

Hosted by the SOAS, University of London

# The Future of the Rural World?

## Africa and Asia




**CONFERENCE  
PROGRAMME**

Friday, 30th October 2015  
at Woburn House Conference Centre



**SOAS**  
University of London



Once upon a time, the rural world held the key for the survival of the planet: the antidote to unsustainable and hyperbolic modernisation.

Today, some social scientists think the village is no more. The village has become the waiting room for the labour markets of the city, a ‘non-space’, a resource, and part of a tightly-bound system in which the countryside can only succumb to the rough seduction of the metropole.

The great transformation from peasant to industrial society in Europe has not followed in other parts of the world; yet, agriculture is no longer the mainstay of many rural economies in Africa and Asia.

Expanding populations, extractive industries and evolving technologies and infrastructures have filled the countryside and contributed to the diversification of the peasant economy.

# PROGRAMME

Time	Session	Room	Speakers	Topic
9.30-10.00	Registration tea/coffee	Tavistock Room		
10.00-10.15	Welcome	Main Hall	<b>Prof. Edward Simpson</b> Professor of Social Anthropology, SOAS	
10.15-11.00	Introduction	Main Hall	Prof. Edward Simpson, Prof. Patricia Jeffery, Dr Tina Otten, Dr Tommaso Sbriccoli, Dr Alice Tilche	Rural change & anthropological knowledge in post-colonial India
11.00-11.30	Break	Tavistock Room		
11.30-12.30	Keynote	Main Hall	<b>Prof. Peter Ho</b> Chair Professor of Chinese Economy and Development, Delft University of Technology <i>Introduction by Prof. Michel Hockx, Director of the China Institute, SOAS</i>	Why is China's property insecure? Probing into agrarian change and social welfare
12.30-13.30	Lunch	Tavistock Room		
13.30-14.30	Keynote	Main Hall	<b>Prof. Katy Gardner</b> Professor of Anthropology, London School of Economics <i>Introduction by Prof. Michael Hutt, Director of the South Asia Institute, SOAS</i>	We Want Work! Fractured Stories of Loss and Hope from rural Bangladesh
14.30-15.00	Break	Tavistock Room		
15.00-16.00	Keynote	Main Hall	<b>Prof. Henrietta Moore</b> Director of the Institute for Global Prosperity and Chair in Philosophy, Culture and Design at UCL. <i>Introduction by Prof. Mashood Baderin, Chair for the Centre of African Studies, SOAS</i>	The Village in an Age of Crisis
16.00-17.30	Roundtable Discussion	Main Hall	<b>Chaired by Baroness Valerie Amos</b> Director of SOAS	Future of the Rural World?
17.30-20.00	Wine Reception	Brunei Gallery, SOAS	<i>"The Future of the Rural World? India's Villages, 1950-2015"</i> Exhibition at the Brunei Gallery will be open for viewing	

# SPEAKERS



**Professor Peter Ho**, Chair Professor of Chinese Economy & Development, Delft University of Technology

Peter Ho is Principal Investigator of the European Research Council (ERC) Project, RECOLAND, on Land Policy and Administration in China. Peter has extensively published on institutions and property rights, sustainable and rural development, poverty and social inequality, and environmental policy and management in China.



**Prof. Katy Gardner**, Professor of Anthropology, LSE

Katy Gardner's work focuses on issues of globalisation, migration and economic change in Bangladesh and its transnational communities in the UK. Katy's most recent research arises from an ESRC-Dfid grant 'Mining, Livelihoods and Social Networks in Bangladesh' and involves the role of multinationals and competing narratives of 'development' and 'un-development' in her original fieldwork site in Sylhet, Bangladesh.



**Professor Henrietta Moore**, Director of the Institute for Global Prosperity, and Chair in Philosophy, Culture & Design at UCL

Henrietta Moore is a distinguished anthropologist and cultural theorist, and has focused her recent work on the notion of global sustainable futures. Moore's approach places notions of well-being, institutional change, citizenship, and social justice at the focal point of her research.



**Professor Edward Simpson**, Professor of Social Anthropology, SOAS, University of London

Edward Simpson's research focuses on the anthropology of mobility, disasters, and social change in South Asia. He was recently Principal Investigator on a four year long, ESRC-funded project looking at rural change in India through the restudy of the social anthropology of the 1950s.



**Professor Patricia Jeffery**, Emeritus Professor of Sociology, University of Edinburgh

Patricia Jeffery's main research interests are in gender and development, especially childbearing, women's reproductive rights, social demography in South Asia; Indian society, education and the reproduction of inequality; race and ethnicity. Patricia was Co-Investigator on the ESRC-funded project looking at rural change and anthropological knowledge in India



**Dr. Tina Otten**, Lecturer, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany

Tina has interests in myth, ritual and social change in Odisha, eastern India. Her research explores the ways in which people conceptualize social identity, experience change and how new ideas are absorbed and influence ritual and political structure, medicine, and gender- and kinship relations.



