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Urbanization without guarantees: articulation, rentier capitalism and occupancy on the agrarian urban frontier

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ABSTRACT

This article engages with the work of Stuart Hall to examine conditions of agrarian city-making on India's urban frontier. The article draws on Hall's writings on articulation and marxist method to propose an approach to studying the urban frontier "without guarantees'. That is without *a priori* presumption of the total consolidation of the non-urban to a financial-capitalist urban fabric. Examining India's agrarian-urban frontier, the article argues that the expansion of capitalist urbanization is being commanded, appropriated, and rejected by a decidedly agrarian set of actors, social relations, and technologies. On the frontier both the state and capital are subject to a series of agrarian articulations: bargains, compromises, and reformulations with agrarian and non-urban society that alter the very character of urbanization itself and challenge the received grammars of critical urban theory. In contrast to "extended urbanisation" approaches that assert the primacy of macrogeographical capitalist intentions, the article argues following Hall, that these urban-agrarian articulations on the frontier are fundamentally uncertain, requiring specific political and ideological work to sustain and frequently subject to collapse and resettlement. The final section of the article outlines three core conditions of agrarian-urban articulation in the present conjuncture: rentier capitalism; land occupancy and territorial blockade.

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> To make the test of the truth of marxism depend on the world standing still is … to give ourselves all kinds of those necessary guarantees that we may think we need to have … But to carry that guarantee in our back pockets will prevent us from actually being able to come to terms with the real world. *Stuart Hall, For A Marxism Without Guarantees, 1983*

For several years now both central and state governments in India have aggressively sought to reconfigure rural and peri-urban land for expanded urban industrial, residential, and commercial uses. Rolling out regional development plans, land control deregulation, and investment in IT parks and highway infrastructure, the state has attempted to create fertile landscapes for domestic and international capital eager to expand into new

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markets (Schindler & Kanai, 2018; Searle, 2018; Shatkin, 2017). As such over the past twenty years, India's agrarian urban frontier – sites adjoining and beyond the traditional metropole – have become ground zero for all manner of experiments in urban (re)territorialization, land enclosure, and assetization, forging what Llerena Searle (2016) has called "landscapes of accumulation" in the countryside.

The capture of the countryside by metropolitan and market forces has been nevertheless far from straightforward. India's urban peripheries and hinterlands are today marked not by seamless urban capture and operationalization, but rather by a heady and troubling articulation of multiple urban and agrarian dynamics. Of expanses of high-resolution, privatized land assets interlocked with opaque, nonprivatized territories; of high-end global real estate investments subtended by contested land aggregation and capture practices; of highways corridors appropriated and blockaded by subtle agrarian bureaucratic manipulation; and speculative mega-urbanization projects stalled and quietly returned to their rural pasts (Cowan, 2022). These articulations draw our attention to the political necessity for metropolitan capital to forge coalitions with existing social formations in exchange for access to land, and in doing so, force us to approach the study of urbanization conjuncturally (Clarke, 2018), attentive to the multiple mediations through which hegemonic geographies are determined. In other words, the grand territorial shake-down of India's countryside, which seeks to enable the expansion of real estate and infrastructural capital, proceeds not by eliminating the rural and agrarian world, but rather by renovating customary agrarian institutions, class and ideological relations and selectively handing out power, territory, and control to agricultural communities. What we're left with are not smooth urban formations but rather what Sai Balakrishnan (2019, p. 619) has referred to as "recombinant" landscapes, wherein "differentiated agrarian property regimes combine with liberalization reforms to produce new geographies of uneven development". These recombinant, or what I think of in this article as articulated geographies are deeply alive to a host of socio-spatial arrangements and practices that can bend capitalist development projects toward alternative sociospatial production and indeed break them altogether.

In this article, I describe the articulated processes of rural-urban transformation in India's contemporary urban peripheries as *agrarian city-making*. In previous work, I have used the term agrarian city-making to examine the articulated geographies of non-urban and urban-oriented capitalism that are shaping frontier spaces of accumulation in contemporary north India, drawing attention to the ways urban development mandates and investment projects are being commanded, mediated, and appropriated by a decidedly *agrarian* set of actors, class relations, technologies and institutions.[1] As such, I use agrarian city-making to both describe a conjunctural mode of sociospatial transformation specific to post-liberalization rural India *and* to elaborate a method for studying urban-agrarian geographies conjuncturally, without guarantees, open to slippages, contradictions, and unsettlement. In doing so, I build upon, and converse with a broad body of emerging scholarship on what Shubhra Gururani (2020) has referred to as "agrarian urbanism" (Balakrishnan & Gururani, 2021; Denham, 2023; Ghosh & Meer, 2021; Gidwani & Upadhya, 2022; Mishra, 2021; Rathi, 2021; Sood & Kennedy, 2022). I propose "agrarian city-making" not to throw out yet more vocabulary toward conceptualizing "the urban-nonurban" in general. Agrarian city-making is instead intended to engage a conjunctural analyses, following Hart (2006, 2016) of the

geographical, political, and historical processes that mediate capitalist relations of production at the urban agrarian frontier.

To do so, this article draws on the work of Stuart Hall to expand on three central analytical–methodological contributions of agrarian city-making to the study of the urban frontier. First, agrarian city-making calls attention to the agrarian as an articulating principle of urban change within certain post-colonial societies, wherein multiscalar urbanizing actors *seeking* to agglomerate space into extended concentrations of globalized finance and industrial capitalism are forced to rely upon and seek to renovate pre-existing agrarian relations of production, exploitation, property, and their subtending institutions. This requires going beyond the non-urban or here "agrarian" as a mere precondition or supply terrain for urbanization, and rather considers the contested grounds upon which non-urban and urban forces connect, augment, and mediate frontier geographies. The paper argues that our understanding of the "frontier" as such, can be usefully nuanced by Hall's (1980) non-essential conceptualization of articulation. Following Hall (1980), the paper argues that the agrarian does specific work as an "articulating principle" contingently structuring forces that seek out the subordination of the countryside to capitalist urbanization.[2]

Second, agrarian city-making is intended to develop and put into practice a dialectical methodology that understands these "articulations" as necessarily uncertain, open to subversion, change of tack, and appropriation (Kipfer & Hart, 2012, 331).[3] In doing so, I foreground the capricious political-economic terrains upon which urban agglomerations and extensions are sought, must be specified, but which are never guaranteed. As Hall argued, articulations describe a form of relationality that is:

> not necessarily given in all cases as a law or fact of life, but which requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which … has to be constantly renewed, which can under some circumstances disappear or be overthrown, leading to the old linkages being dissolved and new connections – rearticulations – being forged. (Hall, 1985, pp. 113–114)

In this paper, I use "agrarian city-making" to highlight the dramatic transformations taking place in peripheral spaces, to again borrow from Hall (1983) "without guarantees". Attentive to examining urban expansion but also the crises that have befallen grand projects of urbanization across India over the past few decades. Here, I argue for an approach to studying urban expansion wherein the "agrarian" is not solely prefigurative of coming urbanization, not methodologically presumed dead on urban arrival, rather we are required to specify how and whether existing non-urban determinates mediate urban-oriented accumulation within a sociohistorical conjuncture defined by the persistent hegemony of agrarian social relations despiteagrarian corporatization, decline and capitalist ambitions toward the real subsumption of agrarian space to the "urban capitalist fabric" (Brenner, 2019; Brenner & Schmid, 2014).

