

2011

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Recommended Citation

Sackley, Nicole. "The Village as Cold War Site: Experts, Development, and the History of Rural Reconstruction." *Journal of Global History* 6, no. 3 (2011): 481-504. doi:10.1017/S1740022811000428.

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The village as Cold War site: experts, development, and the history of rural reconstruction*

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Abstract

This article examines 'the village' as a category of development knowledge used by policy-makers and experts to remake the 'Third World' during the Cold War. The idea of the village as a universal category of underdevelopment, capable of being remade by expert-led social reform, structured efforts to win the 'hearts and minds' of people from Asia to Latin America and Africa. Rooted in a transnational interwar movement for rural reconstruction, village projects were transformed in the 1950s and 1960s by a scientization of development that narrowed the range of experts in the field and by Cold War politics that increasingly tied development to anti-communism and counterinsurgency. From India to Central America, strategic efforts to control rural populations won out over concerns for rural welfare.

Keywords Cold War experts, development history, India, Vietnam, villages

Introduction

'We had to destroy the village in order to save it.' Attributed to an unnamed US army major in the wake of the Tet offensive of 1968, this statement has entered popular culture as a chilling summation of the perversity and futility of the United States' intervention in Vietnam. A war waged for the 'hearts and minds' of villagers, to 'save' them from communism, became a war on villagers. Yet the original quotation, as published in the *New York Times*, referred not to a village but a 'town', the provincial capital of Ben Tre.¹ The transmutation from 'town' to 'village' suggests the central place of the village not only in US visions of Vietnam but also in other projects to transform the 'Third World' during the Cold War.

Between the 1940s and 1960s, the 'village' and its presumed inhabitant, the 'peasant', became both subjects and objects of expert and state campaigns to develop and secure the 'Third World'. To US officials and 'Third World' leaders alike, villagers – not city dwellers or remote tribal peoples – were the great masses of underdevelopment, imagined as rousing

* I am grateful to William Gervase Clarence-Smith, Hugh West, Eric Yellin, and two anonymous reviewers for their careful readings and helpful suggestions.

1 'Major describes move', *New York Times*, 8 February 1968, p. 14.

from centuries of slumber to new consciousness of the possibilities of the modern world. Images and assumptions about village poverty – and its potential to disorder the world – shaped elite visions of backwardness and efforts to engineer ‘modernity’ and maintain global control. Villages were real places on maps of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. But they were also imagined and constructed spaces in the ideologies and projects of government officials, foundation officers, and experts. What Ashis Nandy has called ‘the village of the mind’ structured how they understood and responded to events in rural regions of the globe.²

This article examines ‘the village’ as a category of development knowledge used by policymakers and experts to remake the ‘Third World’ during the Cold War. A range of US, imperial, and postcolonial elites ‘thought in villages’, focusing on the close-knit settlements of a thousand or so people typical of South and Southeast Asia as key development sites. The villages they chose on the ground or imagined in their models varied across national and imperial contexts and changed over the course of the twentieth century. Yet, for all the fuzziness, the concept held a great deal of intellectual, political, and emotional purchase, and profound similarities cut across the many meanings and methods. For all, ‘the village’ contained all of the dangers and possibilities that development experts saw in ‘Third World’ peoples. Talk of villages called up fears of the disorder that policymakers and reformers read into the rural landscapes of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Simultaneously, however, the village form, imagined as a small, unified community of ordered living, appeared as an ideal instrument with which to contain unruly peasant politics, mobilize labour, and construct an ideal social order. The village was the problem; it was also the solution. Through expert knowledge and state power, the reconstructed village (or the model village built from the ground up) promised to secure and legitimate empires, Cold War alliances, and new nation-states.

While the focus on the village form began with the movement for rural reconstruction during the 1920s and 1930s, it assumed a new geopolitical urgency during the Cold War. Interwar projects to ‘uplift’ villagers had involved a loose transnational constellation of elite actors, from missionaries and colonial administrators to nationalist politicians and social reformers. In the era of decolonization and Cold War rivalry, village transformation became inextricably tied to projects of state formation, global hegemony, and imperial preservation. In these, US policymakers and projects came to play an increasingly outsized role.

The post-war era also saw the rise of the village as a laboratory increasingly under the microscopes of specialized experts. This ‘scientization’ of rural reform narrowed the range of actors in the field, as politicians and foundations pushed missionaries and amateur projects to the sidelines, and looked increasingly to social scientists with claims to universal expertise. These experts transformed specific villages into on-the-ground experiments for the production of knowledge about development. In doing so, they made particular local places stand in for non-city dwellers in all of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The village as a category became even more commensurable and reproducible.

Envisioning the village as a homogenous and replicable unit shaped how policymakers and experts approached the project of development. Thinking in villages represented something different from modernization theory: its terminus was not Walt Rostow’s ‘age of high

2 Ashis Nandy, *An ambiguous journey to the city: the village and other odd ruins of the self in the Indian imagination*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 19.

consumption' but instead the creation of a world of stable agriculturalists, 'modernized' and 'developed' yet perpetually different from the people of 'the West'.³ Such atomization often ignored conditions in the growing metropolises of the 'Third World' and, until the 1960s, most solutions to urban poverty or political dissent involved efforts to keep people in the countryside. Further, projects to relocate or sedentarize nomadic or tribal peoples often turned on the notion of containing people in the village form. Village thinkers rarely considered rural divisions of class and ethnicity, the wider regional and cultural networks in which actual villages were embedded, or the complexity of migration patterns in and out of villages and cities or across national lines. Thus, well into the 1950s, development elites spoke sanguinely about the power of national 'community development' programmes to address peasant welfare simultaneously with national development and political stability goals.

By the end of the decade, however, geopolitical imperatives assumed new importance and shifted the aims of village projects from social welfare to strategic defence. When villagers failed to behave as expected, refusing birth-control campaigns or joining communist movements, US policymakers and experts and 'Third World' leaders from India to South Vietnam backed ever more coercive projects to force conformity to elite targets. The line between development and Cold War security thinned and then disappeared in the battlefields of Southeast Asia, where the construction of 'strategic' villages joined the techniques of community development to new practices of counterinsurgency. Although promoted as model communities to win the hearts and minds of villagers through expert assistance and military protection, strategic villages, encircling forcibly relocated peasants behind barbed wire and into civilian defence patrols, were essentially instruments of war.

Recent scholarship on development has illuminated the social construction of development categories, the geopolitics of development, and the role of experts in development practice. While scholars have located numerous instruments of development regimes, from the calorie to the economy, the village has not been fully examined as a category of, and symbol for, underdevelopment. Those who have taken on the village have tended to segment a longer, transnational history of ideas about rural reconstruction into national and imperial histories of either the interwar years or the post-Cold War period.⁴ By bringing together

3 W. W. Rostow, *Stages of economic growth: a non-communist manifesto*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1960.

