the decline of villages in the countryside but then continually attempts to recreate the idea or memory of the village in the city. For the globalised neo liberal economy though, it makes sense: Villages and small farmers in the countryside are not part of the large scale industrial agriculture vision, and the idea of the village in the city works well with a fragmented urbanism of spatially segregated people who shop in the supermarkets, malls and chain stores that are set up to distribute a maximum choice of imports from such corporations.

Favela to Farm: MST

In the introduction to 'Triumph of the City', Edward Glaeser says, in Gordon Gecko style;

'It's easy to understand why a visitor to a Kolkata slum might join Gandhi in wondering about the wisdom of massive urbanization, but there's a lot to like about urban poverty'.[xiv]

The 'likeability' of urban poverty Glaeser argues, is again down to poverty rates being lower in cities than in rural territories, and so living in an urban slum is a better 'choice' than scraping things together in a rural hovel. In this scenario, the power of the free market is supposed to sort out the infrastructural inadequacies of megacities and their slums. But things are not going according to this plan; urban slum populations have been growing in the era of liberalisation, not shrinking, and meanwhile it does indeed seem easier to side with Gandhi [xv]. Or, for example with Mitschein, Miranda and Paraense who, in writing about Brazilian shantytowns, argued that;

'Instead of being a focus for growth and prosperity, the cities have become a dumping ground for a surplus population…' [xvi].

It would seem that doing the 'sensible' thing in Brazil, has rarely been a matter of choice. Saskia Sassen describes the situation thus:

The scale of land acquisitions leaves a large global footprint. It is marked by a vast number of microexpulsions of small farmers and villages, and by rising levels of toxicity in the land and water surrounding the plantations acquired land. There are growing numbers of displaced people, rural migrants moving to slums in cities, destroyed villages, and smallholder economies, and, in the long run, much dead land. What actually happens when a new owner/leaser, whether national or foreign, has acquired 2.8 million hectares of land to grow palm for biofuels? Mostly dozens of villages, whole smallholder agriculture districts, and whole manufacturing operations in these regions are expelled from the land. Some may receive compensation, and some may be resettled in equivalent terrain. But generally speaking, the losses are far larger than the compensations. Finally, flora and fauna are expelled to make room for monocultures [xvii].

Brazil is one example among many that Sassen refers to in her analysis of an accelerated global marketisation of agricultural land that has been occurring since around 2006, and which she explains is a major and systematic shift in global patterns of land acquisition, wherein there is a dramatic increase in foreign ownership of land, particularly in the global south. More than 200 million hectares of land have been sold to foreign buyers between 2006 and 2011, mostly in Africa and Latin America. Sassen explains that this huge surge in land acquisition came about in 2006 partly because major banks were already concerned about the

possibility of the financial crisis that materialised a year or so later, and farmland was viewed as a secure place for investment capital. 2006, as everyone knows, was also coincidentally, the year of the rural/urban tipping point, beyond which the majority of the world's population live in cities.

The near-naturalised narrative of urbanisation and statistical projections of rural to urban migration, obscure the tremendous political and social resistance that there is to multinational industrial farming practices in critical rural territories. In Brazil there have been decades of popular struggle against large corporations' ownership of agricultural land, and inefficient and damaging mega scale plantations, many of which are the legacy of colonialism. The MST or 'Movemento do Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra' which roughly translates as the 'Landless Workers' Movement' are part of a wider historical movement against giant agricultural land concentrations and rural land worker expulsions in Latin America. The MST were formed in 1984 and since then they have been organising new rural settlements for rural workers across the country. There are numerous other similar organisations working in the country. In Sao Paolo state for example, camps have been set up by at least seven other substantial landless workers organisations, but the MST are the biggest. In Sao Paolo they have set up around half of all the state's landless settlements and they report that they have some 1.5 million members in Brazil as a whole[xviii].

There has been a considerable amount of research into the impact of Brazil's landless worker settlements. Some of the key findings are unsurprising, but extremely important. Among these are that once established, their settlements boost local economies through buying and selling local produce and the people in local towns therefore also tend to buy and eat more locally produced food when an MST settlement is established. They find smallholder farms to be, on average, more productive per square metre than the large plantations that that they tend to replace or compete with. Biodiversity also improves through the crop diversification that comes with smaller farms. They also report on technological innovations made by MST farmers. Many landless worker settlement citizens have relocated from urban favelas, and find that their income, homes and diet have improved markedly[xix].