In his critique of the teleology and dogged economism of "classical marxism", Hall expounded upon a marxist method "without guarantees", attentive to the historical dynamism of capitalism, willing to build and yet immediately unpick conceptual abstractions, and as such comfortable enough to presume to have "no answers" *a priori* (Hall, 1983). Hall calls for a methodological approach attentive to the dialectical stirring between the outlandish ambitions of dominant and hegemonic forces, and their multiscalar

mediation through class and ideological struggle. Considering an *urbanisation without guarantees*, thus is a similar call to reject macrogeographical urban abstractions as our analytical start and endpoint, and rather to specify the material, historical and geographical mediations that give rise to conjunctural forms of urbanization (Hart, 2016; Loftus, 2015). Such a methodological approach, as Mann and Wainwright (2008, p. 853) have argued, holds the potential to unleash a "geography without salvation, without guarantees" open to the sedimentation of power, the crumbling of dynasties and formation of altogether different worlds.

Urbanization without guarantees serves as a reminder that capitalist attempts to abstract space are, in the first instance, always only attempts. As Lefebvre (1991, p. 287) notes, "on first inspection [abstract space] appears homogeneous" but it is "not homogenous; it simply has homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its lens". Such an approach centres the ways that historically-defined social formations imbue projects of capitalist abstraction with provisionality and trouble, forcing on us the requirement to specify the concrete, negotiated formation of historically-specific urban processes, and give consideration to the exigencies of the social world which may take hold of powerful economic processes and produce rather more fretful landscapes of transformation than much metropolitan theory is used to giving credence. Urbanization without guarantees is a rallying call to drop any presumption that the mere appearance of an entrepreneurial state, special economic zones, planning technologies, and investment vehicles dictate a smooth and extended incorporation of the countryside into a capitalist urban fabric.

Finally, and relatedly, agrarian city-making, influenced by Hall's (2021 [1986]) readings of Gramsci[4], attends to the material and ideological compromises, alliances and alchemies – in other words the political and cultural grounds – required to broker municipal state and capitalist appropriation of rural society, and in doing so, enable a host of *quite other* social, cultural and economic logics to take hold of spatial production; generative of heterogeneous, explosive, stalled and crisis-ridden agrarian urban frontiers. In this paper I draw largely on insights from my own fieldwork in North India over the past decade, in a context in which state officers, planners, and investors with designs to integrate rural space must enlist the agrarian world into capitalist projects of urbanization, and yet where such enlistment is dogged by contradiction, requiring degrees of compromise, renovation, alchemy, and leakage with already existing productive forces, institutions, social relations, and political-economic circuits. This requires paying attention not only to the investment and development plans of the state and private partners, to privatizations, masterplans, infrastructural development, formal commodity production, and market operations, but also to agrarian property regimes, village institutions, rentier regimes, caste-social hierarchies that are partly in-command of rural land's conversion into urban real estate. Urban expansion in contemporary India, I argue, is characterized by a conjunctural mode of spatial production in which the state and private actors engage (through processes of what we might think of as an "urban passive revolution"[5]) to enter into a series of strategic alliances with dominant agrarian class actors and institutions in order to access and assetize rural land. This encounter not only indexes urban development to the social formations of agrarian capitalism but in turn engages in city-making through a host of agrarian forms, circuits, and technologies.

The paper is organized in the following sections. First, the paper will engage with broader literature on both "agrarian –" and "extended urbanisation" in order to build an argument for urbanization "without guarantees". Subsequently, the paper will draw upon Stuart Hall's work on articulation to propose a conjunctural approach to studying urban expansion, examining the "frontier" as particularly articulatory sociospatial geography. The second half of the paper will elaborate on three conjunctural forms of agrarian city-making: *rentierism*, the formal subsumption of customary property regimes, agrarian communities, and rentier networks within expanding urban development projects; *occupancy*, the iterative and provisional repurposing of said customary lands by both agrarian and urban capitalist frontier-actors in expectation of urbanization; and *blockade* the frequent remediation and breakdown of urbanization by agrarian actors and institutions. I do so by drawing on my own research in the city of Gurgaon and on the peripheries of New Delhi over the past ten years, alongside the analyses developed by others who contribute directly and implicitly to the loose field of agrarian urbanization. In doing so the point is not to throw "agrarian city-making" out as a generalizable set of concepts of peri-urban transformations everywhere but rather to explore differential modes of agrarian-urban encounter through a lens open to the multitude of forms sociospatial transformation might take.

Urbanization without guarantees

Recent scholarship loosely coalesced around the term "agrarian urbanism" has sought to capture practices of sociospatial change in peri-urban areas, predominately although not exclusively (Denham, 2023; Paprocki, 2021), in contemporary India. Taking seriously the rather large imprint of colonial and post-colonial agrarian capitalism on Indian society, this body of work examines how architectures of urban governance and capital investment have become imbricated in the agrarian social structure; wrought through agrarian capitals, class relations, and political institutions (Balakrishnan & Gururani, 2021; Cowan, 2019, 2022; Ghosh & Meer, 2021; Gururani & Kennedy, 2021; Mishra, 2021; Rathi, 2021; Sud, 2020). Gururani (2020, p. 14) in this vein defines what she terms "agrarian urbanism" as a focus on how "agrarian regimes of land and property endure and coproduce the urban". Agrarian urbanism takes its cue directly from critical agrarian scholarship in India and elsewhere, which has examined the heterogeneous workings of agrarian production and property systems and their relation to projects of capitalist development outside the metropole (Bernstein, 2006; Byres, 1986; Lenin, 1964; Patnaik, 1987). For agrarian urban scholars, it is precisely these uneven forces of agrarian production, systems of land tenure, labor exploitation, and gendered and caste-structured social and political-ecological relations that emergent urban forces encounter and must attempt to enlist and discipline in the contemporary projects of land assetization and financialization (Cowan, 2022).