4 Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of experts: Egypt, techno-politics, modernity*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002, p. 123–52; Nick Cullather, "'The target is the people'": representations of the village in modernization and U.S. National Security Doctrine', *Cultural Politics* 2, 1, 2006, pp. 29–48. On development categories, see Matthew Connelly, 'To inherit the earth: imagining world population, from the yellow peril to the population bomb', *Journal of Global History* 1, 2006, pp. 299–319; Timothy Mitchell, 'Economists and the economy in the twentieth century', in George Steinmetz, ed., *The politics of method in the human sciences: positivism and its epistemological others*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005, pp. 126–41; Nick Cullather, *Hungry world: America's Cold War battle against poverty in Asia*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010, pp. 11–34; Daniel Speich, 'The use of global abstractions: national income accounting in the period of imperial decline', *Journal of Global History*, 6, 1, 2011, pp. 7–28. For histories emphasizing US actors in village reform, see David Ekbladh, *The great American mission: modernization and the construction of an American world order*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010; Jason Pribilsky, 'Development and the "Indian Problem" in the Cold War Andes: *indigenismo*, science, and modernization in the making of the Cornell–Peru project at Vicos', *Diplomatic History*, 33, 3, 2009, pp. 405–26. On colonial projects, see Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the expert: agrarian doctrines of development and the legacies of British colonialism*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007; Joanna Lewis, *Empire state-building: war and welfare in Kenya, 1925–52*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000; Helen Tilley, *Africa as a living laboratory: empire*,

multiple histories, this article reveals the ways in which the village has served as a powerful, unique, and global category of expert reform. A broader temporal and transnational frame allows us to trace how the village became a bounded category of Cold War expertise and, thereby, to begin to explain how the boundedness of expert visions led to coercion and violence in contested regions in the Cold War.

Transnational roots

The roots of Cold War efforts to win the hearts and minds of villagers lay in interwar politics and practices of rural reconstruction. The village, real and imagined, first became an object for sustained social engineering in the 1920s and 1930s. Driven by a global traffic of missionaries, social scientists, and philanthropic foundations, the image of the village was increasingly a universal category, a type of living that could be found from Asia and the Middle East to North America. That way of living was seen as disordered and in critical need of modern knowledge. Ideas and campaigns for ‘rural reconstruction’ proliferated around the world, from model villages in Egypt and the United States to mass education brigades in China and Greece. As the worldwide crisis of the Depression deepened and hit export commodity regions especially hard, Great Britain sought to quell unrest in its colonies by joining in campaigns for rural reconstruction and ‘community development’. Thus, circulating from New Deal agencies and US philanthropies to missionaries, nationalists, and British colonial administrators, rural reconstruction coalesced into a collection of models and practices that could be administered to villages and peasants around the world.

The idea that the village was plastic and could be socially engineered was itself new to the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, early colonial administrators singled out the village as the central institution of Indian and Javanese society, depicting them as self-contained ‘little republics’ governed by communal ownership and impervious to change.⁵ The influential social theorist Henry Sumner Maine compared Teutonic villages that had achieved modern legal regimes based on private property, Maine’s *sine qua non* of civilization, to Indian villages that remained eternally ancient and backward. Maine disputed that India had ever reached a feudal stage of development, but other commentators attached the term ‘medieval’ to the ‘Asiatic’ village.⁶ In Russia and China, two other places singled out as ‘nations of villages’, western European and American visitors cast Russian and Chinese villages as insurmountable bulwarks against national progress. The *mir*, explained journalist Frank G. Carpenter in 1902, was a ‘little world in itself’, where ‘Asiatic’ peasants did ‘not

development, and the problem of scientific knowledge, 1870–1950, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011. On nationalist visions of the village, see Omnia El Shakry, *The great social laboratory: subjects of knowledge in colonial and postcolonial Egypt*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007; Subir Sinha, ‘Lineages of the developmentalist state: transnationality and village India, 1900–1965’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50, 1, 2008, pp. 57–90; James C. Scott, *Seeing like a state: how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998, pp. 193–306.

5 Thomas Stamford Raffles, *The history of Java*, vol. 1, London: John Murray, 1817; Clive Dewey, ‘Images of the village community: a study in Anglo-Indian ideology’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 6, 3, 1972, pp. 291–32.

6 Henry Sumner Maine, *Village-communities in the east and west*, London: John Murray, 1871.

seem to care for the future'. As late as 1910, the US sociologist E.A. Ross's tour of Chinese villages led him to conclude that China was 'the European Middle Ages made visible'.⁷

Such visions of 'Oriental backwardness' were undergirded by racial doctrines that saw biology and climate as determining the civilizational potential of peoples. Not only were Oriental races inferior to Anglo-Saxons and incapable of economic progress or self-government, but peasants, according to many nineteenth-century race scientists, came from different racial stock from nobility.⁸ Thus Asian villagers were doubly backward: unable to undertake the journey from Orient to Occident, or from hinterlands to the imperial courts of India or China, where Europeans admitted that elements of civilization existed. British and Dutch colonial policies largely reflected the view that stark cultural and racial deficiencies inhibited the possibility for remaking rural colonized subjects in the image of Europeans. Even as plantation capitalism and colonial property law, taxation, and coercive labour regimes transformed social and economic conditions throughout rural Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Caribbean, colonial administrators focused relatively little attention on changing cultural and social practices within villages.⁹ Imperial rhetoric about bringing moral improvements was used to justify empire, but the fiction of villages as places outside history and immune to change held firm.

It was in the years around the First World War that the village became the object of intensive social reform, the first groups to identify it as a site of reform being Anglo-American protestant missionaries. Anchored to treaty ports in China and colonial capitals in India, the missionary had failed to realize, in the words of the missionary Arthur H. Smith, that '[b]y far the larger part of the most numerous people on the globe live in villages'.¹⁰ Moving out from cities to villages, a new generation of missionaries began to apply ideas about social reform that were being worked out as answers to the industrial and agrarian problems of western Europe and the United States. They argued that the problem of the village required 'men of knowledge' who could address the 'non-theological aspect of Foreign Missions'.¹¹ In India and China, but also in the Philippines and Brazil, they founded model farms, agricultural colleges for village boys, and village missions to teach agriculture, public health, and education. Their confidence about the success of their efforts came from a new faith that expertise could 'engineer' society, but also from changing ideas about the possibility of adapting Western civilization to the Orient. The example of Japan's industrialization and its victory in the Russo-Japanese war of 1905 was prominent in their dreams of village reform. After visiting 166 mission stations in India, China, and Siam, the secretary of the

7 Frank G. Carpenter, *Europe*, New York: American Book Company, 1902, pp. 329, 326; David Engerman, *Modernization from the other shore: American intellectuals and the romance of Russian development*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 190–1; Edward A. Ross, *Changing Chinese: the conflict of Oriental and Western cultures in China*, New York: Century, 1911, p. 3.

8 Nell Irvin Painter, *The history of white people*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2010, p. 232.

9 Thomas R. Metcalfe, *Ideologies of the Raj*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995; David Ludden, 'World economy and village India, 1600–1900', in Sugata Bose, ed., *South Asia and world capitalism*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 159–77.

10 Arthur H. Smith, *Village life in China: a study in sociology*, New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1899, p. 15.

11 Edward Warren Capen, 'Modern principles of foreign missions', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 30, 1907, pp. 33–44; Gary R. Hess, 'American economic missionaries and efforts at economic improvement in India', *Agricultural History*, 42, 1, 1968, pp. 23–34.