So, local economies in Brazil benefit from landless worker settlements, but so ultimately do the economies of larger cities, not only from inflow of local produce, but because they are not able to provide the infrastructures, employment and welfare systems required by rural to city

migrants in overgrown favelas, and because ultimately the crime, deterioration of health, and other problems that result from mass urban poverty puts too big a strain on cities.

Brazil's landless workers movements began as a movement for social justice, but they are very aware that they, and the peasant cultures that they represent, are also in the front line of a struggle for the environment. Large scale industrial agriculture is among the biggest contributors to the greenhouse gas effect. It not only puts huge volumes of GHGs into the atmosphere, but uses vast amounts of energy. On average, industrial agriculture systems require between 10 and 15 calories of fuel and other forms of energy to produce 1 calorie of food energy[xx]. Industrial agriculture's consumption of energy contradicts farming's original reason for existence, which was to be a provider of energy. Alternatively, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC);

'….. ecologically based methods for agricultural production, predominantly used on small-scale farms, are far less energy-consumptive and release fewer GHGs than industrial agricultural production. Besides generating fewer direct emissions, agro-ecological management techniques have the potential to sequester more GHGs than industrial agriculture'[xxi].

In spite of all these statistics, the main project being pursued worldwide is one of urban to rural migration and a continued scaling up of mechanised agricultural production. Organisations like the MST and La Via Campesina and others like them are part of an alternative project to that of hypertrophied cities and giant fields, owned and managed by giant multinational corporations: namely a countryside that includes more smaller scale, bio diverse and eco-friendly farms and villages, which in turn exchange food and goods and culture with local towns and cities. Theirs is a realistic and holistic view of cities and their symbiotic relationships with the countryside, it is not one borne out of any pastoral romance.

Chocolate box city:

In the quotes cited a few pages back, Edward Glaeser's use of the words 'Misty eyed' to define those who might see value in the idea of the village, and Boris Johnson's references to the 'memory' of the village and his association of the village with 'Eden', have the effect of consigning the idea of the village in the 21st century to history, nostalgia, backwardness, and facile chocolate box impressions. Johnson then describes his view of cities and his opposition to Gandhi, as 'unromantic', and Glaeser tells us that urban to rural migration is 'sensible'. Their support of urbanisation is thus rendered clear eyed, realistic, and rational, and the city becomes a site of progress and logical thinking in their scheme. What they evoke here, is an age old imaginary urban-rural boundary that runs along the same line as that between rationality and romance, familiar in the arts since the ancient Greeks at least[xxii]. In effect, they are inferring are that anyone thinking of the village as a viable settlement form for the future is being deluded by a pastoral imaginary. But is the city and countryside's traditional relationship with romance and rationality still viable, if it ever was? Rem Koolhaas, among the world's most influential architect/urbanists, once known especially for his celebration of New York and the culture of congestion, has recently turned his gaze to the countryside and finds that;

'Today, a hyper-Cartesian order is being imposed on the countryside, enabling the poeticism and arbitrariness, once associated with it, to now be reserved for cities'[xxiii].

In associating poeticism with the city, rather than the rural, Koolhaas deterritorialises and flips around the traditional logic of the urban rural divide. As a cultural construct the idea of rurality or urbanity can be deployed either side of that traditional geographic border. In a 2012 lecture, he illustrated the 'whimsicality' of contemporary cities with an image of Anish Kapoor's giant ArcelorMittal Orbit tower, built for the London Olympics and nicknamed 'Boris's folly' (because of the substantial losses it has been incurring).[xxiv] Koolhaas could also have mentioned Johnson's championing of the totally kitsch 'Garden Bridge' project, which offers a picturesque view of nature as a garden on a concrete pedestal, but offering little to London's ecology; no cycle lane, no water retention, and almost no encouragement to the flora and fauna in the polluted river Thames over which it is intended to stand, in fact it's construction will reportedly require the felling of 30 old trees. It perfectly symbolises the

global city's detachment from its own environment, as does London's steadily decreasing consumption of UK produce.[xxv]