A central concern here is how rural land and territorialized class and caste relations, are being captured, aggregated, and subordinated to urban-oriented modes of surplus value production. How diverse and uneven agrarian capital, class relations, and caste-structured agrarian land systems get bounded up in projects of urbanization while retaining their historically-defined organizational forms and relations of reproduction. Scholarship on agrarian urbanism has shown such encounters rarely take place as

violent and dispossessive showdowns between a globalized metropolitan capital and homogenous rural conditions. Indeed, despite their immediate attractiveness to the critical geographer, land transformations rarely operate through sheer domination. Rather more commonly they resemble – pace Gramsci – a slower hegemonic project: the remediation of agrarian institutions for land assetization (Cowan, 2022), the political capture of a petty peasant class and ideological propagation of propertied citizenship, and finally the enlistment of agrarian landed property, brokers, and speculators to forge open frontiers for expanded urban accumulation (Cowan, 2018; De Neve, 2015; Levien, 2015; Sami, 2013). Here international real estate firms faced with powerful agrarian political and social constituents are compelled to form alliances with agrarian landed property, exploit uneven terrains of development, mobilize stories of miraculous asset-value growth (Upadhya, 2020), utilize irregular legal and territorial methods, conjure ersatz paperwork and recalibrate customary land tenures in order to turn rural and agrarian land and community for urban and industrial purposes (Campbell, 2014; Cowan, 2022).

This process, as Sai Balakrishnan's (2019) work excellently demonstrates, is determined by the historic uneven development of agrarian capitalism which has unevenly disposed rural communities to engage with projects of urban capitalist spatial integration in the contemporary moment. In her study of corridor urbanization in Maharashtra, Balakrishnan explores how agrarian elites in command of commodity-production, capital-intensive inputs, sociotechnical infrastructures, and lucrative state subsidies, not only distributed surpluses in a way that contributed to uneven regional agrarian commodity markets in the post-colonial period but when exposed to agrarian crises in the contemporary moment leveraged the gains of unevenness to ally with urban firms and facilitate real estate development. Of course, those situated materially differently within uneven agrarian social formations were differently disposed. Balakrishnan (2019) discusses how the "middle peasantry" lacking significant surplus capital, mobilized political power and control of rural institutions to blockade development and bargain compromises with industrialists. While the revalorization of well-located "waste-lands", the back-end of agrarian uneven development, has differently disposed some *Adivasi*, indigeneous communities with the market power with which leverage for rentier extraction and expanded civic and political rights (Balakrishnan 2019, 126). Balakrishnan's study not only draws attention to the enrollment of uneven agrarian social and market dynamics in projects of expanded urban accumulation but also highlights how such expanded accumulation is determined by contingent agrarian historical-geographical conditions, contradictions, and crises. Here the agrarian is not simply a precondition to a process of city-building, rather its uneven class, caste, and value dynamics are constantly mediating incoming *attempts* to urbanize.

Studies of agrarian urbanization elsewhere share an analytical commitment to peripheral modes of urbanization with a broader literature on contemporary "peripheral" urban geographies (Caldeira, 2017; Gururani, 2020; Karaman et al., 2020; Roy, 2016; Sawyer et al., 2021). Much of this scholarship has emphasized how urbanization frequently takes place through diverse and nonnormative practices, logics, technologies, and social relations. Theresa Caldeira's "peripheral urbanization", for example, provides an important elaboration of the diverse range of city-making practices that predominate the majority world but often exist one step ajar, or "transversally" from, the privileged technics of macrogeographical capital circulation, masterplans, and rental yield curves.

While Caldeira's transversality is a useful spatial metaphor to describe how difference comes to constitute spatial production, Caldeira (perhaps consciously) provides a less detailed theorization of the specific mechanisms or indeed social relations through which these differences are forced to transverse. How, for example, is subaltern autoconstruction enabled by state-political institutions, social formations, and extant relations of exploitation and value-generation? The ambiguity concerning the underlying mechanisms of articulation between ostensibly distinct modes of urbanism, echoes early articulationist positions (see Hall, 1980), and leaves "transversality" underspecified.

The converse body of critical scholarship that has trained its lens on peripheralized urbanization focuses on the world-historical structures of "planetary" and therein "extended" capitalist urbanization both massifying existing metropoles and eating up far-away hinterlands (Brenner & Katsikis, 2020; Brenner & Schmid, 2014; Castriota & Tonucci, 2018; Merrifield, 2018). This body of work, led by the important work of Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, proceeds from a position that contemporary rounds of capitalist development are increasingly, and *really*, subsuming social and morphological space into expanded concentrations of urban accumulation for the realization of relative surplus value; often through reference to large-scale territorial and economic planning strategies that concentrate capital in both existing and expanding agglomerations (Brenner & Schmid, 2014). If the previous body of work is at pains to highlight the nonnormative practices and logics of spatial production that endure within and against "formal" market dynamics, or what I call the *formal* subsumption of space to capital, planetary urbanization scholarship tends to work from the presumption of the *real* subsumption of space to capital, or space's total utilization for the production of relative surplus value (Wilson & Bayón, 2016).

While we tend to evaluate these distinct works ("peripheral" and "planetary") through the glaring distinctions and disagreements, there is some common ground I think worth establishing. First, there is agreement across camps over the need to reject a metrocentric reading of the urban, that *urbanisation* obliterates traditional morphological divisions and territorialized social formations in ways that exceed the nominal "city". This is a particularly useful contribution to the planetary urbanization oeuvre and is also a precept of "peripheral" and "everyday" urbanization scholarship (Derickson, 2018). As such there is broad agreement over the need to ditch received spatial categories – the "urban" and "rural" – and rather attend to the dynamic and processual manner through which urban-nonurban transformations take place. Secondly, a common thread across much of this literature is an acknowledgment that peripheral transformations are, to differing degrees, impacted by hegemonic configurations of *urban-oriented* capital accumulation. Much of the literature is engaged in a historical conjuncture defined in part by an end to the classical "agrarian question" (Bernstein, 2006), by de-agrarianization and/or corporate agrarianization. In this context, our shared study of peripheral sociospatial transformations reflects a context in which (state-)capital is *seeking* to aggregate, assetize, rationalize, and subsume erstwhile agrarian land to higher-value generating uses. To both materially and ideologically turn the under-commodified world toward urban-oriented circuits of commoditization and assetization. In otherwise implicitly distinct approaches, capitalist urban actors and social formations are *in the room* engaging and engaged by a heterogeneous non-urban world to different effects.

Of course where these scholarships so starkly diverge is how to conceptualize the "capitalist urban fabric" (Brenner, 2019). How forces of urbanization differently articulate with contending ideological, social, and cultural circuits that not only serve to constitute the disorderly internal relations of capitalist urbanization but as such may equally lead to its mutation, appropriation, or obstruction. At stake in these debates, appears to be not only how exactly we parse the non-urban and urban, the dominant and subordinate, formal and informal; how, as previously discussed we characterize their corresponding relation; but also how much methodological–analytical currency we give ostensibly powerful structural forces of *urban* capital; how quickly we excise non-urban capital, non-economic circuits of value from our analyses; and indeed our willingness to not only abstract from these sites a generalizable theory of "the" urban (Brenner, 2019, pp. 40–41) but perhaps more importantly how much faith we hold in our own conceptual abstractions.

