

**WestminsterResearch**

<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/westminsterresearch>

**Villages and Urbanization**

**Stringer, B.**

This is an accepted manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Architecture and Culture, 5 (1), pp. 5-20.

The final definitive version is available online:

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/20507828.2017.1299435>

© 2017 Taylor & Francis

---

The WestminsterResearch online digital archive at the University of Westminster aims to make the research output of the University available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the authors and/or copyright owners.

---

Whilst further distribution of specific materials from within this archive is forbidden, you may freely distribute the URL of WestminsterResearch: (<http://westminsterresearch.wmin.ac.uk/>).

In case of abuse or copyright appearing without permission e-mail [repository@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:repository@westminster.ac.uk)

## **Villages and Urbanization.**

*Ben Stringer*

### **Abstract**

In this essay comments by politician Boris Johnson and economist Edward Glaeser exemplify narratives of global urbanization that portray rural villages as redundant and perpetuate outdated notions of urban-rural division. Simultaneously, traditional urban-rural dialectics are distorted by divisive new urban projects like gated communities styled as old villages. This paper argues for development models that acknowledge the vital environmental and economic roles played by rural villages, and opposes artificially created 'villages' in cities. In so doing, alternative readings of rurality and villages by Rem Koolhaas, Brazilian land reformers, Gandhi, and critics of contemporary Indian literature and urbanism, are considered.

**Keywords:** *village, urbanization, agriculture, globalization, settlement form.*

*"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."*<sup>i</sup>

Boris Johnson speaking at a property trade fair in Cannes 2011 when Mayor of London.

### **Introduction**

As the idea of the village slips from the country to the city it mutates, taking on different forms and characteristics. It can take on the social inclusivity of the community garden or urban farm, but the big money in today's city, is with hard edged spaces of social exclusion such as the ghetto or the gated 'community'. This essay draws comparison between particular examples of new 'villages' in the country and the city, in reality and fiction, within the context of global urbanization.

2016's Brexit referendum and US Presidential elections revealed stark political divisions between country and city voters in the UK and USA, although defining 'urban' and 'rural' is not actually that easy: 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.<sup>ii</sup> 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 more multi-layered and difficult to position geographically (McGranahan and Satterthwaite 2014). 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.<sup>iii</sup> Despite such conceptual complexities, cities and their relationships with wider regional and global networks are frequently described in terms of a kind of total generalised urbanization 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 urbanization 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 growing cities and megacities. Paradoxically, within those global cities is discernible a kind of compensatory neo-ruralization 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 metropolis.

At its worst, the rhetoric of global urbanization overlooks or 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 urbanization being advocated presumes high levels of large scale, export oriented agriculture in the countryside. What is required as the

Italian Territorialists, and 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 international supply systems. The most obvious alternative to the mega-city / mega farm paradigm would seem to be one that supports the critical roles that villages and small farmers play in networks that benefit cities and provide more biodiverse interfaces between agriculture urbanism and ecology.

The continual repetition of statistics since 2006 about the exponential growth of the world's urban population has deflected attention from the highly contested nature of politics and economics in the countryside. The statistics 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 Brazilian land reformers MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra or Landless Workers' Movement), 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 as somehow backward or belonging in the depths of history. 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 thinkers. In this regard I will be paying a little extra attention to Gandhi and India. This is partly because of Gandhi's epic contribution to this relationship between radical culture and villages, and partly because of a provocation made in a speech (quoted at the top of this article) made by Boris Johnson when he was mayor of the quintessentially global city of London, in which he says Gandhi's village oriented philosophy was wrong. This speech was widely reported by newspapers in India, where up to 70% of its population live in villages.<sup>iv</sup>

## **Eden? What Eden?**

The part of Johnson's speech that I have quoted 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'.* (Glaeser 2012:5)

Unlike Johnson, Glaeser does not soften his 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'*. Very little analysis of villages or rural economics was 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. (Glaeser 2012:7). Reading between the lines, it could be assumed that the people moving from the countryside to the city, in his scheme, are mainly people of younger professional ages looking for better prospects in the city, and thus leaving elderly and children behind. This also would accord with a dismantling of agricultural and settlement systems oriented to small farms and villages in favour of export oriented mono crop mega farms which require smaller work forces. Because the largest farms target global markets, cities therefore lose much of their economic connections with their own hinterlands and along with them, 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 2016's UN Habitat III conference, 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.’<sup>vi</sup> Habitat III has been described as ‘....the result of concerted lobbying and policy-making by cities, city networks, governments, policy-makers, NGOs and other actors.’<sup>vii</sup> ‘Time to Think Urban’ says ‘...cities and metropolitan areas are the major drivers of national economies...’<sup>viii</sup> It could be added that cities are also seen as the drivers of global economic systems too, and are emblematic of what Chantal Mouffe has described as a ‘post-political’ ‘consensus....around the idea that there is no alternative to neo-liberal globalization’.<sup>ix</sup> 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.*’<sup>x</sup>*