For architects and planners, the rural imaginary has long been able to slip across geographic urban-rural boundaries with ease. A contemporary example is 'Bicester Village'; an open-air shopping mall, for high end clothing outlets located outside an old Oxfordshire market town in England. It has the form of a pedestrianised high street flanked by painted timber shop fronts designed in a vernacular style that is hard to place (part Swedish, part American wild west perhaps?). The shops are mostly outlets for famous international clothing brands concentrated in a way that in the UK, only central London, or one of its major airports could compete with, (for example; 'Gatwick Village', the shopping precinct in London's second biggest airport). Bicester village is well served by its own station for fast trains to London and Birmingham plus good motorway connections and a luxury coach service too. The actual shopping 'street' is marooned among car parks. Architecturally it is a conceptual mash up; an international urban bourgeoisification of the rural village projected into the countryside. The only people who know each other in this village are the poorly paid shop assistants who live in the real town of Bicester where there is a depressingly familiar tale of shop closures on the real high street, the one actually connected to the streets and lanes of the old town which ultimately lead to the nearby countryside[xxvi].

Villages of the recent future.

Small rural settlements were an important part of the future for much of the twentieth century. Occasionally they were at the vanguard of modernism, as was the case, for example, with the 60,000 or so 'Kolhoz' and 'Sovkhoz' collective farm communes created in the Soviet Union, or the 25,000 rural Communes of China's Great Leap Forward. Later, the 60's and early 70's gave rise to an era of countercultural communes in the west. By the 1970's there were around 7000 in the US alone, pursuing different social, political and ecological ideals in diverse rural (and urban) locations.[xxvii] They were small idealistic spatially proximate communities that offered withdrawal from the mainstream. Famous examples included Drop City, Black Bear Ranch and The Farm.

Some forward-thinking architects of the era were thinking in terms of communes and villages too; Paolo Soleri founded Arcosanti in Arizona, the Dutch architect Aldo Van Eyck studied Dogon villages in his efforts to re-think modern architecture and Archigram's issue number 6

included a packet of seeds and a manifesto to design environments rather than buildings, whilst the Street Farmers fantasised about the demolition of cities. Widespread interest in rural settlement form among alternative minded architects at that time was also fuelled by some of the era's seminal books, all bestsellers: Rudofsky's *Architecture Without Architects* generated great interest in vernacular forms, the *Whole Earth Catalogue* which was a practical directory of equipment for the 'Back to Land' movement, Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* presciently warned about migration into cities and over intensive farming leading to desertification of agricultural lands. And in its search for more ecological intelligence, *The Ecologist's 'Blueprint for Survival'* referred to anthropological studies of tribal villages in their critique of what they saw as the modern western city's excessive complexity and hierarchy. And Alexander, Ishikawa, Silverstein, Jacobson, Fiksdahl-King and Angel's book *A Pattern Language* argued that "Individuals have no effective voice in any community of more than 5,000–10,000 persons".

The village in the city; from gesellschaft to gemeinschaft, and back.
A Pattern Language made the case for breaking big cities down into spatially defined small neighbourhoods ('300 yard identifiable neighbourhoods') arguing that planners and architects should 'Separate the communities from one another by means of substantial areas….', and use such features as 'gateways' and 'looped roads', and suchlike. These spatial strategies might have appealed to alternative minded designers at the time, but they are now more likely to be echoed in much of today's conservative planning practices and projects and applied to well-to-do conservative suburbs and gentrification projects rather than experiments in anti-establishment communal living. For example, in the work of the New Urbanists and the US LEED Neighbourhood Development standards, who both sometimes seem to echo 'A Pattern Language in their emphasis on giving definition to neighbourhoods. Although both LEED ND and the New Urbanists explicitly oppose such things, it is, within the logic of most cities' property markets, not such a big step to the contemporary gated community, a notable component of many of today's most socially fragmented cities.

Around the world gated communities frequently deploy village like appearances and often include the word 'village' in their names. In the neo liberal city, the image of the village has become the friendly face of social division and economic disparity. Yearnings for neighbourliness too often equates to the most un-neighbourly of urban cleansing schemes. As Leonie Sandercock put it; "The current popularity of both the 'new urbanism' and gated

communities is the latest manifestation of [a]...denial of diversity and fear of difference"
(quoted in Jill. L Grant)[xxviii]. The history of modern urban planning and architecture is deeply
infused with such fears and with the idea of the village as a means of escape from the
complex realities of the city.