Take the "extended urbanisation" concept, which is perhaps the "moment" of Brenner and Schmid's planetary urbanization thesis most relevant to our discussion.[6] Extended urbanization is defined by the authors as first the "operationalization" of distant landscapes to support the everyday socioeconomic functioning of urban life; second, the construction of fixed infrastructures in order to support such operationalization; and finally the enclosure of land from "established social uses in favor of privatized, exclusionary and profit-oriented modes of appropriation" (Brenner & Schmid, 2014, p. 167). The non-urban, for the authors, is understood primarily as a prefiguration of the urban, or as the authors put it "internalized within world-encompassing, if deeply variegated, processes of planetary urbanization" (Brenner & Schmid, 2014, 163). Here we are given a disappointingly non-dialectical, expressive conceptualization of the urban and non-urban. Indeed, while Brenner and Katsikis (2020) critique approaches that "blackbox" the internal mediations of "the hinterland", the authors nevertheless maintain that a new "global metropolitan network" has indeed reconfigured hinterland areas, exposing "local territories to increasing turbulence, risk and precarity" (Brenner & Katsikis, 2020, 31) without much regard for these internal mediations. Indeed the multiscalar sociospatial relations of the "hinterland" are not given ready scrutiny to themselves set the terms of reconfiguration not least itself expose the *metropolitan network* – which it supposedly substantiates – to noticeable "turbulence". We hear almost nothing of the class relations (in their abundance and heterogeneity), relations of exploitation, and differentiation of the hinterland. As such not only does the concept of extension read as if it were faithfully taken from a series of industrial reports, taking "abstract space" as if it were truly abstract, but there remains striking silence on the historical-geographical determinants and dialectical class relations that sustain, animate and give rise to a global and extending "metropolitan network", on the mediated political, class and social relations, contradictions and crises that comes to express the particular conjuncture defined by urban totalization. While "extended urbanisation" scholars certainly give credence to multiscalar sociospatial analyses, the approach methodologically foregrounds an *a priori* extended urbanization, seeing all relevant mediations fall neatly into line, appearing as little other than socially embedded, particularities (Loftus, 2018).

Analyses of urban-nonurban articulations must be attentive to the multiscalar political-economic grounds on which the crises and contradictions of accumulation are struggled over, and through which the very fate of capitalist abstraction

acquires"practical truth" (Marx 1993 [1857]). Despite drawing from a broadly similar Marxist tradition, the ambiguity of historical materialist analysis within much "extended urbanisation" scholarship, is such that there remains a lack of faithful attention to the mediated political grounds upon which urban forces extend or concentrate. Crucially, and in line with Brenner (2019, p. 40) this is not to reject abstractions *tout court,* nor to reify the "local" "political" or "class relations" as pre-given conditions. Rather a study of urban-nonurban articulations requires a rejection of a method which takes abstract categories as our analytical departure and end points (Loftus, 2015, p. 367). And instead, requires a dialectical methodological approach, informed by Marx's (1993) 1857 Introduction to the *Grundrisse,* that attends to the urban as a "real abstraction" (Ollman, 2003), always already mediated through multiscalar, historically specific material determinations and relations. It is incumbent on historical materialists to historicize, situate and scrutinize such mediations in order to understand the ways abstractions like "extended urbanisation" acquire "practical truth" (Marx, 1993 [1857]), are realized and act out in the world. While abstractions are no doubt necessary analytical tools, we must hold our abstractions suspiciously, unfaithfully, and without guarantee. As Hall remarks in a different context, "ruling ideas are not guaranteed their dominance", they do not proceed through the "playing out of an already written and concluded script" (Hall, 1986a, p. 42) but must be *secured* through class, political-economic, and ideological struggle.

In this regard, while "extended urbanisation" approaches no doubt to provide a useful set of conceptual abstractions that provide a momentary fixture to the driving structural logics and imaginaries of capital and the capitalist state, as quite explicitly narrated in industry and financial reports, planning documents, press releases and the like, the eagerness to abstract generalizable "concepts that permit us to distinguish surface appearances … from the underlying mechanisms" (Brenner, 2019, p. 41) often belies careful attention to the "complex mediations" that substantiate, disturb and diminish such abstractions (Hart, 2016, p. 375). Which is to say we risk misrecognizing capital's desires for capital's realization. This abstractive haste and lack of attention to the conjunctural conditions of capitalist expansion, provide us with a less clear understanding of what attempts toward rural operationalization mean for non-urban spaces' economic networks, political configurations, and so on, in practice, nor of the political, territorial and class struggles that disrupt and realize capitalist urban imaginaries across multiple scales. What are the conditions under which extended urbanization takes place, is realized and frustrated? What, if any, determinate role does historically determined state formations and socio-spatial differentiation; non-urban class relations, political and cultural institutions, capital flows, and property regimes play in shaping processes of commoditization and assetization at the heart of urban expansion? How do we as scholars engage in the politics of urban expansion if we have already conceded that such expansion, and its associated variant forms, has always already taken place?

The challenge for those of us studying the urban-non urban frontier is important *not to* rehearse capital's own abstractions, told about itself in the investment and development strategies of hedge funds, planners, and real estate firms. Such accounts conceive of the rural – a dejected, disempowered, and often empty signifier – as either urban input-generating or already subject to elimination by the dispossessive force of urban expansion. Rather we ought to investigate not only *how* and *whether* metropolitan

capital seeks to refashion diverse agrarian land systems into standardized resources for investment and rural social and institutional settings into central financialized actors.

That is not to say of course that features identified in accounts of extended urbanization do not characterize trends of what I am analytically terming, agrarian city-making in India. The Indian government has undoubtedly sought to refigure both agrarian production and territory to support the expansion of capitalist accumulation across metropolitan boundaries (Cowan, 2022), there has been a strong effort placed on capturing global capital investment in a spate of mega-infrastructural projects that not only facilitate the expansion of existing urban centers but are themselves technologies geared toward reorganizing territory for assetization (Schindler & Kanai, 2018); and the state has aggressively sought, through "regional development plans" and land and zoning deregulations, to enclose and assetize rural land (Sood & Kennedy, 2022).