If, as Swingedouw argues, urbanization should not be understood as an inevitability, but as a project, then a corollary of urbanization is that the assumed decline of small rural settlement forms is a project also: Neo-liberal global urbanization 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. But just as rural villages are being dismissed, there is also, as the quote from Johnson suggests, a desire within urban politics to recreate the idea or memory of the village in the city. It is a confusing and contradictory scenario. For the globalized neo liberal economy though, it makes sense: Villages and small farmers in the countryside are not part of the vision of large scale export oriented industrial agriculture, but 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.

### **Favela to Farm: MST**

In the introduction to ‘Triumph of the City’, 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.*’ (Glaeser 2012:

9, 69-92) The 'likeability' of urban poverty he 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 liberalization, not shrinking, and meanwhile it does indeed seem easier to side with Gandhi<sup>xi</sup>. 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...'*<sup>xii</sup>

How often is doing the 'sensible' thing a matter of choice? Saskia Sassen explains the situation in Brazil thus: *'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.'* (Sassen 2014:82). 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 systemic shift in global patterns of land acquisition, wherein there has been 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 the year of the rural/urban tipping point, beyond which the majority of the world's population live in cities.

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 ('Movimento do Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra'; roughly translatable as '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 Paulo 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<sup>xiii</sup>.

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 where MST settlement are established in the same region. They find smallholder farms to be, on average, more productive per square metre than the large plantations 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 (Bergamasco and Norder 2015). 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.

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, export oriented industrial agriculture systems require between 10 and 15 calories of fuel and other forms of energy to produce 1 calorie of food energy, contradicting farming's original reason for existence, which was to be a provider of energy.<sup>xiv</sup> Alternatively; *'..... 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'*.<sup>xv</sup> Nevertheless, 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. There 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 earlier, Glaeser's use of the words 'Misty eyed' to define those who might see value in the idea of the village, and 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 21<sup>st</sup> century to history, nostalgia, backwardness, and facile chocolate box impressions. On the other hand, they use words like 'unromantic' and 'sensible' in support of rural to urban migration, rendering the city as a progressive site of clear eyed realism, rationality and logical thinking. Thus, 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 (Williams 1975). In effect, they infer are that anyone thinking of the village as a viable settlement form for the future is being deluded by a pastoral imaginary. Such fictional divisions of city and countryside according rationality and romance never matched reality.

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.'*<sup>xvi</sup> 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 reportedly incurred).<sup>xvii</sup> Koolhaas could also have mentioned the totally kitsch 'Garden Bridge' project, championed by Johnson, 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. 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 and the UK's steadily decreasing consumption of home grown produce.<sup>xviii</sup>

### **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 (Miles 2007:83). 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 interest in vernacular forms, the *Whole Earth Catalogue* provided 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. *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 wastage, complexity and hierarchy, while *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' (Alexander, et al:41-85). These spatial strategies might have appealed to alternative minded designers at the time, but aspects of them are now more likely to be echoed or mutated within much of today's conservative planning practices and projects and applied to exclusive 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 *A Pattern Language* and 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...denial of diversity and fear of difference".<sup>xix</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> century city (Hillier, Hanson 1984:132). An approach, broadly speaking, adopted by most 20<sup>th</sup> century social housing estates in Britain, and elsewhere, until the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While many of the UK's urban housing estates are currently being bulldozed and replaced by new commercially built neighbourhoods that are spatially better integrated into the fabric of the city, they 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 translated into conservative or neo-liberal strategies: 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), in which he makes a damning and comprehensive critique of the kind of urbanism and damaged ecology produced by neo liberalism, and offers an alternative driven by local self-sustainable democracy. He argues from the standpoint of understanding cities 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 reinforcing neighbourhood boundaries, other than when particular geographical or historical conditions insist upon it, as in the case of Venice, 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.<sup>xx</sup> 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 Ferdinand Tönnies' terms (Tönnies 2014). Though not actually intended to demarcate an urban-rural divide, Tönnies' concepts have nevertheless historically been used to indicate differences between small pre-industrial rural communities

and large modern industrialised urban societies. (Hillyard 2007:14). 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 globalization. Delanty argues that community has become a much more discursively constituted process in a postmodern globalized 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.* (Delanty 2003:188). 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 idea of the country village as somehow more stable and place-bound compared to the space of the city is no longer true, if it ever was. Inscribing the spatial limits of an urban community undermines its capacity for negotiation with the city, and thus the city's sense of urbanity too.