A key moment in this history is John Nash's Park Villages scheme of 1823-34 at the North of
his project for London's Regent's park, for some the first incarnation of the modern designed
suburb. Much of Regent's Park's landscape is a kind of stylised countryside, whose
construction required the demolition of real farms and villages. The idea of the village was
also hinted at in the arts and crafts elements of London's (and perhaps the world's) first ever
council housing scheme; the Boundary Road estate. This time in the hope that it could deliver
a sense of moral fortitude in place of the perceived inner city criminality that it was replacing.
This estate was identified by Hanson and Hillier as a foundational moment in the
morphological development of UK housing because of its inverted spatial logic, one of the
beginnings of what they term a 'no neighbours model' approach to spatial organisation that
seeks the withdrawal of occupants from the social life of the typically open street system of
the 19th century city. An approach, broadly speaking, adopted by most 20th century social
housing estates in Britain, and elsewhere, until the turn of the 21st century. Now, many of the
UK's urban housing estates are being bulldozed and replaced by new commercially built
neighbourhoods that are spatially better integrated into the fabric of the city, but which still
tend to maintain social division through their unaffordability for average income families.

Not all of the idealist thinking about small communities from the 60's and 70's has been
taken up by present day conservatives or neo liberal developers: Alberto Magnaghi, pioneer
of the Italian 'Territorialist' school of planning and urbanism, took up some similar themes in
his book *The Urban Village*, (indeed *The Ecologist's* Edward Goldsmith wrote the preface to
its English edition), but he uses them as a means to launch a damning and comprehensive
critique of the kind of urbanism and damaged ecology produced by neo liberalism, and to
offer an alternative driven by local self-sustainable democracy. He argues from the standpoint
of understanding cites relationships with regional scale networks that integrate smaller
outlying towns and villages, local agriculture and industry, as opposed to cities that orient
themselves primarily toward global trade and which are less needful of local trade
relationships with their own hinterlands. Magnaghi's call for more holistic models of
urbanisation strikes an important chord. More questionable however, is his argument in

favour of 'the city of villages', in particular his emphasis on spatially defining the edges of urban neighbourhoods. Although great cities do have multiple neighbourhoods with definable centres, is it the case that such neighbourhoods also define their limits within a dense urban fabric? Which great examples of cities support such a paradigm for spatially emphasising neighbourhood boundaries, other than when particular conditions insisted upon it, as in the case of Venice's geography for example?

Many notable historians and sociologists have observed that the characteristics of globalisation and the anxieties associated with it, have increased the desire for community.[xxix] Whether this is because of an overwhelming sense of social groundlessness that comes with an increasing immersion in advanced communication networks, or local anxieties about immigration, the argument is that the 'gesellschaft' that globalisation brings, can produce desires for 'gemeinschaft', to use Tonnies' terms[xxx]. Though not intended to demarcate an urban-rural divide, Tonnies' concepts have nevertheless historically been used to indicate differences between small pre-industrial rural communities and large modern industrialised urban societies[xxxi]. The figure of the village in the city in the design and representation of such things as gated communities or village themed shopping centres, can be read as manifestations of reactionary desires for gemeinschaft; a kind of sop or decoy to allay fears of globalisation's boundlessness and uncertainties, but also to mask increasing social and spatial segregation in the city.

It is necessary to distinguish between an idea of community as an expression of a desire for a stable, traditional place bound cultural identity and that which is consciously and continually constructed within the heterogenous and shifting flows of globalisation. Delanty argues that community has become much more discursively constituted in a postmodern globalised world. Individuals are as likely to situate themselves within a community as be placed within one by social forces (or one might add, by virtue of living in a particular place):

'Organised more like a network, community is more abstract and lacks visibility and unity, and as a result is more an imagined condition than a symbolically shaped reality based on fixed reference points. Its boundaries are also more contested and consequently community is also the site of a great deal of conflict.'[xxxii]

If a sense of community has to be actively constructed, argued and negotiated, and not taken for granted, then this is as much the case for the rural village as it is for the urban neighbourhood, the traditional sociological idea of the country village being somehow more stable and place-bound compared to the space of the city is no longer true, if it ever was.[xxxiii] Is it the case that inscribing the spatial limits of an urban community risks undermining its capacity for negotiation?