And yet on closer inspection, these projects of "city-building" are in crisis. India's contemporary urban frontier is a far cry from that depicted in state development strategies, composed of "empty urbanisation" projects (Upadhya, 2020), farmer and peasant-led development coalitions (Balakrishnan, 2019; Sami, 2013), customary rentier economies (Cowan, 2018; Pati, 2022), speculative investment (Cowan, 2022; Upadhya, 2020) and more recently full-blown rural revolt (Kumar, 2021). Lying in the wake of India's headline transnational investment partnerships, newly masterplanned peri-urban regions, mega-infrastructural projects, and special economic zones is a landscape of stalled, compromised, and failed development projects (Cross, 2010; Roy, 2011; Upadhya, 2021). The contortions of the Indian government's attempts toward "extended urbanisation", are as much a consequence of global capital's attempts to rapidly exit oversaturated and speculative financial and real estate markets in the present conjuncture (Goldman, 2021; Searle, 2018) as they are an outcome of the territorial, legal and political compromises the state and capital have been required to make with local landed property and agrarian institutions in order to access the hinterland (Cowan, 2022; Upadhya, 2020).

Articulation and frontiers

Agrarian city-making as a concept aims to speak to a conjunctural mode of sociospatial production in liberalizing post-colonial and post-agrarian economies, in which capital is engaged in a project to pull agrarian institutional and property rights-bearing actors unevenly into projects of accumulation. A project shaped by the historical unevenness of colonial–postcolonial capitalist development. Agrarian city-making must be understood as a conjunctural expression of capital's articulated geographical relations within post-agrarian frontier spaces. Stuart Hall's critique of modes of production scholarship provides a useful starting point for a more dialectical conception of the urban-nonurban relation.[7] Hall's essay "*Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance*" powerfully details the ways capitalist production in Apartheid South Africa was reliant upon the reproduction of racialized differences. For Hall, racialized capitalism in South Africa was an "articulated social formation" in which capitalist and non-capitalist relations of production, were provisionally settled, sustained by both free and non-free labor, with racialization a core "articulating principle" (Hall, 1980, p. 309). As Karayiannides (2023) rightly notes, Hall's engagement with "articulation" was not straightforwardly influenced by Althusser and Balibar's (1985[1970]) structuralist account in *Reading*

Capital but was equally drawn from his engagement in debates among critical development scholars over the necessary historical linkages between seemingly distinct "modes of production" at a key turning point in twentieth-century post-colonial capitalism in the 1970s. Of how one conceptualizes the peculiar (or rather non-English) form of capitalism, the precise relation between normative and nonnormative modes of capitalist production that was apparent in former colonized societies.

Articulation was Hall's answer to this question. For Hall, the differential subsumption of relations of production and forms of exploitation in South Africa was evidence of a necessary, nonessentialist, yet historically-defined linkage, given force at this moment by processes of racialization (Conroy, 2022). As Hall emphasizes these articulating principles are never "necessary, determined, absolute, and essential for all time" (Hall, 1986b), they correspond rather to historically specific political-economic, social, and ideologically structured-linkages which require constant work, and working compromise, to sustain. For our purposes it is important that Hall saw articulated relations *not in* equivalence, nor as an expressive relationship where subordinate relations "perfectly" reproduce the dominant structure, *nor* by way of teleological contradiction, "the warrant and guarantee of all arguments, by so-called orthodox Marxists" (1993, p. 38). Rather Hall's open mobilization of articulation (Hart, 2024) is so useful to a study of the urban frontier, I would argue, as it allows us to better scrutinize the contingent linkages and mechanisms of difference that come to structure projects of capitalist transformation as they seek to reach into distinct political-economic and institutional relations (see Cowan, 2018).

Indeed, Hall's discussion on and critique of the modes of production debates can impart productive insights for discussions by urban geographers on the "frontier". The "frontier" has been invariably used to theorize territorial relations between capitalist and noncapitalist value regimes, over-saturated and undercommodified property markets, urban and agrarian political economy; modernist state authority and the "archaic", feudal systems of governance. In other words, as a spatial metaphor to describe a relation between two ostensibly distinct sociospatial arrangements. And, yet this specific relation is often left rather over-extended and under-theorized, "the frontier" is used at different times to describe sites of incorporation, but also refusal, improvization, difference, and world-making. In this paper, I consider "frontiers" to refer to a specific contested territorialized encounter, wherein processes of capitalist devaluation, surplus, and waste-making – in our case, forms of de-agrarianizing rural society – are differently articulated with development agendas in ways that provisionally enable the expansion of a capitalist urban fabric. The outcomes of this frontier articulation are, pace Hall, not necessarily given but require particular conditions of existence, and constant work of renewal.

This work of renewal is structured, as Neil Smith (1996) and Jason Moore's (2000) separate work has elaborated, by the necessary geographical unevenness of capitalist development. Here the space beyond-the-frontier is marked not simply as the "outside" of capitalist value but more commonly as a geography of capitalist surplus, devaluation, under-development, and differentiation (Cowan et al., 2023). As geographers have argued, these necessary spatial devaluations and margins provide the necessary conditions, for continued capitalist expansion (Gidwani, 2008). Articulation then, gets at the contingent processes through which the frontier-geographies relate, are

structured and subsumed. As such the contemporary agrarian-urban frontier is less likely to refer to a space beyond which is untouched by capitalist social relations, and more likely to refer to a moment of articulation that contingently subsumes oversaturated, under-commodified, or nonurban resources.

Agrarian city-making thus draws attention to cultural, ideological, and material work required to articulate agrarian society into vernacular capitalist markets on the frontier; elaborating on the heterogeneous forms capitalist expansion takes within historical-geographical conjunctures (Banaji, 1977). On India's urban frontiers, where politicians and development firms are champing at the bit to assetize the countryside as a financial and real estate resource, the agrarian does certain consequential work as an articulating principle, enabling certain kinds of territorial action while disabling others. Agrarian city-making also elaborates on a method for examining urbanization "without guarantees"; focused on the fraught articulation of diverse relations of production, institutions, and ways of organizing property and labor, that produce geographies of compromise, unevenness, alchemy, and failure. This must be understood as a provisional political project embarked upon in post-colonial, agrarian contexts like contemporary India, whereby state and capitalist desires for land's aggregation, assetization, and rationalization articulate through the uneven geographies of post-colonial capitalism: through agrarian land tenure, histories, institutions, social hierarchies and relations of rent and production. It is precisely the contingency of this articulation, wrought through social and political-economic struggles, that shapes the grounds upon which urbanization does or does not take place and in which form. Whether we arrive at sociospatial arrangements characterized by glistening IT and real estate hub, a peasant-capitalist development partnership, an empty field, a blockaded highway, or indeed resurgent ruralism.

In the second half of this paper, I will draw attention to what I see as common moments of articulation in contemporary agrarian city-making in India and elsewhere. I do so not to provide some account of urbanization in general but rather to highlight how the agrarian as an articulating principle throws up sociospatial arrangements that both enable and trouble the expansion of the "metropolitan network". To this, I highlight three commonalities. First, the renovation of agrarian customary land tenure arrangements for rentier capital accumulation; second, practices of "occupancy" (Benjamin, 2008) engaged in by the state, private sector, and rural communities in order to capture land; and finally, the trouble that the two former agrarian-articulated processes imbue for projects of urbanization.