### **Re-imagining Indian villages.**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi saw in the village an alternative kind of politics, economics and society to the one offered by British colonialism and by what he saw as the western model of capitalism. For him the village represented the possibility of a society oriented to local democracy, and in his promotion of village crafts he saw the possibility of an economy of greater self-sufficiency and independence. His village-centric political philosophy always had detractors though, 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 of whom shared Gandhi's belief in villagers' abilities to act as the harbingers of a new democratic nation state. Nehru advocated industrialisation and the co-operativisation of small farms and villages so that they could afford new technologies and improve outputs (Das

Gupta 1989). Ambedkar was different to Gandhi and Nehru in that he had grown up as an 'untouchable' in a village and so 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*'.<sup>xxi</sup> 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. (Ray & Ray 2011).

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 their organisation. 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. Rudolph and Rudolph make the case that Gandhi 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*'. (Rudolph and Rudolph:155).

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 21<sup>st</sup> century works by Ghosh, Ondaatje and Abeyesekera, 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 21<sup>st</sup> century...'* (Mohan 2012:185). The South Asian 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 urbanity defined 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<sup>xxii</sup>. 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 around 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, and according to Amitabh Kundu this is partly due to what he calls the 'exclusionary', 'sanitization' of cities, meaning the clearance of slums and policing of middle and upper class neighbourhoods to exclude itinerants and homeless people. 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.'*<sup>xxiii</sup>

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.* (Glover 2013 p111). 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 as described by Glover, makes one wonder if in 21<sup>st</sup> century India the typical reading of the modern city as the embodiment of Gessellschaft and the rural village as Gemeinschaft, is being turned on its head. Not just a blurring of the urban rural divide, but a kind of inversion of it, wherein anxious desires for limits to urban societies in cities produce suffocating inward looking ideas of small 'village' like communities in the city, whereas against the prevailing trends, a politics and culture of openness to globalisation and the future could be emerging in the Indian village.



## References

- Alexander, Ishikawa, Silverstein, Jacobson, Fiksdahl-King and Angel 1977 *A Pattern Language* NY: OUP
- Bergamaso, Sonia Maria P.P. and Norder, Luiz Antonio *Rural Settlements and the MST in Sao Paolo*, in M. Carter (ed.) 2015 *Challenging Social Inequality* NC, USA Duke University Press.
- Brand Stewart 1968 onwards *Whole Earth Catalog* CA: Portola Institute
- Brenner Neil (ed.) 2014 *Implosions/Explosions* Berlin, Jovis Verlag.
- Carter, Miguel (ed.) 2015 *Challenging Social Inequality*, NC, USA Duke University Press.
- Champion & Hugo (eds.) 2004 *New Forms of Urbanization, Beyond the Urban-Rural Dichotomy*. Oxford: Ashgate.
- Das Gupta, Nirmalya Bhushan 1989 *Nehru and Planning in India*, New Delhi: Concept
- Davis, Mike 2006 *Planet of Slums*. London: Verso
- Delanty, Gerard 2003 *Community*. Oxford: Routledge
- Glaeser, Edward. 2012 *Triumph of the City*. London: Pan Books.
- Glover, William J 2013 *The Troubled Passage from 'Village Communities' to Planned New Town Developments in Mid Twentieth Century South Asia* in Rademacher, Anne and Sivaramakrishnan (eds) 2013
- Hillier, Bill and Hanson, Julienne 1984 *The Social Logic of Space* NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Hillyard, Sam 2007 *The Sociology of Rural Life* Oxford: Berg
- Magnaghi, Alberto 2005 *The Urban Village* London: Zed Books
- McGranahan, Gordon and Satterthwaite, David. 2014 *Urbanisation concepts and trends* IIED (International Institute for Environment and Development) Working Paper.
- Miles, Malcolm 2007 *Urban Utopias: The Built and Social Architectures of Alternative Settlements* Oxford, Routledge
- Mohan, Anupama 2012 *Utopia and the Village in South Asian Literatures* Basingstoke UK, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nandy, Ashis 2001 *An Ambiguous Journey to the City* New Delhi: OUP
- Rademacher, Anne and Sivaramakrishnan (eds) 2013, *Ecologies of Urbanism in India* Hong Kong, HKUP.
- Ray, Ishita Aditya and Ray 'Sarvapriya B.R. Ambedkar and his philosophy of Land Reform: An evaluation' *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences* Vol 2, No. 2.1 Quarter I 2011
- Rudofsky, Bernard 1964 *Architecture without Architects* NY Doubleday.
- Rudolph, Lloyd I and Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber 2006 *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays* Chicago UCP.