Re-imagining Indian villages.

Gandhi's village-centric political philosophy always had detractors, not least in two of the other major figures of Indian independence; the country's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and first Minister for Law B.R. Ambedkar. Neither shared Gandhi's belief in villagers' abilities to act as the harbingers of a new democratic nation state through traditional crafts and self-sufficiency. Nehru advocated industrialisation and the co-operativisation of small farms and villages so that they could afford new technologies and improve outputs[xxxiv]. Ambedkar was different to Gandhi and Nehru in that he grew up as an 'untouchable' in a village and thus understood village life from the lowest possible perspective. He had no faith at all in the idea that traditional village communities who'd enforced caste system misery for centuries, could uphold new standards of democracy. For him the traditional village was; *'...a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness and communalism'*. And he said: *'Every Hindu village has a ghetto. The Hindus live in the village and the untouchables live in the ghetto [Ambedkar 1948:21-22].* Late in life he converted to Buddhism because of his disgust for caste traditions. Given the chance he would have gone further than Nehru; he advocated government supported and supervised collective farms and the nationalisation and regulation of India's entire agricultural sector, although for him this did not necessitate large scale farms, he was more concerned with social justice and productivity [xxxv]

Gandhi was criticised by Ambedkar and others for not doing enough to bring down the caste system. The problem had been that it was too tied up with the Hinduism whose spirituality Gandhi wanted to nurture. That said, Gandhi's Ashrams, prototypes for his ideas for an alternative village republicanism, were the embodiment of egalitarianism in the way that they were run. There was, for example, one kitchen and dining hall run by shift rotas which included everyone, meaning everyday eating, cooking and washing could not be divided according to caste or class. Rudoph and Rudolph make the case that Ghandi should not be

understood as a regressive seeking a return to pre-modernism, but as a postmodernist, advocating the idea of a multitude of modernities other than the dominant European model. According to them:

The ashram and the satyagraha as vehicles for displaying a democratized public sphere became a new kind of political theater. Gandhi moved their performances around India, recreating at various sites the drama of transgressing private commitments and challenging unjust laws to create democratized public spheres.[xxxvi]

The difference between Gandhi's and Ambedkar's views of the Indian village chimes with that between utopia and dystopia or of an idealised pastoral and counter pastoral in representations of rurality in the arts. In her study of the village in South Asian literature, Anupama Mohan explains that the utopia/dystopia dichotomy does not adequately account for recent novels that describe sets of relations of a complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty that don't sit easily on either side of this binary divide, nor are novels which have consciously omitted particular groups of people or relationships adequately explained within this dichotomy. So in addition to utopia and dystopia, Mohan develops the Foucauldian idea of heterotopia, and also introduces the notion of homotopia. Her examples of homotopic novels include those that convey through the village trope, a desire for a unified nation under the banner of one religion or language. Examples of heterotopia given by Mohan include early 21st century works by Ghosh, Ondaatje and Abeyesekara, which she says;

'....often work away from the paradigms of utopian/dystopian, and national/marginal, towards an interstitial zone of contact and cohabitation and negotiation. The consciousness of an inescapably complex and multicultural collective fabric animates such emergent writings of the 21st century....'

The village then, as a site of complexity, difference, ambiguity and change. And seeming to be portrayed in ways that one might more readily associate with readings of cities such which define urbanity through the constant openings up of multitudes of narratives. To what extent these novels are reflecting everyday reality is open to question; Indian newspapers still sometimes report appalling cases of caste related bigotry and violence in villages[xxxvii]. But the recent political history of rural Indian society has also witnessed historic progressive milestones, notably the Gandhi inspired Panchayat Raj legislation of 1992 decentralising

powers to local village councils and guaranteeing places on those councils for women and dalits (or 'untouchables'). The debates conducted in the independence era about the future of rural villages still resonate, after all it is still the case that up to 70% of Indians live in villages, and by far the majority of MPs constituencies are rural.