Rentier capitalism

A central feature of agrarian city-making in the contemporary moment is the enduring role rentier capitalism, nonprivatized agrarian property relations, and inelastic rentier economies, play in subtending capitalist urbanization. In my own research in Haryana in North India, this articulation of customary land tenure and capitalist urbanization can be pinned on a territorial compromise between politically powerful agrarian landed property and emerging forces of real estate capital from the 1980s. In Haryana in order to access agricultural land, without popular opposition, and at the volumes required for large-scale city-buildingprojects, capitalists and developers have been compelled to cede territories, rents, and jurisdictions to dominant agrarian landowners.

The "urban villages" common across parts of peri-urban North India are the direct representation of this territorial compromise (Cowan, 2018). As state development authorities and private firms began buying up and converting fungible agricultural fields in Delhi and Gurgaon from the 1980s, agrarian communities held onto their monopoly, collectivized and nonfungible property rights to village residential land (*abadi deh)* which would soon sit in the heart of some of the most highly valued real estate in the subcontinent. In the post-liberalization period, villagers in both New Delhi and Gurgaon have clubbed together and mobilized land on these territories for rentier purposes; constructing mass low-income housing, and industrial and commercial units on what are nonprivatized customary lands (Cowan, 2018; Pati, 2022). These customarily organized rents are mobilized by agrarian actors to make speculative investments in land markets outside their exempt territories (Cowan, 2018).

Crucially, *abadi* land markets are not *fully* or purely capitalistic. That is, if we take Harvey's influential approach to rent in *Limits to Capital* (1982, p. 347) abadi land does not act "as a pure financial asset" traded strictly according to logics of profit maximization and rentier rates of return. Much like other so-called "informal" territories, *abadi* land markets are nonfungible, highly localized, and characterized by deeply inelastic transactional economies governed by decidedly noneconomic determinates (Benjamin, 2005; Ghertner, 2015b, 2020). Abadi lands are collectively owned, formally unmapped, and organized through rural governing institutions, *panchayats*, and caste-associations that form a central barrier to the clean movement of financial capital through the land (see Pati, 2022). Nevertheless, despite their nonnormative form, the preservation of *abadi* territories in this case fundamentally determines *any* movement of urban capital into rural land (Cowan, 2022). The rentier economies that emerge from these nonprivatized, nonsubsumed land markets play a vital role in providing low-cost housing and industrial inputs, structuring a vernacular 'urban-agarian' land nexus that subsidizes rental prices and industrial production, and performs powerful ideological work to secure in the villages a nascent class of agrarian-urban rentier, deeply vested in speculative projects of real estate-led accumulation (Cowan, 2022, 139). Abadi lands, community, and village rents, in other words, partly retain their agrarian institutionalcharacter which in the present conjuncture, articulate and are formally subsumed to urban-oriented capital, expressed within broader capitalist land markets in rent.

In this regard, if we typically consider capitalist urbanization to proceed through the unstoppable elimination of customary landed property, that is the *real* subsumption of land and the social forces of production to capital, agrarian city-making is characterized precisely by the endurance of village rents and customary landed property that enable the urbanization of the countryside to proceed. Abadi rentierism indexes a political economic and ideological project to articulate both agrarian tenurial regimes, forces of reproduction, and social structure with projects of capitalist urbanization. Just as Hall set out to develop a nonessentialist conceptualization of capitalist (re)production, one able to accommodate a diverse range of historically determined political, ideological, and economic relations, we might consider the same of rentier capitalism (Capps, 2016). While the English enclosures provide us with something of a gold-standard of primitive accumulation, in much of the world, including the cases discussed here, capitalist assetization is awkwardly fixed within non-privatized, noncapitalistic tenurial and property settings

(Ghertner, 2015b). Here, there is a *formal* subsumption of customary property and rentier arrangements to capitalist regimes of production, but not a "real" or complete transformation of the social relations and forces of reproduction.

These kinds of rentier agrarianism are not exclusive to North India. In *The Great Urban Transformation*, You-Tien Hsing (2010) conceptualizes how the *chengzhongcun* or "village in the city" in southern China (outcomes of China's two tier urban-rural property systems which make up some 60% of Shenzhen's urban area) form central "territorial compromises" for urban expansion. Hsing writes, "even as villages are swallowed up by large cities, peasants managed to eke out a share of urban wealth through real-estate operations and maintain[n] relative autonomy within the urban territory". At the heart of China's "great urban transformation" are enduring non-urban relations. Elsewhere in Gavin Capps (2016) examination of "tribal landed property" in South Africa, "rentier chieftancy" and chiefs' effective monopoly *against* capital, form the central base for accumulation for global mining industries. A common theme in these studies is the enduring autonomy and authority of existing agrarian forces of production and reproduction, and the central role customary landed property plays in both guiding and appropriating the conditions for capitalist urban expansion elsewhere. These accounts equally demonstrate the compulsion for urban capitalist actors to forge alliances and compromises with actually existing property relations and forces of (re)production, forging a kind of passive revolution of property on the periphery.

What does foregrounding rentierism and the "formal" subsumption of land to capital confer to a study of urban-nonurban transformations? Rather than propose formal subsumption as some new generalizable condition of "extended urbanisation", following Hall, I understand the incorporation of customary property regimes within otherwise fully capitalist systems to be an outcome of the articulation of agrarian social formations with urban development mandates within a historical geographical conjuncture. Territorializing subsumption, reveals the articulation of agrarian property relations with urbanization projects without the necessary elimination or indeed operationalization of the former by the latter. Realizing the formal subsumption of land to capital helps explain how exactly urbanization processes articulate with agrarian relations of production, rents, and social structure. This highlights the basis for an analysis of how projects of mega- and extended- urbanization in contemporary India are being mediated through "territorial compromises' and the endurance of agrarian forms, providing the determinates through which urbanization is shaped, frustrated, and sometimes blocked.

Occupancy

Of course at the heart of *abadi* rentierism are adjoining practices of territorial occupancy. These are practices of territorialization that belie formal state and market norms that feature in literature on "peripheral urbanism" (Caldeira, 2017) discussed in the first section of the paper. The form of much agrarian city-making is composed of the irregular auto-construction of houses, boundary walls, roads, and infrastructural systems – subtended by paper constructions – personal layout plans, e*rsatz* records, and provisional authorization paperwork – that anticipate and speculate on coming urbanization. While much of the literature allocates these territorial practices to the urban and rural poor, on the agrarian-urban frontier occupancy forms the

predominate political economy of urbanization and mode of spatial production by a diverse range of actors.