Kennedy School of Missions in Hartford, Connecticut, pointed repeatedly to Japan to argue that ‘the future of oriental social development is full of promise’.¹²

Missionary efforts paralleled what the historian Joseph Hodge has called the discovery of the ‘human side’ of colonial development.¹³ An attention to native ‘uplift’ began in the Philippines. In the wake of the archipelago’s conquest involving the systematic destruction of villages and the forced relocation of Filipinos into overcrowded, disease-ridden ‘village centres’, the US colonial state made the ‘regeneration’ of native villages through village schools and public health campaigns a centrepiece of its vision of an exceptionalist, republican imperialism.¹⁴ New ideas about separate Asian and African paths soon spread, crossing imperial networks of exchange. To govern natives and increase economic production of staple crops, colonial administrators began to join scientific expertise about farming and health to anthropological insights about how native customs might be ‘adapted’ to build ‘healthy, progressive, organic communities’.¹⁵ Meanwhile, American philanthropic foundations turned their attention to overseas projects for rural uplift, promoting Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee model of agricultural and industrial education for rural African Americans as a mechanism for inculcating the ‘essentials of civilization’ to rural peoples in Greece, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁶

The village stood at the centre of many of these new efforts. Lord Lugard, architect of the interwar British imperial policy of indirect rule, argued that the village should function as the administrative unit of the ‘more advanced communities’ of Africa.¹⁷ Lugard’s nephew, Frank Lugard Brayne, financial commissioner of the Punjab in India, conducted an experiment in village uplift in one district and produced a series of books on the ‘remaking of village India’. Brayne used native ‘village guides’ and adaptations of traditional plays to convince villagers to adopt agricultural cooperatives, new housekeeping methods, and village schools.¹⁸ This project fitted into a new drive by the India Office to promote rural welfare and scientific agriculture in India’s villages. ‘[A]ll the resources of the State should be brought to bear on the problem of rural-uplift’, concluded the Royal Commission on

12 Edward Warren Capen, ‘Sociological appraisal of Western influence in the orient’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 16, 6, 1911, p. 754.

13 Hodge, *Triumph*, pp. 118–19.

14 Paul A. Kramer, *The blood of government: race, empire, the United States, & the Philippines*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

15 Quoted in Hodge, *Triumph*, p. 140. See also Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Tense and tender ties: the politics of comparison in North American history and (post) colonial studies’, *Journal of American History*, 88, 3, 2001, pp. 829–65; Michael Adas, *Dominance by design*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 129–84; Paul A. Kramer, ‘Empires, exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: race and rule between the British and United States empires, 1880–1910’, *Journal of American History*, 88, 4, 2002, pp. 1315–53; Suzanne Moon, *Technology and ethical idealism: a history of development in the Netherlands East Indies*, Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2007.

16 Thomas Jesse Jones, *The essentials of civilization: a story of social values*, New York: Henry Holt, 1929; Eric S. Yellin, ‘The (white) search for (black) order: the Phelps–Stokes Fund’s first twenty years, 1911–1931’, *The Historian*, 65, 2002, pp. 319–52.

17 Frank D. Lugard, *The British mandate in British tropical Africa*, London: William Blackwood, 1922, p. 202.

18 Frank Lugard Brayne, *The remaking of village India*, London: Oxford University Press, 1929; idem, *Better villages*, London: Oxford University Press, 1937.

Agriculture in India in 1928.¹⁹ A similar effort could be found in Greece, where the fracturing of empires and the chaos of the First World War had brought the Rockefeller Foundation and the Phelps–Stokes Fund to villages in Macedonia. Like Brayne’s work in India, the Macedonian project assumed that an array of experts and administrators could and must help peasants free themselves from conditions unsuitable to the proper functioning of modern societies and economies.²⁰ Not only in India and Greece, but also all over the world, villages were unfit for modern times. Social reformers and colonial administrators had the tools for village transformation and the village needed changing.

Imperial attention was partially driven by concerns about agricultural efficiency and public health. But the urgency with which colonial states took up the problem of the village reflected increasing anxieties about its politicization. By the late 1920s, Mohandas Gandhi’s appeal to India’s villagers had transformed an Indian Congress demanding representation within the empire into a mass movement for complete independence. In China, Mao Zedong re-envisioned a communist revolution led by peasants rather than an industrial proletariat, while, within nationalist circles, Sun Yat-sen’s programme for a modern China of railroads and machines gave way to exhortations for urban elites to go ‘back to the village’. Echoing the comments of Western observers, Chinese intellectuals in the 1910s had blamed China’s failure to modernize on ‘superstitious, ignorant, and inert’ villagers. Twenty years later, communists and nationalists alike celebrated the villager as the heart of the Chinese nation and ascribed Chinese backwardness to foreign economic and political dominance. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru similarly held up village India as the real India and argued that the Indian village, far from an unchanging entity, had been wounded by exploitative colonial rule and required reconstruction. Although they differed on the question of industrialization, both Gandhi and Nehru believed that the making of a new Indian nation began in its villages.²¹

Such views were echoed in what could only be described as a global wave of peasantism among urban intellectuals and elites in the 1930s. Peasantism animated national politics in Korea, Japan, Mexico, Peru, Turkey, Egypt, the United States, and central Europe.²² It also traversed the ideological spectrum. Mao Zedong and the staunch anti-communist Leonard S. Hsü in civil-war China, Antonio Gramsci in an Italian prison and the minister of agriculture Walter Darré in Nazi Germany, liberal critics of southern plantation agriculture and nostalgic southern agrarians in the United States: all trafficked in dreams of social

19 *Report of a Royal Commission on Agriculture in India*, London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1928.

20 Harold B. Allen, *Come over into Macedonia: the story of a ten-year adventure in uplifting a war-torn people*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1943.

21 Sun Yat-sen, *The international development of China*, New York: Putnam, 1922; Xiarong Han, *Chinese discourses on the peasant, 1900–1949*, Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 2005; Gyan Prakash, *Another reason: science and the imagination of modern India*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

22 Gi-Wook Shin, ‘Agrarianism: a critique of colonial modernity in Korea’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41, 4, 1999, pp. 784–804; Florence Mallon, *Peasant and nation: the making of postcolonial Mexico and Peru*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995; M. Asim Karoumerlioglu, ‘The Village Institutes experience in Turkey’, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 25, 1, 1998, pp. 47–73; El Shakry, *Great social laboratory*; Stephen Vlastos, ed., *Mirror of modernity: invented traditions of modern Japan*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998, pp. 79–94.

transformation through the village.²³ Their uses of the village differed, of course. Visions of the village as an anchor of conservative tradition against urban modernity had little in common with plans to uproot capitalism through cadres of proletarianized peasants. Yet a shared strain of ambivalence characterized a wide range of national and transnational discourses about peasants. Evocations of villages as the heart of nations, physically and psychologically disordered by forces outside their control, were coupled with older critiques of peasants as passive, irrational, primitive, and lazy. As David Engerman has shown, many US intellectuals justified the violent collectivization of Soviet agriculture and destruction of thousands of villages on the grounds that the cultural defects of the Russian peasantry required a radical, top-down programme of modernization.²⁴ While less violent and all encompassing than Soviet collectivization, a wave of nationalist village projects from Village Institutes in Turkey to a ‘better villages’ campaign in Jamaica all shared the premise that village life required ‘reconstruction’ through expertise, planning, and elite visions of change.

Powered by the politics of nationalism, the transnational movement for rural reconstruction was given ideological ballast and urgency by the worldwide depression of the 1930s. The Depression led many to question industrial capitalism and envision instead a return to the social and communal bonds of rural life, where even industry would be relocated to the countryside. These ideas animated rural reform efforts in industrialized nations such as the United States and Great Britain and appeared in reform platforms in India, China, Turkey, and Mexico. In vast stretches of the globe where cash-crop capitalism dominated, the collapse of export markets, fragmentation of peasant landholdings, and plummeting wages led to a wave of rural and urban protests, riots, and strikes. The rural development projects proposed by colonial governments were emergency measures to shore up imperial possessions from the threat of popular revolt.²⁵ The spectre of violent villagers and uprooted peasants who migrated to cities and took up revolution thus drove the construction of the early framework for post-war economic development.

