The desire for community: illusion, confusion and paradox
(Jeremy Brent, 2004)

Abstract
- Community seen as an ‘answer’ in issues of power
- Is community an illusion in the globalised world
- Community is a DESIRE as people seek voice and connectedness

Introduction
- Work in an outer city estate - community always seen as the answer to problems; but it never appears
- Times of strongest community have not been times of calm - so why is it associated with such?
- Community activity —> conflict and division. Divides inside from the outside. One of most common enemies = young people (Brown, 1995)
- Paradox - lots of community successes. So what is community?
- Arguments; community is an illusion; confusion over relationship between community, place and nature; fetishisation of locality which ignores importance of movement/diaspora

Illusion
- Arguments against community?
  - Community ignores wider forces; globalisation, capitalism and uncertainty, growth of individualisation. Fluidity of modern/post-modern world sweeps away stability of a community
  - Community’s ability to counter global forces = an illusion of group power, autonomy and unity. Can’t withstand divisions and inequalities
  - Understandable but doomed projects
  - Community is a static in a world of flows. Danger e.g. folk communities of Nazi Germany or gated communities in South Africa
- Difference between community as a pure illusion and community as a desire which cannot be achieved under the present circumstances
- How much illusion is part of political and social life?
- Community is not static - it is all about movement, and change. Risk of being radical - need support
- Are community, globalisation and individualisation completely incompatible?
- [Could you argue that individualisation has made us more aware of aspects that can bond people as communities]

Confusion
- Confusing place and community = widespread
  - Latter does not exist in every place. Differences between the former is not necessarily due to differences between the communities
  - Communities based solely on place = intensely nationalistic and reactionary. Denies collective experiences of travellers, diaspora, translocal sexual identities etc.
  - Idea of ‘natural’ communities - local and organic. Criticised - social inequality becomes natural difference
- Community as organic - attempts to claim that it can exist outside the society it is a part of. Impossible - cannot start from an independent point, all constructions

Paradox of definition
- Often community relies on metaphor or its relationship with something else than the concept itself
- Definition needed; identifies counterfeit claims to community, basis for self-criticism and providing a vision (Freie, 1998)
- Phillips (1993) - a community, as he defines it, has never existed.
- Bell and Newby (1971) - paradox of defining community is that as soon as one tries to, it ceases to have existence
- Dynamic - over time as well as space