Take, for example, a village council in Kapashera on the Delhi-Gurgaon border, where I have been conducting research since 2011. Since the 1990s, the village council has taken it upon themselves to construct a mass grid of low-income rental housing, replete with roads, water, and sewerage lines on both their autonomous *abadi* lands (exempt from formal land markets and urban jurisdiction) but also on adjacent agricultural land (fully open to capitalistic land markets and urban jurisdiction). While *abadi* autoconstructions are the exempt privilege of the caste-based village council that governs *abadi* land, any construction on private agricultural lands without planning approval is unauthorized and disconnected from formal planning regulations and infrastructures. Village councils nevertheless attempt to give these mass unauthorized autoconstructions the semblance of authority by drawing up computerized layout plans and ersatz ownership ledgers, by authorizing off-the-books exchanges, and by lobbying local officials to reclassify land as nonagricultural and thus more proximate to non-agricultural uses (Cowan, 2022, 133-178). These kinds of urban rehearsal both withhold territory and power within agrarian institutions, while also materially and performatively nudging land toward urban-uses. They also, importantly speak to the ways "the urban" acts as a series of alluring, if speculative, invitations into new forms of capitalist community amidst the devaluation of agrarian economies. These urban communities are defined not by the fragmenting bonds of agrarian caste and class, but rather by membership in a new community of urban rentiers, landlords, speculators, and more recently, the Hindu national suject (Kumar, 2021). Indeed, practices of land occupancy, or *kabza* in Hindi, form as Gururani (2020) notes, part of agrarian communities' central strategies for urban rentier expansion. *Kabza* practices are by no means novel to agrarian city-making. Indeed informal occupancy is somewhat the classic mode of spatial production in cities in the majority world (Bhan, 2017; Caldeira, 2017; Ghertner 2015b; Holston, 2009). For Caldeira, autoconstructions involve a host of "improvisation and bricolage; complex strategies and calculations; and constant imagination of what a nice home might look like" (Caldeira, 2017, p. 5). While in the Indian context, these kinds of irregular, anticipatory construction are captured in Solomon Benjamin's notable work on "occupancy urbanism". For Benjamin (2008, 2019), "occupancy urbanism" describes a dominant mode of spatial production, engaged in by the urban poor involving the incremental and intensive occupation and reclamation of public and private property. For Benjamin, such incremental occupancy is less "transversal" to formality as discussed by Caldeira, and rather is centrally constitutive of urban land markets themselves (Benjamin, 2008).

And yet, under agrarian city-making, occupancy manifestsdifferently. On the frontier, these *kabza* practices are most commonly engaged in not by the urban poor – as is the case in part in Benjamin's early writings – but rather expressively by landed elites and corporate real estate actors. This is partly due to the complexities of rationalizing agrarian property into modern, capitalist idioms. In order to aggregate and convert vast swathes of rural land, laced with undulating forms of land tenure, regulation, and exclusion into a standardized resource, real estate firms are forced to engage in the very same practices as the Kapashera village association – physically capturing land, building boundary-walls and fences overnight, taking verbal assurances, subtly reassigning tenure-forms and

mobilizing private layout plans and demarcation reports (Cowan, 2022). Elite occupancy urbanism or *kabza* in agrarian urban spaces is animated here by ambiguous agrarian land tenures (common lands are frequent sites of land occupancy), the social and political power of dominant agrarian communities, bureaucratic performance, and the speculative real estate and industrialization mandates of capitalist actors. Importantly *kabza* practices are anchored into a broader speculative milieu – ordained in state planning and policy documents – that privileges territorial claims that align with real estate-uses in land no matter their legal or regulatory domain (Ghertner, 2015a). In other words, on urban-agrarian frontiers, India's capitalist class emerges as occupancy urbanists par excellence.

On Gurgaon's periphery, for example, a key tactic of corporate land aggregation has been the mobilization of counter-paperwork – land registry documents and demarcation reports – in order to imbue in land degrees of uncertainty in ownership (Cowan, 2021). As a landowner in Gurgaon relayed to me in a conversation during fieldwork in 2019, "First they [real estate firm] had their own cadastral demarcation done, showing that I was encroaching on their land … then they brought forty men and broke the back fence, building a wall on my land, then later I came to know they had reassigned my land as 'uncultivatable' [thereby more proximate to urban-uses] … finally I had my own demarcation done and it turns out they are sitting on a slither of my land!" The uncertainty that these occupancy practices imbue, practices embalmed in social and political power, allows powerful actors to substantiate ownership claims, and nudges the courts to favor *ex-parte* and "status quo" settlements (Cowan, 2022, p. 166).

Again elite occupancy is not reserved to my own fieldwork. Nikita Sud (2020, pp. 58–59), in work on rural special economic zones in Gujarat, describes how senior villagers turned land brokers view irregular land captures as equally legitimate to a legal land title, Sud's work examines how the physical possession of open land, plays a central part in lodging claims into what Gidwani and Upadhya (2022) have recently referred to as the "supply-chains" of land assetization. Elsewhere, there is a broader literature on elite capture of local planning apparatuses and the vernacular refashioning of territorial regulation to meet elite land banks (Gururani, 2013; Sundaresan, 2019). Nor is occupancy the reserve of land-based urbanization. In his study of water politics on Delhi's peri-urban edge Matthew Birkinshaw (2022) examines how competing political elites engage in "water grabs", informally capturing tubewell systems for rentier and political gain. Much like the case of land on the frontier, "non-network" water infrastructures in peri-urban Delhi are "strongly socially embedded" (Birkinshaw, 2022, p. 42) and thus difficult for formal state agencies to control, furnishing powerful local actors opportunities to capture and repurpose. Indeed as Llerena Searle (2018) reminds us, land assetization is always socially organized, brokered and mediated. Urbanization is not a switch that can be turned on and off by the state. Important for this paper, under agrarian city-making it is decidedly agrarian tools, institutions and social structures that are being mobilized to articulate urbanization project, to lay claim to land and set it up for clean assetization. Taking Benjamin's occupancy urbanism to India's urban frontier, overwrought by forces seeking to hold on to rurality while pressing forward with land value capture, this contested politics of occupancy is a practice leveraged *for land value capture*.

Blockades

And yet while the territorial strategies described previously have all involved a host of actors occupying land (or infrastructure) *for* value capture, these same strategies remain tentatively open to quite other territorial ambitions and uses. As discussed before, these articulations of agrarian and urbanization processes are not stable but require, to paraphrase Hall (1986a, pp. 113–114) *constant renewal* and "can under circumstances disappear or be overthrown". On the agrarian urban frontier the exudations of abadi rentierism and occupancy frequently distort the state's clear vision of space, lodging multiple legal claims, customary relations of production and extraction, reams of paperwork and physical constructions in the way of a clean rationalization of land (Cowan, 2021). Just as real estate actors are able to lodge uncertainty in ownership, so too can landowners mobilize local connections and knowledges to game and stifle urban development.