By the eve of the Second World War, village projects proliferated around the world and rural reconstruction had become a constellation of ideas and practices shared across empires and nations. Information circulated through colonial administrative services, through North American organizations such as the International Missionary Council and the Rockefeller Foundation, and through the global travel of anti-colonial nationalists such as the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, the Chinese Mass Education Movement leader James Yen, and the West Indian historian Eric Williams, all of whom created or championed village

23 Leonard S. Hsü, ‘Rural reconstruction in China’, *Pacific Affairs*, 10, 3, 1937, pp. 249–65; Antonio Gramsci, *Prison notebooks*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992; R. Walter Darré, ‘The German peasant formed German history’, in George L. Mosse, ed., *Nazi culture: intellectual, social, and cultural life in the Third Reich*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003, pp. 147–51; Arthur F. Raper, *Preface to peasantry: a tale of two black belt counties*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1936; Twelve Southerners, *I’ll take my stand: the South and the agrarian tradition*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930.

24 Engerman, *Modernization*, pp. 164, 168, 209–10.

25 Frederick Cooper, ‘Modernizing bureaucrats, backward Africans, and the development concept’, in Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard, eds., *International development and the social Sciences*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997, pp. 64–92; Hodge, *Triumph*, pp. 170–88.

development projects.²⁶ Not that these reformers always agreed. Indeed, international talk of rural reconstruction papered over myriad ideological and disciplinary differences in how to address the problem of the village, differences that would surface again during the Cold War. But disagreements over priorities and methods did not undermine the centrality of the village as a site for reform.

One significant change after the Second World War was the place of the United States and US experts and institutions in projects to remake the village. In the 1930s, American places were embedded *within* transnational circuits of rural reconstruction. The US South and American Indian reservations were seen as areas in particular need of rehabilitation, but deep currents of rural communitarianism, from farmer collectives to model villages of the New Deal, animated national policymaking. While US practices to remake rural life joined the world of village reform, ideas came back to the United States via missionaries, social reformers, and social scientists, who observed and praised rural projects in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. They contrasted isolated American farm homesteads with the potential for communal bonds and civic organization in close-knit village living in other parts of the world.²⁷ After the Second World War, the economic ascent of the United States and the apparent success of its corporate farms and suburbs, along with the collapse of New Deal reforms, combined to give planned rural change far less purchase within the United States. With a few outlying exceptions, such as Appalachia, Americans were no longer imagined as peasant folk, and the 'village' became largely a quaint term affixed to suburban subdivisions and shopping malls to evoke localism and tradition.²⁸

If the post-war United States was no nation of villages, the regions of the world newly categorized as 'underdeveloped' were imagined as a vast sea of peasant villages. The statistical construction of underdevelopment, through such indices as GNP, calories, and morbidity per capita, was assembled in national units. But the descriptive portrait of underdevelopment featured the village. Indeed, as the field of anthropology turned in the 1930s from remote tribes to 'modernizing' villages around the world, its practitioners documented more and more of the globe as inhabited by peasant 'folk', steeped in 'tradition' but shaped increasingly by outside forces. American anthropologists and rural sociologists began to describe peasants as a global type who shared, across nations and regions, a distinct outlook and way of life. Peasant villages were, US social scientists emphasized, the typical social unit of underdeveloped nations.²⁹ By the late 1940s, their economic conditions and political allegiances were tied increasingly to the rhetorical and military battles of the Cold War.

26 V. P. Pande, *Village community projects in India*, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1967, pp. 103–12; E. Franklin Frazier and Eric Williams, eds., *The economic future of the Caribbean*, Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1944; Charles W. Hayford, *To the people: James Yen and village China*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

27 On rural reconstruction in the United States, see Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic crossings: social politics in a progressive age*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 447–61.

28 By the end of the 1950s, evocations of the 'village' would also migrate to US urban policymaking and urban 'renewal' projects.

29 See, for example, Irwin T. Sanders, 'Characteristics of peasant societies', in Edmund de S. Brunner et al., *Farmers of the world*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1945, pp. 4–7.

Village laboratories

The international politics of the village changed dramatically with the Cold War and decolonization. While leaders of postcolonial states from India to Egypt saw transforming villages as critical to their aspirations for economic development and national cohesion, European colonial powers re-evaluated the importance of rural development in the context of nationalism and fears of Soviet competition. Social welfare and rural 'education for citizenship' became new justifications for colonial rule.³⁰ But it was US policymakers who most clearly connected peasant landlessness, malnutrition, and reproduction to the potential of communist victory in the 'Third World'. Peasant revolution and communist victory in China reinforced the lesson that, in President Harry S. Truman's telling, 'poverty, misery, and insecurity are the conditions on which Communism thrives'.³¹ By the early 1950s, US policymakers, foundations, and experts turned, with new attention and dramatically increased funding, to the problem of rural development. Some US social scientists operated as university-based modernization theorists, but many more entered the field of development practice, in which their applied research took them directly into villages. In the process, they turned villages into 'laboratories' of investigation for their theories and models of planned social and economic change.

If specific villages were laboratories, then the idea of the 'awakening' village became central to US explanations of Asian and African political and economic demands. Few metaphors were as pervasive in popular descriptions of underdevelopment in the 1940s and 1950s than that of peasants in Asia, Africa, and Latin America 'awakening' to 'consciousness of the needless want which they have so long suffered'.³² After a world tour in 1950, the US Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas announced that he had 'not seen a village between the Mediterranean and the Pacific that was not stirring uneasily'. For centuries, 'perhaps for millennia', wrote the *New York Times* correspondent in India, Herbert L. Matthews, 'the life of the villagers had gone on much the same'. Now, villagers who had never before felt their deprivation had been aroused and were learning to demand economic and political change. In the Middle East, the Assistant Secretary of State George V. Allen saw an historic 'awakening of the village . . . that was alerting rural people to the need for progress for the first time in 5,000 years'.³³ The notion that the late 1940s constituted a global Rip Van Winkle moment was a curious one. It required amnesia about the peasant politics that had shaken the colonies in the 1930s and had sustained a brutal US war in the Philippines at the turn of the century. It passed over the history of colonialism and capitalism in rural Asia and the Middle East, as well as the decades-long efforts at rural reconstruction in which US foundations and experts had participated.

30 Lewis, *Empire state-building*, pp. 301–16.

31 Harry S. Truman, *Public papers of the president: Harry S. Truman, 1950*, Washington, DC: GPO, 1965, p. 228.

32 Cedric H. Seager, 'Point four's impact on the Middle East', *Department of State Bulletin*, 27, 691, 1952, p. 451.

33 William O. Douglas, *Strange lands and friendly people*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951, p. 317; Herbert L. Matthews, 'Volcanic forces rumble in India', *New York Times*, 8 February 1948, p. SM8; 'Aid of U.S. held vital to Middle East', *Washington Post*, 5 March 1955, p. 11.

To explain this awakening, US and western European commentators instead pointed to the exhortations of nationalist elites, and to the new reach of global communications and its ability to project, for the first time, images of the good life to remote areas of the world. The British novelist Wyndham Lewis wrote in 1948 that the ‘earth has become one big village, with telephones laid on from one end to another’.³⁴ US policymakers and social scientists saw in this a ‘revolution in rising expectations’ where ‘press and radio bring new concepts and new ambitions to . . . the “endless village” of the underdeveloped world’. Knowledge of relative poverty was at the core of political instability and economic unrest in the post-war world.³⁵ The irony was, of course, that it was precisely wartime newsreels, reports, and the travel of hundreds of thousands of soldiers abroad that brought Americans to new awareness of global conditions. Seeing villagers for the first time, Americans imagined villagers suddenly seeing them.