**Dr. Alice Tilche**, Leverhulme Postdoctoral Research Fellow, LSE

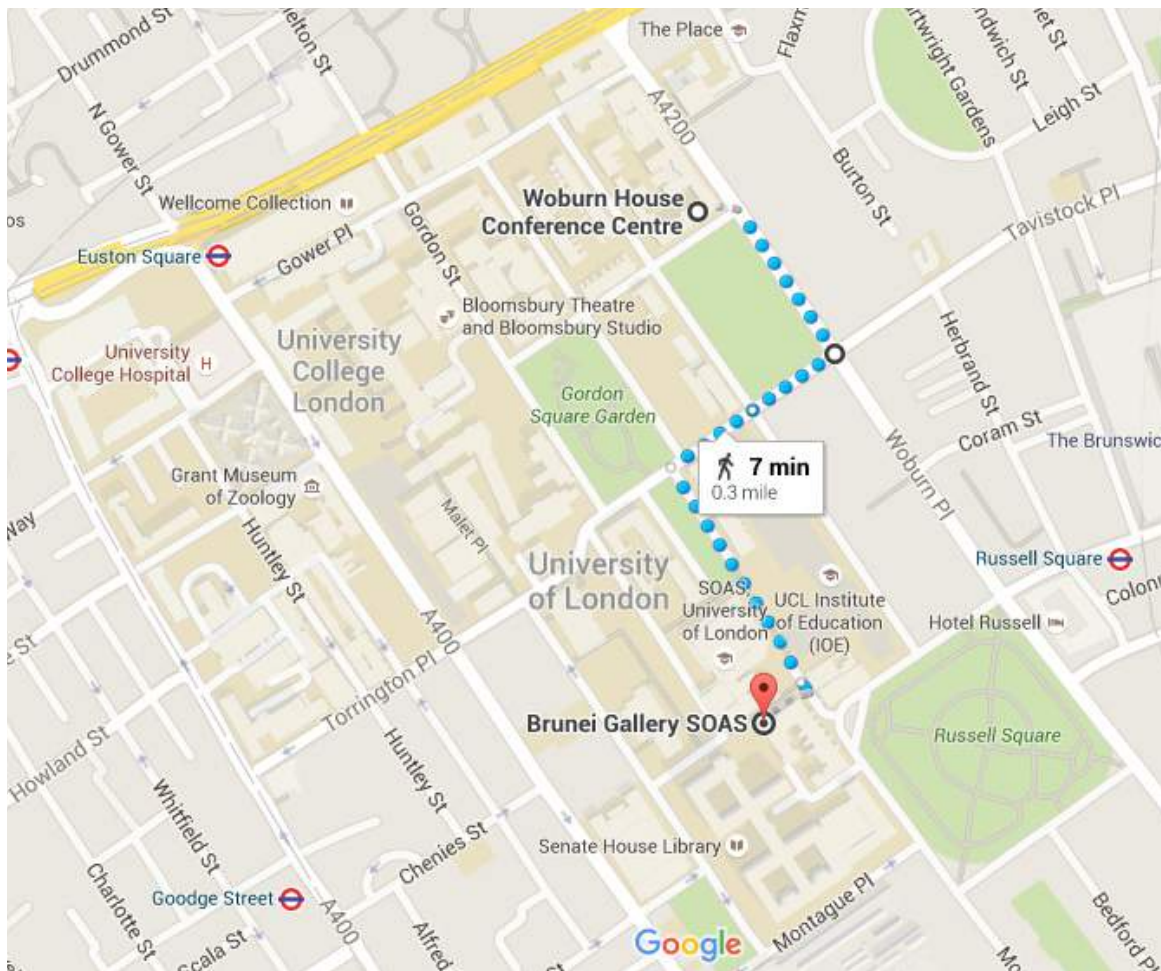
Alice's work combines an interest in the fields of material culture and museum studies, South Asian anthropology, development studies and the politics and cultures of indigeneity. Focussing on the development of an Adivasi ('Tribal') Museum in rural Gujarat, my PhD thesis examined the relationship between 'art making' and the making and mobilisation of an Adivasi identity.



**Dr. Tommaso Sbriccoli**, Freelance Anthropologist, Sienna, Italy

Tommaso has been doing field research in Northern India since 2003, working mainly on rural and pastoral communities in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Tommaso is currently writing a monograph based on 'restudying' the village of Jamgod which Prof. Adrian Mayer studied in the 1950s.