In India, rural to urban migration rates are slowing, according to Amitabh Kundu this is partly due to what he calls the 'exclusionary' 'sanitzation' of cities, meaning the clearance of slums and policing of middle and upper class neighbourhoods to exclude itinerants and homeless people. [xxxviii] The argument in favour of this kind of urban cleansing is that it is necessary in order to attract inward investment from overseas, investors would otherwise be put off by the sight of too many poor people in the inner cities. The other reason Kundu explains, is that just as the countryside has become saturated, and very short of new jobs for India's young population, so too have the cities. He says:

 Exclusionary cities that are a million plus and attract global capital will not encourage an informal sector to come up. I personally feel that if you really want to promote urbanisation you have to create a network of small and medium towns.

In his analysis of the ways that the idea of the village influenced the planners and architects of India's new towns in the post-independence era, William J Glover says:

Given the importance Indian Planning discourse has given to establishing the conditions for 'community' to flourish based on spatial proximity and shared cultural affinities and habits- we might say, thus…the post-liberalization Indian metro seems destined to intensify class, religious and ethnic exclusivity as the basis for neighbourhood formation.

The contrast between Mohan's examples of heterotopic literary portrayals of South Asian villages and India's progressive rural legislation on one hand, and the exclusionary, homotopic prognosis for Indian cities, makes one wonder if in the 21st century Tonnies' rendition of the urban rural divide is being turned on its head, and if actually the future of the world lies depends on its rural villages.

[i] Wikipedia's 'Village' entry: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Village (accessed September 10 2016).

[ii] Gordon McGranahan and David Satterthwaite *Urbanisation concepts and trends* (IIED Working Paper 2014) http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/10709IIED.pdf? Accessed Dec 1 2016.

iii ibid

iv Champion & Hugo (eds.) *New Forms of Urbanization, Beyond the Urban-Rural Dichotomy* (Ashgate 2004).

v Eg: *Gandhi was wrong, says London mayor* (Times of India Oct 5 2011):
 http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/nri/other-news/Gandhi-was-wrong-says-London-mayor/articleshow/10241894.cms accessed Nov 2016

vi Eg: *ibid*

vii http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/glaeser-triumph-of-the-city-excerpt/

viii http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/05/19/why-has-globalization-led-to-bigger-cities/?_r=0

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x UN Habitat document for the 24th session governing council, *Time to Think Urban,* http://unhabitat.org/time-to-think-urban-un-habitat-vision-on-urbanisation/ (accessed September 15 2016). p.3

xi Ibid p.6.

xii From an interview with Chantal Mouffe http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2013/09/16/five-minutes-with-chantal-mouffe-most-countries-in-europe-are-in-a-post-political-situation/ accessed December 2016

xiii Swyngedouw Post-Democratic Cities. For Whom and for What? P.5 accessed at http://www.variant.*org*.uk/events/pubdiscus/Swyngedouw.pdf

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xv According to the UN population Fund http://www.unfpa.org/urbanization

xvi Quoted in Mike Davis's 'Planet of Slums' 2006 p.175

xvii Sassen p.

xviii MST website

xix Bergamaso and Norder, 'Rural Settlements and the MST in Sao Paolo', in M. Carter (ed.) 'Challenging Social Inequality', Duke University Press, 2015.

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xxi Vandermeer etc

xxii See Raymond Williams?

xxiii http://www.iconeye.com/architecture/features/item/11031-rem-koolhaas-in-the-country

xxiv Crystal Palace ref
xxv NFU
xxvi Oxford Times
xxvii Malcolm Miles *Urban Utopias: The Built and Social Architectures of Alternative Settlements* (Routledge 2007) p.83

xxviii Leonie Sandercock, Leonie. 1999. *A Portrait of Post-Modern Planning: Anti-Hero and/or Passionate Pilgrim?* Plan Canada Vol. 39 Issue 2: p.12–15, as cited in Jill L. Grant (2007) *Two sides of a coin? New urbanism and gated communities* Housing Policy Debate Vol18 Issue 3 p483

xxix Among them are Hobsbawm, Jameson, Delanty, Rose, Bauman and Giddens.
xxx Tonnies 1887+
xxxi Hillyard

xxxii Delanty 2001 p.188
xxxiii Delanty's argument in favour of a communication communities differs from
xxxiv Nehru and Planning in India: Proceedings of the National Seminar on Pandit ...
xxxv http://www.onlineresearchjournals.com/aajoss/art/60.pdf
xxxvi Rudolph and Rudolph

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xxxviii http://civilsociety.defindia.org/migration-to-cities-has-been-slowing-down/