The unrest of the village mattered because, according to US policymakers, foundation officers, and social scientists, it was being assiduously exploited by communist insurgents, who fomented revolution by promising naive villagers a path to progress through the renunciation of capitalism. From the Greek Civil War to the Huk rebellion in the Philippines, villagers were depicted as military and psychological targets of communist agents and guerrillas. It was, however, the example of China that made US attention to the village question so acute in the early Cold War. When Mao proclaimed the People’s Republic of China in 1949, US liberals blamed the communist victory not on conspiracies within the US State Department, as conservatives did, but on the failure to address the economic and social concerns of China’s villagers. US missionaries, foundations, and experts had been involved in interwar Chinese rural reconstruction efforts, but it was not until 1948 that the US government placed significant resources behind a Sino-American Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction (JCRR). The JCRR offered too little, too late. Blocked by the corrupt regime of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) from addressing problems of land ownership or rural political representation, it also failed to deploy many of the broader social welfare elements of interwar rural reconstruction practice.³⁶ In the critiques that followed the ‘loss’ of China, liberals from Douglass to President Harry S. Truman unfavourably compared urban-bound US diplomats and experts to communists who, as Truman explained, went ‘to the peasant or the villager . . . and talk[ed] to him directly in his own tongue about the things he has learned to desire’. US policy needed to focus, the journalist Arthur Goodfriend agreed, ‘at the rice-roots’.³⁷

If the problem of development lay in the countryside, then it was in nonaligned India that American liberals believed they most needed to apply the rural lessons of the Cold War. In the early 1950s they came to see India, the world’s largest democracy, as the

34 Wyndham Lewis, *America and cosmic man*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1949, p. 21.

35 Willard L. Thorp, ‘World farming population aroused by knowledge of greener pastures’, *Department of State Bulletin*, 25, 643, 1951, pp. 661–2; Isador Lubin, ‘The world’s awakening people’, *Department of State Bulletin*, 26, 677, 1952, p. 935.

36 Frank Ninkovich, ‘The Rockefeller foundation, China, and cultural change’, *Journal of American History*, 70, 4, 1984, pp. 799–820; Ekbladh, *Great American mission*, pp. 25–39; Melvin Conant, Jr, ‘JCRR: an object lesson’, *Far Eastern Survey*, 20, 9, 1951, pp. 88–92.

37 Truman, *Public papers 1950*, p. 262; Arthur Goodfriend, *The only war we seek*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1951, p. 119.

developing nation with the most ambitious and realizable plans for rural development. India's first five-year plan called for the building of massive dams, steel mills, and scientific laboratories, but its focus was squarely on reshaping India's villages. The Indian national 'community development' programme, launched in 1952, drew on the country's experience as a central site in the exchange of missionary, imperial, and nationalist projects in rural reconstruction.³⁸ Beginning in a few thousand villages but spreading by 1961 to 410,000 nationwide, the programme trained cadres of Indian 'village-level workers' in a range of expert knowledge about agriculture, public health, and rural social organization. It then sent them out to villages with the goal of uncovering villagers' 'felt needs' and convincing them that 'modern' techniques of living and village councils could fulfil their aspirations.³⁹ Village self-help and village democracy, forged through government and expert leadership, were the rallying cries of community development's Indian and American enthusiasts.

For Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the programme addressed multiple, pressing economic and political needs: it promised to alleviate India's chronic food shortages, meet the welfare state rights enshrined in India's new constitution, and forge national cohesion by transforming peasants divided by region, religion, language, caste, and class into a national citizenry. As the political scientist Subir Sinha has noted, these structures accelerated the project of making peasants legible to the state by linking villages into 'circuits of state power' and creating a structure for sending village knowledge back to policymakers.⁴⁰ Furthermore, by remaking peasant practices and tapping into the voluntary labour of villagers, community development offered development on the cheap. The main cost of the programme was in the construction of administrative machinery to train village-level workers, hire expert advisors, and create new state structures that operated at the national, state, district, and village levels.

For US policymakers, the village community development programme in India also promised multiple dividends. First, supporting the programme provided an opportunity to recover from the China debacle and use rural development to contain communism in the 'Third World'. 'Communism got its hold in China on the village level. It must be beaten in India on the village level', reasoned the new US ambassador to India, Chester Bowles, who led the charge for US funding of India's programme and the transfer of the Indian model to other nations.⁴¹ Second, the Indian programme offered a high-profile demonstration site for the US Point Four programme of technical assistance, whose administration and funding lagged behind Truman's grand promise of a 'bold new program' for the underdeveloped world.⁴² Finally, community development, with its focus on voluntary labour and village democracy through sympathetic expert assistance appealed to US officials as a

38 India, Planning Commission, *The first five-year plan*, New Delhi: Government of India, 1952; Jawaharlal Nehru, *On community development*, New Delhi: Government of India, 1958.

39 Pande, *Village community projects*, p.173.

40 Sinha, 'Lineages', p. 75.

41 Chester B. Bowles, 'The partnership that must not fail', *Department of State Bulletin*, 26, 658, 1952, p. 164; Howard B. Schaffer, *Chester Bowles: New Dealer in the Cold War*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

42 Harry S. Truman, *Public papers of the presidents: Harry S. Truman, 1949*, Washington, DC: GPO, 1964, p. 114.

potent symbol of the difference between ‘democratic’, grass-roots development and top-down Soviet methods of forced agricultural collectivization.⁴³ By the mid-1950s, enthusiasm for the Indian programme led the US International Cooperation Administration (ICA) to declare ‘community development’ of villages a goal of US development policy. The ICA created a Community Development Division and helped initiate or support programmes underway in Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Ceylon, Nepal, Indonesia, Korea, Malaya, the Philippines, Indonesia, and South Vietnam. By 1961, the United States spent approximately US\$50 million in support of programmes labelled ‘community development’ in thirty countries.⁴⁴

As the village became an object of post-war development policy, it was also increasingly an experimental site for experts to work out their theories of development in the field. The expanding international development regime had an enormous hunger for experts of all nationalities to fill technical assistance missions and advise governments on development policy. Some became career development experts working directly for the United Nations, the US government, or the governments of developing countries. Others came to development work as part of academic research teams funded by US foundations and US government contracts. Through research ‘on the ground’, university-based scientists and social scientists attempted a dual professional role: to expand the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge and to provide ‘useful’ and ‘actionable’ knowledge for development policymaking. Some university experts lodged themselves in the offices of national planning commissions; but for particular experts – anthropologists, rural sociologists, agricultural extension experts, and population scientists – the ‘field’ was itself the village. In the 1950s and 1960s, hundreds of academics selected ‘experimental’ and ‘control’ villages as ‘laboratories’ with which to study how social and economic change happened and how it could be accelerated.⁴⁵ As such, their object of study was not the village itself but what the village could be made to represent. Shared metaphors of laboratory science nonetheless obscured important disciplinary differences over what mattered about villages, and how expert knowledge of villages should be used. These differences could be seen in projects for anthropological analysis and population studies.

US anthropologists came to post-war development with an expanding portfolio of credentials in village studies and new interest in policy work. In the interwar years, they had transformed their discipline into a science based on fieldwork (increasingly in peasant villages) and on general sociological theories about the nature of social change and ‘culture contact’ that they posited could be applied to a range of modernizing places. More than ethnographic knowledge of specific cultures, anthropologists believed they had a method for understanding, through specific studies, how peasant communities modernized. In the Philippines and in Africa, they had begun to assist colonial administrators in understanding

43 Dean Acheson, ‘Conference on world land tenure problems’, *Department of State Bulletin*, 25, 643, 1951, p. 660.

44 House Committee on Foreign Relations, *Foreign assistance act of 1962*, 87th Congress, 2nd Session, H. Rep. 1788, Washington, DC: GPO, 1962.