# LOCATION



## Address

Woburn House Conference Centre  
Woburn House,  
20-24 Tavistock Square  
London WC1H 9HQ  
<http://www.woburnhouse.co.uk/>

## By rail or underground

- 5 minutes walk from Euston Station
- 8 minutes walk from St Pancras International and Eurostar terminals
- 10 minutes walk from Kings Cross Station
- 5 minutes walk from Russell Square and Euston Square Underground

## By bus

A number of buses stop on Tavistock square including the 59, 68, 168 and 91.

Visit the Transport for London website for more information.

**Please note that the wine reception at 5.30pm will be held in the Brunei Gallery at SOAS. Directions from Woburn House to the Brunei Gallery can be found above.**

# INDIA'S VILLAGES, 1950-2015

Asking questions about **The Future of the Rural World?** marks the end of a major project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (of the United Kingdom). The project 'restudied' three villages in India, which had previously been studied by anthropologists in the 1950s. The aim was to compare life in villages then with today.

The original studies had been undertaken independently by F.G. Bailey, Adrian C. Mayer and David F. Pocock (deceased) and resulted in a considerable body of ethnographic writing about rural India at a particularly significant historical moment.

## Past...

In 1950, the children of newly independent India were born into a world where there was no refrigeration, television or internet; there was no electricity or piped water for most. There was optimism and enthusiasm for the future. However, life expectancy was low; metalled roads, combustion engines and plastics were still rare. Universal suffrage placed agriculture at the centre of political life in the new country. India had yet to go to war with Pakistan, and the IR8 rice seed of the so-called Green Revolution was more than a decade away.

After the Second World War came a renewed interest in the languages and cultures of Britain's former colonies. In India, there was a particular interest in villages, as Gandhi's rather romantic portrayal of the importance of village life merged with post-colonial paradigms of state welfare provision and centralised developmental planning.

Anthropologists documented sophisticated agrarian societies ordered by caste and institutionalised inequality, where the division of labour mirrored the ritualised and hierarchical exchange relationships of caste. The accounts published at this time, now also form an unprecedented and intimate historical account of what life was like in rural India in the years immediately after independence.

## Present...

Since then, much has happened in rural India: Nehru's socialism, influenced by post-colonial and particularly cold-war politics, has given way to the forces of (neo)-liberalisation and globalisation. Various waves of development policy were unevenly implemented; political devolution passed some responsibility for economic development, social justice and taxation to the village level; affirmative action ushered in 'reservations'. Land-reforms and new technologies transformed agriculture, whilst public health programmes enhanced survival.

Over the last four years, we have conducted new fieldwork in the villages so rigorously documented in the 1950s. Today, all three fieldsites (in Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat) display varying legacies of post-colonial development policies, economic and land reform, and technological, corporate and media expansion.

In each location, there has been a growth of grass-roots Hindu chauvinist politics. In Odisha, land rights and tribal identities have become burning issues, as people have been brought into conflict with transnational corporations and rapacious extractive industries. Rapid industrialisation in Madhya Pradesh has brought villagers into wage relations with India's industrial houses. In Gujarat, the village has become part of the transnational networks of migration, which directly link the politics and economy of rural India to the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

# Future?

Each field location displays different sociology and emergent development and cultural trends. The impossibility of a single future for rural India emerges clearly.

The trends identified in the 1950s as influencing the future direction of village life continue to define in a broad sense what village life is about:

- The role of agriculture and the material and symbolic capital of small-scale land-holding is declining.
- Livelihoods, and agricultural production, are diversifying.
- Caste hegemony remains, but other forms of ethnic and religious politics dominate daily life.

To such general trends, we add the following details:

- Mass unemployment, 'over' education, and cultures of 'waiting' are endemic.
- Religion dominates public discourse in many locations.
- Land fragmentation is combined with speculative land and construction markets.
- Private monopolists dominate many local supply chains.
- Transnational capital has become increasingly sophisticated at extracting revenue.
- Service professions and a middle class have entered rural life.
- A mobility paradigm organises daily and life-cycle expectations for many.

In a more general sense, we have found:

- The village, however hollowed out in economic or migratory terms, is regularly evoked as a unit of political mobilization and identity.
- The strategic decisions of transnational capital strongly influences the direction of life in villages. Local governments often seem out of step with the realities which surround them; national government policy similarly reflects realities rather than defining them.
- The distinction between villages and cities appears to be collapsing, to the degree that the vocabulary of social science and public requires reworking.



Exhibition at the Brunei Gallery,  
SOAS, University of London

## THE FUTURE OF THE RURAL WORLD? INDIA'S VILLAGES, 1950-2015

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