These kinds of occupancy-induced blockade are in part a consequence of land's necessary brokerage across scalar, institutional supply-chains (Gidwani & Upadhya, 2022). Occupancy and customary arrangements are central instruments to turn land on its way to becoming a liquid financial asset. The reliance of real estate and industrial capital on a range of brokers, experts and bureaucrats to haul together "possession, paperwork and power" (Jonnalagadda and Cowan, n.d.) leaves extant slippage for rearticulation: for alternative political-economic and ideological formations to take hold; for those groups to work toward different goal-orientations; for agrarian communities to block and subvert land aggregation and development projects; and for the powerful social networks that broker agrarian land as a liquid asset to fall apart.

Take for example the rerouted, blocked and bloated mega-highways that zigzag around India's agrarian spaces, connecting up scattered metropoles, are something of a testament to both the uneven circulation of infrastructural capital (Searle, 2018) and the occupancy-induced leakages that beset projects of urbanization. In Haryana, for example, key mega-highway projects have been stalled and rerouted as local landowners have mobilized counter-demarcation reports, reclassified land tenures, and lobbied courts for greater compensation (Cowan, 2022; Jha, 2019; Katakam, 2014). While highways are often considered quintessential markers of "extended urbanisation" forcefully driving through the financialization of the countryside their frequent distortion and undoing in contemporary India again demonstrates that there is little guarantee such extensions will indeed take place (Bathla, 2022).

Elsewhere blockades can be found in the fenced off, dug out, and cleared fields that sit in permanent-waiting across India's peri-urban fringe. In a recent paper Carol Upadhya (2021, p. 147) traces how the highly speculative rounds of capital investment that have poured into rural land in Amaravati, only to be rapidly exited for ventures elsewhere, have left territories marked by emptiness where "land is not only divorced from its productive role in agriculture, it also does not fulfil any other function". Occupancy for emptiness strikes at the heart of the socially defunct and speculative character of contemporary capitalism. Much akin to the cultivation of housing vacancy in North America (Noterman, 2022), speculation here rests upon a project to creatively disembed land from its historic and actually existing uses and values; impressing the either/or binary of a proprietary future or nothing at all. These empty spaces, common across agrarian urban frontiers,

have in various accounts been reoccupied, redeployed for common agricultural, leisure, pastoral or religious purposes that are sometimes enrolled into urban networks (Angelo, 2017; Kotsila & Apostolopoulou, 2022; Roast, 2022). Asa Roast's study of *kongdi* – the informal capture of empty land awaiting development – in Chongqing, for example, draws out the complex ways that practices of agricultural commoning on *kongdi* territory articulate with anticipated futures of urban development. Roast's (2022) work usefully conceptualizes communed rural territories on the peripheries of the metropolis not as rural remainders to urbanization, but rather as sites where the guarantees of urbanization are negotiated, articulated through agrarian practices, and take shape.

Empty lands can be similarly captured for alternative political means. As the invitation into a community of urban rentiers and frontiersmen has begun to falter and lose its allure for rural communities in north India from the late 2010s, the Hindu "nation" has arrived to furnish territorial land claims, provide much needed succor to otherwise dejected rural populations (Valluvan, 2021). During fieldwork in Gurgaon's land revenue offices in 2019, amidst an upsurge in Hindu chauvinism, I would frequently encounter young men, with significant financial backing, assembling paperwork to substantiate possession rights on land for the purposes of cow sanctuaries and temples, perhaps an innovative way to bank land in expectation of rising land values, or alternatively a chauvinistic counter-assertion to real estate uses that advance altogether distinct socio-ecological calculus to land. In forthcoming work, Shubhra Gururani (2024) notes that the construction of "temples, ashrams, *samadhis* [memorials], and *gaushalas* [cow shelters]" have shot up over the past ten years, emerging as key sites in the politics of land occupation. Gururani writes that "the figure of the *babas* [priests] in the context of Hindu and upper caste assertion, de-agrarianization, and speculative urbanisms" articulate an emergent project of Hindu majoritarianism with dominant projects of land assetization.Gururani's work provides a useful reminder of the potential for *re-articulation* of a given hegemonic social formation, for projects of accumulation to be retacked with a new set of compromises and fissures. Here as the normative power of developmentalism loses its allure, or fails to realize its spectacular populist promise, articulations of the agrarian and urban take different shape. These frontier rearticulations are composed by what anthropologist Don Kalb (Kalb, 2014, p. 7) refers to as the "shifting alliances between blurry groups, based on complex moral visions and desires" that are becoming "more frequent, more intense, more massive, more confrontational".

Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to put forward agrarian city-making as an approach to understanding processes of sociospatial change on the frontiers of Indian cities without guarantees. Adapting Hall (1983), this paper has argued that carrying guarantees of urbanization in our back pocket "prevent[s] us from actually being able to come to terms with the real world". I have argued that the agrarian in the context of planned urban expansion in contemporary India does certain articulatory work, lacing agrarian social formations and relations of production with emergent structures seeking urbanization. In doing so I have stressed the need to attend to the political, ideological, and economic grounds upon which seemingly convincing capitalist projects are set out, negotiated, and settled. Attention—to steal from Ghertner (2020)—to the "liveliness"

of the frontier (it's diverse tenurial arrangements, relations of production, and sociopolitical infrastructures) opens us up to the diverse range of social, cultural, and political strategies through which capitalist urbanization is formed, is formed in part, or is not formed at all. For some no doubt, such an approach risks reifying local "particularisms" that at best sustain some generalizable principles of urban theory (usually the supremacy and totality of agglomeration economies) (Scott & Storper, 2015). And yet, such approaches appear only comfortable to affirm urbanization post facto, once the dust has firmly settled on the successful sites and we can lamentably confirm that yes indeed land dispossession, assetization, agglomeration, and rentier extraction have taken place. Not only is this smooth after the fact rarely realized in contemporary agrarian urban India, but this approach feels less than compelling for those critical scholars who seek to understand the violence of the contemporary conjuncture so we can change it.

Notes

1. In this vein, my use of agrarian city-making draws similarities with Terry McGee's (1991) foundational work on *desakota* territories.
2. Here, for clarity, the agrarian refers to the multi-scalar relations of capitalist agricultural production, reproduction and accumulation (and their subtending class relations and ideological and institutional forms) that have shaped the uneven character of large swathes of rural space under both colonial and post-colonial periods in the present majority world.
3. William Conroy (2023) usefully pushes us to consider Hall's remarks on 'tendential force', that help explain the endurance and sedimentation of otherwise contingent articulations.
4. See Hart (2024).
5. See Cowan (2024). Gramsci's 'passive revolution' refers to a form of hegemonic power characterised by the renovation of existing structures of power, and enlistment of popular masses into bourgeois capitalist projects.
6. Some might consider 'concentrated' urbanisation the other relevant moment, to which a similar methodological shortfall discussed here equally applies.
7. See also Hart (2007); Chari (2017); Cowan (2018); Zeiderman (2018); Conroy (2022).

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