45 See, for example, Paul Neurath, ‘Social research in newly independent countries: an Indian example’, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 24, 4, 1960, pp. 670–4; William F. Ogburn, ‘A design for some experiments in the limitation of population growth in India’, *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 1, 5, 1953, pp. 376–89.

the impact of colonial rule on 'native cultures' and 'adapting' them to imperial imperatives. During the New Deal and the Second World War, the colonial model migrated to state-sponsored anthropological investigations of native American reservations, southern US communities, and Japanese-American internment camps. By the war's end, with the engagement of more than half of all US anthropologists in war work and the founding of the Society of Applied Anthropology, many US anthropologists had come to see themselves as policy scientists of prediction and prescription.⁴⁶

At Cornell University, a group of anthropologists returned from war service with grand plans to establish 'the equivalent of a department of applied anthropology' centred on 'backward areas' research. Spinning the globe in 1947, they imagined interdisciplinary research teams, led by anthropologists, traveling out to village sites around the world and returning to Ithaca, New York, with 'comparable research data on the social and psychological processes of technical modernization'. They characterized the post-war world as an agglomeration of 'peasant subsistence economies . . . under great internal and external pressure to change'. Deploying the trope of awakening villages, they warned of peasants roused politically by a new 'awareness of economic and social disadvantage' and the 'irreversible revolutionary process' of modern technology.⁴⁷ Initially, they proposed studies in Thailand, Peru, Nova Scotia, New Mexico, and China. With the Chinese revolution, India replaced China in their plans. The project's leader, Lauriston Sharp, avowed that 'intensive study of small but representative groups' could yield recommendations on how to improve government programmes.⁴⁸

In India, the Cornell Project found a sympathetic audience for its methods in the Ford Foundation. The head of the Foundation office in New Delhi, a rural sociologist by training, had been pushing Nehru for a 'cultural evaluation' of the national Community Development Programme. Steeped in rhetoric of understanding villagers' 'felt needs' and ways of thinking, community development was already oriented to the idea that culture mattered. The leader of the Cornell India project, Morris Opler, capitalized on the culturalist rationale for community development and joined it to the logic of the laboratory. An expert on the Apache tribe of North America, and a veteran of the Community Analysis section of the agency that administered Japanese-American internment, Opler had transformed himself into an India expert by attaching himself to Rudra Datt Singh, a young Indian graduate student in anthropology. Together, they selected Singh's home village as their field site and, after assembling an interdisciplinary research team of US and Indian graduate students,

46 Henrietta Kuklick, *The savage within: the social history of British anthropology, 1885–1945*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 182–241; George Stocking, Jr, *The ethnographer's magic and other essays in the history of anthropology*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992, pp. 114–77; David H. Price, *Anthropological intelligence: the deployment and neglect of American anthropology in the Second World War*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.

47 Columbia University, New York, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Carnegie Corporation Records (henceforth CCR), Box 124, 'Cornell University: grant of \$180,000 for program in anthropology', October 1947; CCR, Box 124, Lauriston Sharp, 'Studies in culture and applied science: progress report to the Carnegie corporation of New York', October 1950; CCR, Box, 124, Sharp to John Gardner, 19 April 1951.

48 CCR, Box 124, Lauriston Sharp, 'Cultural anthropology program: progress report to the Carnegie corporation of New York', 30 September 1949; idem, 'Peasants and politics in Thailand', *Far Eastern Survey*, 19, 15, 1950, p. 157.

began documenting village life in earnest. In his proposal to the Ford Foundation, Opler likened the village to a 'clinical laboratory' where research scientists tested hypotheses and yielded 'scientifically grounded' evidence of the 'patterns of behavior and thought' that might provide openings for the introduction of 'necessary changes'.⁴⁹

Intrigued by Opler's proposal, the Ford Foundation requested that the Cornell project move their operations to a village covered by the Community Development Programme. A nearby 'control village' without a state programme would then serve as a site for scientific comparison. As the project got underway, Opler trumpeted a range of pithy examples of the dangers of cultural ignorance and, conversely, the ability of cultural knowledge to help administrators use 'traditional' practices to frame modernity in local terms. These included cautionary tales about technical experts who introduced high-nutrient reddish lentils that reminded orthodox Hindus of meat, and metal ploughs that threatened caste and economic ties between village farmers and village carpenters who repaired traditional wooden ploughs. Fortunately, Opler explained, anthropologists could point out these cultural road-blocks and help administrators circumvent them with culturally specific explanations and demonstrations.⁵⁰

As the project progressed, however, Cornell's 'action-research' yielded few such specific policy recommendations. Teams of graduate students, focused on the imperative of dissertation research, produced hundreds of thousands of field notes on the two villages but no process for comparing the mass of ethnographic detail or drawing policy conclusions. When controversies arose over turf battles between Cornell and its partner in India, Lucknow University, and charges that the project was meddling in village politics set off a firestorm of criticism in the Indian press, the Ford Foundation terminated its support. Back in Ithaca, a roomful of filing cabinets overflowed with 12,000 pages of narrative field notes, 20,000 pages of structured interviews, 5,000 entries on the material culture of the village, 4,000 black-and-white photographs, and 10,000 feet of motion picture films. Opler and his associates laboriously catalogued and cross-indexed this material according to the Human Relations Area Files, a schema designed to facilitate comparisons and generalizations across cultures. Yet from all the raw materials, dissertations, and books produced from the research, only one Indian anthropologist actually focused on 'human factors' in development policy.⁵¹

The failure of the Cornell project to yield policy recommendations did not end the use of anthropologists in community development projects. Indeed, anthropologists and rural

49 CCR, Box 124, Morris Opler, 'A proposal for a program of experimental field research in technological change', April 1951; Ford Foundation Archives, New York (henceforth FFA), Reel 0405, Grant 53-63, Section 3, Opler to Carl B. Spaeth, 22 April 1952.

50 FFA, Reel 0405, Grant 53-63, Section 3, Morris E. Opler, 'The Cornell action-research project in India', 31 January 1952; idem, 'Problems concerning official and popular participation in development projects', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 2, 4, 1954, p. 158.

51 FFA, Reel 0405, Grant 53-63, "'Leakage" of US expert's questionnaire, Indian research officer forced to resign', *National Herald*, Lucknow, 28 March 1955; FFA, Reel 0405, Grant 53-63, Section 4, Edward E. LeClair, Jr, 'Memorandum [to Clarence E. Thurber]: Rankhandi research project', 10 April 1958; Yale University Library, New Haven, CT, Manuscripts and Archives, Douglas Ensminger Papers, Box 14, Folder B21, Douglas Ensminger, 'The Ford Foundation's nineteen years of involvement with India's community development program', 11 July 1972; S. C. Dube, *Changing villages: human factors in community development*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1958.

sociologists staffed most of the community development assistance divisions within US embassy technical assistance missions. Nonetheless, by the late 1950s real and perceived crises in agricultural production and population growth had led US and postcolonial governments and the United Nations to question the utility of both cultural experts and the community development model for addressing broad social welfare concerns of villagers. Motivated by fears about social disorder caused by rising rural populations, migrations from village to city, and chronic food shortages, US officials, international development agencies, and many 'Third World' leaders shifted to specific campaigns for increasing food supply and decreasing population. Instead of community development, with its focus on adapting modern techniques to peasant culture, they proposed that foundations and governments should support technological research and its village application through campaigns of demonstration, advertising, and financial incentives. In India, an influential Ford Foundation-sponsored report by agricultural scientists depicted the peasant not as culturally bounded but rather as a rational actor, who would adjust his farming practices given the right economic incentives.⁵²