Sassen, Saskia. 2014 *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* MA: Harvard.

Schumacher E.F 1973 *Small is Beautiful* Preston: Abacus Press.

Swyngedouw, Erik. 2010 *Post-Democratic Cities. For Whom and for What?* paper presented at Regional Studies Association Annual Conference Pecs, Budapest. Accessed at <http://www.variant.org.uk/events/pubdiscus/Swyngedouw.pdf>

Tönnies, Ferdinand 2014 (originally 1881) *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* Norderstedt: Grin Verlag

Williams, Raymond 1975 *The Country and the City* Oxford OUP

---

<sup>i</sup> 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

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

<sup>iii</sup> Champion & Hugo (eds.) *New Forms of Urbanization, Beyond the Urban-Rural Dichotomy* (Ashgate 2004).

<sup>iv</sup> See note i.

<sup>v</sup> Edward L. Glaeser ‘Why Has Globalization Led to Bigger Cities’ *New York Times* (May 19 2009) accessed at: [http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/05/19/why-has-globalization-led-to-bigger-cities/?\\_r=0](http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/05/19/why-has-globalization-led-to-bigger-cities/?_r=0)

<sup>vi</sup> UN Habitat document for the 24<sup>th</sup> 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

<sup>vii</sup> Federico Caprotti, Robert Cowley, Ayona Datta, Vanesa Castán Broto, Eleanor Gao, Lucien Georgeson, Clare Herrick, Nancy Odendaal & Simon Joss (2017): *The New Urban Agenda: key opportunities and challenges for policy and practice*, Urban Research & Practice. Taylor and Francis.

<sup>viii</sup> See note vi, p.6.

<sup>ix</sup> ‘Five Minutes with Chantal Mouffe’ LSE European Politics and Policy blog: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2013/09/16/five-minutes-with-chantal-mouffe-most-countries-in-europe-are-in-a-post-political-situation/> accessed December 2016.

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

<sup>xi</sup> According to the UN population Fund <http://www.unfpa.org/urbanization>

<sup>xii</sup> Quoted in Davis, 2006 p.175

<sup>xiii</sup> According to the MST’s own website: <http://www.mstbrazil.org>

<sup>xiv</sup> Brenda B. Lin, M. Jahi Chappell, John Vandermeer, Gerald Smith, Eileen Quintero, Rachel Bezner-Kerr, Daniel M. Griffith, Stuart Ketcham, Steven C. Latta, Philip McMichael, Krista L. McGuire, Ron Nigh, Dianne Rocheleau, John Soluri and Ivette Perfecto 2011 *Effects of industrial agriculture on climate change and the mitigation potential of small-scale agro-ecological farms* Perspectives in Agriculture, Veterinary Science, Nutrition and Natural Resources 6, No. 020 CAB International. (Cited in Ajl 2014).

<sup>xv</sup> Ibid (but not cited in Ajl 2014).

<sup>xvi</sup> ‘Rem Koolhaas in the Country’ in the ‘Countryside’ issue of *ICON* (September 2014): <http://www.iconeye.com/architecture/features/item/11031-rem-koolhaas-in-the-country>

---

<sup>xvii</sup> See for example *The Independent* 21 Oct 2015 <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/anish-kapoor-s-orbit-losing-10000-a-week-described-as-standout-success-for-olympic-legacy-a6702291.html>

<sup>xviii</sup> See for example; de Ruiter, Macdiarmid, Matthews, Kastner<sup>4</sup> and Smith *Global cropland and greenhouse gas impacts of UK food supply are increasingly located overseas* *Journal of the Royal Society Interface* Downloaded from <http://rsif.royalsocietypublishing.org/> on February 19, 2017

<sup>xix</sup> 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

<sup>xx</sup> Among them are Hobsbawm, Jameson, Delanty, Rose, Bauman and Giddens.

<sup>xxi</sup> As quoted in Jodkha, Surinder S 'Nation and Village Images of Rural India in Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar' in *Economic and Political Weekly* August 10, 2002.

<sup>xxii</sup> Eg; *Times of India (Delhi)* Feb 01 2017 :

<http://epaperbeta.timesofindia.com/Article.aspx?eid=31808&articlexml=40-Dalit-families-flee-Mirchpur-after-caste-clash-01022017009020>

<sup>xxiii</sup> Amitabh Kundu interviewed in *Civil Society* <http://civilsociety.defindia.org/migration-to-cities-has-been-slowing-down/>