That this campaign mode could eventually take on a distinct military colouration is shown in the effort at population control: here the rational peasant turned into the stubborn enemy of good sense, and had to be forced to develop. In the early post-Second World War years of this campaign US demographers such as Frank Notestein and Kingsley Davis, shedding previous notions of the incorrigibly backward 'teeming masses', re-imagined the peasant as simple, yet supremely rational and educable. All that was needed to reduce their numbers was a simple birth-control method and effective 'propaganda and education' to encourage its use. Even in the face of manifest failure – the Khanna study of sixteen villages in Punjab revealed that birth rates were higher in 'experimental' than in 'control' villages – experts such as the demographer Donald Bogue insisted that with the deployment of the right educational techniques there was 'no village . . . in Asia that is too rural [or] too traditional to be beyond the reach of family planning'.⁵³

When peasants persisted in rebuffing their efforts, however, the alliance of local and US officials, foundations, and experts resorted to simple coercion. The model now became the post-war rooting out of disease by the mass spraying of DDT, where 'search and destroy' brigades armed with spray guns exterminated the enemy microbes. Indian and US policy- and opinion-makers increasingly described the population control effort as, in the words of the Lucknow *Pioneer*, a 'battle' for 'the great submerged living in remote villages and steeped in superstitions, norms, and modes of a bygone age'. Indeed, in 1967, just as the United States escalated its air war over Vietnam, the Government of India, with US support, planned for helicopter-borne medical teams to tour the Indian countryside; land in villages

52 Ford Foundation, *Report on India's food crisis and steps to meet it*, New Delhi: Government of India, 1959.

53 Kingsley Davis, 'Social and demographic aspects of economic development', in Simon Kuznets et al., *Economic growth: Brazil, India, Japan*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1955, p. 286; 'India: The India-Harvard-Ludhiana population study', *Studies in Family Planning*, 1, 1, 1962, pp. 5–6; Donald Bogue, 'Hypotheses for family planning derived from recent and current experiences in Asia', *Studies in Family Planning*, 1, 3, 1964, p. 7; Dennis Hodgson, 'Demography as social science and policy science', *Population and Development Review*, 9, 1983, pp. 22–3, 30.

to perform sterilizations, fit women with IUD loops, and distribute family-planning literature; and then fly on to the next village. Within a year, India had performed 1.8 million IUD insertions or sterilizations.⁵⁴

The strategic village

The martial metaphors of development worked simultaneously with military campaigns to secure villages in the hot battles of the Cold War. From the outset of the Cold War, US policymakers saw villages as targets for communist guerrilla attacks as well as communist propaganda. It was the ‘deliberate and wanton destruction of Greek villages’ by communists, declared Truman in 1947, that demonstrated the necessity of US intervention in Greece and other nations ‘resisting attempted subjugation’. US policymakers, journalists, and social scientists depicted defenceless villagers ‘terrorized’ by communist insurgents.⁵⁵ Although particular villagers might join the communists, the village itself always remained rhetorically separate from communism. In a study of the Malayan Communist Party in 1956, the political scientist Lucian Pye argued that communism appealed principally to those who had abandoned their traditional ways and found themselves ‘rootless’ in the modern world. Villagers who remained rooted in the soil and their communities did not fit US social scientists’ and policymakers’ picture of communists.⁵⁶

The question for US policymakers was thus how to protect villagers against communists. In Greece, they funded the creation of national village defence battalions. In the Philippines, they launched the Economic Development Corps, a project to provide homesteads to ex-Huk rebels.⁵⁷ By the early 1950s, however, a new example for civilian defence had emerged in colonial Malaya. There, British authorities attempted to defeat largely ethnic Chinese communist revolutionaries by separating them from Malaya’s rural population, rounding up half a million ethnic Chinese workers who had fled into the jungle during the wartime Japanese occupation. The workers were ‘resettled’ into ‘New Villages’ with barbed wire perimeters, fortified entries, and lookout towers. More than a military strategy, the New Villages were built for social engineering. They included new schools, community halls, health clinics, land distribution, and a carefully designed programme of motion pictures and loudspeaker speeches aimed to inculcate national consciousness and demonstrate the material benefits of political allegiance to Malaya. The British High Commissioner Gerald

54 Saradindu Snyal, ‘Sripati Chandradesekhar: the man and his mission’, in Ashih Bose et al., *Studies in demography*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1970, pp. 507–24; Matthew Connelly, *Fatal misconception: the struggle to control world population*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 169–226. On the lessons from DDT, see Nancy Elizabeth Gallagher, *Egypt’s other wars: epidemics and the politics of public health*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, pp. 102–3.

55 Harry S. Truman, *Public papers of the presidents: Harry S. Truman, 1947*, Washington, DC: GPO, 1963: p. 178; idem, *Public papers of the presidents: Harry S. Truman, 1948*, Washington, DC: GPO, 1963, p. 140; ‘Reds reported terrorizing Indian villages’, *Washington Post*, 5 August 1952, p. 3.

56 Lucian W. Pye, *Guerrilla communism in Malaya*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956.

57 Alvin H. Scaff, *The Philippine answer to communism*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1955.

Templer coined the phrase ‘hearts and minds’ to describe the effort to win the war through development and propaganda.⁵⁸

The Malayan campaign was hardly without precedent. The pacification of rural people through re-concentration had been, for example, a key military strategy in the US–Filipino and British–Boer wars early in the twentieth century. Later concentration camps, from the Soviet *gulag* to Japanese–American internment, involved, in varying degrees claims to, and programmes for, community betterment. Finally, forced sedentarization campaigns by imperial powers, from the movement of Bedouin tribes in Transjordan and Arabia to the *paysannats agricoles* of the Belgian Congo, sought to transform millions of nomadic or tribal peoples into stable agriculturalists, whose movement could be checked and labour controlled and transformed under state and expert supervision.⁵⁹

What was new about the New Villages was the joining of military defence with a panoply of rural reconstruction ideas and practices.⁶⁰ US journalists and social scientists praised the efforts. The ‘protected villages’ offered an ‘opportunity to work for the development of community consciousness and . . . democratic self-government’, declared the political scientist John Kerry King after a tour of Malaya in 1953.⁶¹ As British officials brought the New Villages model to Kenya to pacify the Mau Mau rebellion, US officials began to confront the question of securing the rural population of Vietnam.⁶² In 1953, the US technical assistance mission in Saigon funded a ‘pilot project’ to resettle peasants from twenty-five villages into one ‘defended’ village near Hanoi. Trumpeted in the US press as a haven against communist ‘terrorists’ and a development scheme providing villagers with a rice granary, a hospital, schools, and even sport fields, the Dong Quan ‘Pacification Village’ in reality consisted of only three, partially bombed bamboo-and-thatch houses when members of the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs toured it in April 1953. US officials and journalists attributed these meagre results not to the strategy but to French failures to fight creatively in Indochina.⁶³ With France’s defeat at Dien Bien Phu the following spring, the new South Vietnamese regime of Ngo Dien Diem took up the promise of the strategic village.

58 Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and minds in guerilla warfare: the Malayan emergency, 1948–1960*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

59 Land reclamation schemes and the building of vast hydroelectric dams also provoked the forced relocation of hundreds of thousands of people. See Robert Chambers, *Settlement schemes in tropical Africa: a study of organizations and development*, London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969, pp. 18–41; Christophe Bonneuil, ‘Development as experiment: science and state building in late colonial and postcolonial Africa, 1930–1970’, *Osiris*, 15, 2000, pp. 261–5; Bogumil Jewsiewicki, *Modernisation ou destruction du village africain: l’économie politique de la ‘modernisation agricole’ au Congo Belge*, Brussels: Centre d’Étude et de Documentation Africaines, 1983; Martin Thomas, ‘Bedouin tribes and the imperial intelligence services in Syria, Iraq and Transjordan in the 1920s’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38, 4, 2003, pp. 539–61.

60 Lynne Viola, *The unknown gulag: the lost world of Stalin’s special settlements*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007; Orin Starn, ‘Engineering internment: anthropologists and the War Relocation Authority’, *American Ethnologist*, 13, 4, 1986, pp. 700–20.

61 John Kerry King, ‘Malaya’s settlement problem’, *Far Eastern Survey*, 23, 3, 1954, p. 33.

62 Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, creating Kenya: counterinsurgency, civil war, and decolonization*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 107–16.

63 U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Report of the special study mission to Pakistan, India, Thailand, and Indochina*, Washington: GPO, 1953, p. 54; ‘Indo-China: protected village’, *Time*, 2 March 1953; Ronald Stead, ‘Indo-China: Asia’s other war’, *Christian Science*

Although installed by the United States, Diem was a Vietnamese nationalist with his own visions of how to develop South Vietnam and secure it against what he saw as its three enemies, 'communism, underdevelopment, and disunity'. Between 1955 and 1962, he initiated a series of population resettlement schemes that mixed elements of Britain's Malayan campaign and India's community development model with his own particular emphasis on inculcating national loyalty. US officials took credit for helping South Vietnam counter 'subversion at the village level' but the programmes were, initially, the creation of Diem's own administration. They included an attempt to resettle the Montagnard tribal people into model villages, a pilot project for relocating peasants into concentrated 'agrovilles', and then, in 1962, the 'strategic hamlet' programme. Unlike its failed predecessor, which had forced peasants to build large 'towns' (really fortified camps) far from their home villages at break neck pace, the strategic hamlet programme aimed to defend single hamlets, several of which made up a Vietnamese village. Vietnamese plans prioritized military defence and political re-education; economic development and social welfare work were deferred until hamlets were deemed militarily secure and politically loyal.⁶⁴

When the US State Department intelligence chief Rogers Hilsman visited Vietnam in January 1962, the nascent hamlet programme appeared to him a promising response to the alarming success of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in rural South Vietnam. Hilsman's interest reflected a deepening commitment and revised vision of 'counterinsurgency' by the administration of John F. Kennedy. In addition to espionage, psychological warfare, and military attacks on the enemy, Kennedy and his advisors supported what they termed 'constructive counterinsurgency', a campaign to win hearts and minds with development assistance at its centre. The essential fight would take place in, and over, villages. 'The struggle for South Vietnam', wrote Hilsman in a briefing to the president, 'is essentially a battle for control of the villages.'⁶⁵ Encouraged by the head of the British advisory mission who had moved from the Malayan emergency to South Vietnam, Hilsman proposed to use US military and technical expertise to coordinate village defence and development. Instead of Diem's pilot project in one province, the new US-backed programme was national in scope, aiming to reduce South Vietnam's 16,000 villages to 12,000 strategic hamlets. After relocating peasants, often at gunpoint, soldiers were to 'clear and hold' areas controlled by the NLF, set up fortifications, and then allow technical experts to 'move in with programs of aid'. A new Office of Rural Affairs within United States Operations Mission Saigon was charged with coordinating 'rural reconstruction teams' of seventeen to eighteen specialists, ten with expertise in police or intelligence work, four in public administration and public information, and four in agriculture, medicine, education, and 'youth'

Monitor, 15 June 1953, p. 9; James P. Hendrick to C. Tyler Wood, 10 June 1953, in *Foreign relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Indochina, Part I*, Washington, DC: US GPO, 1982, pp. 394, 605.

64 Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA, John D. Montgomery Papers, box 13, folder 10, Bien Lien Nguyen, 'Community development in Vietnam, secretariat general of the national committee for community development, Republic of Vietnam', 1958; Walter S. Robertson, 'Progress in free Viet-nam', *Department of State Bulletin*, 34, 885, 1956, p. 973; Philip E. Catton, *Diem's final failure: prelude to America's war in Vietnam*, Lawrence, KN: University Press of Kansas, 2002, pp. 56-8, 64-9, 93-6, 117, 125; Michael Latham, *Modernization as ideology: American social science and 'nation building' in the Kennedy Era*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000, pp. 151-208.

65 Roger Hilsman, 'A strategic concept for South Vietnam', 2 February 1962, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-96, Volume II: Vietnam, 1962*, Washington, DC: GPO, 1990, p. 75.

activities. The military aim of the project was underscored by metaphors of war: social welfare was the ‘ammunition’ and villagers were the ‘targets’.⁶⁶

The overriding goal was, Hilsman explained, to cut peasants off from the NLF and tie isolated ‘Villagers in[to] the National Fabric’. To Hilsman and other counterinsurgency experts, villagers were essentially apolitical, ‘turned inward on themselves’ and unable to grasp the ideologies or geopolitical stakes of the war. Yet, that portrait was belied by the use of reconstruction teams sent out with surveys and identification cards, which were designed to map the political loyalties of peasants and disentangle communist from non-communist. Both security and development aid furthered the goal by making peasants’ political allegiances more legible to and, thus more controllable by, military and state authorities.⁶⁷ In an essential contradiction, the village was envisioned in the emerging models of counterinsurgency as at once ‘isolated’ from the politics of the Cold War and intimately tied to its future.

As Hilsman publicly extolled the strategic hamlets, the initiative, like its predecessors, was failing. The hamlets took peasants away from their fields, provided insufficient rice-growing plots, and failed to separate villagers physically from the NLF. Blaming its implosion on Diem’s lack of commitment to real material progress in rural Vietnam, US policymakers turned around and pressed his successors for a new programme of village-level pacification.⁶⁸ Given the utopian moniker ‘New Life’ hamlets, the programme called for the assemblage of ‘Revolutionary Development Cadres’, who would lead villagers in ‘local self-help projects – to assist the rural population to help itself’. The administration of Lyndon Johnson trumpeted the cadres’ accomplishments in carefully documented statistics about the numbers of schools opened, vaccinations administered, and roads built. They also pointed proudly to the phalanx of US experts sent to villages, from engineers and medical teams to fish-hatchery experts, home economists, and water-supply specialists. More than Johnson’s promise of a TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority) equivalent for the Mekong delta, village-level transformation efforts aimed to demonstrate, to Vietnamese peasants and US and international critics of the war alike, the good faith of US objectives in Vietnam. Still, they cautioned that the ‘task of winning the “village war”’ was complex and would take time.⁶⁹

In fact, the US military, experts, and political leaders had grown impatient and increasingly sceptical of the model of winning villagers over through social welfare. Commanders in the field, accustomed to the principle of annihilating the enemy, had from the start expressed reservations about constructive counterinsurgency. US social scientists,

66 *Ibid.*, p. 86; Catton, *Diem’s final failure*, p. 140; Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam wars, 1945–1990*, New York: HarperPerennial, 1991, p. 82; William Lybrand, ‘Forward’, in *Symposium Proceedings: The U.S. Army’s Limited-War Mission and Social Science Research, March 26–28, 1962*, Washington, DC: Special Operations Research Office, American University, 1962, p. x.

67 Roger Hilsman, ‘A report on South Viet-Nam’, *Department of State Bulletin*, 47, 1215, 1962, p. 528; Latham, *Modernization*, p. 138; Hilsman, ‘Strategic concept’, p. 78.

68 Roger Hilsman, *To move a nation: the politics of foreign policy in the administration of John F. Kennedy*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967, pp. 424–39.

69 Robert W. Komer, ‘The other war in Vietnam: a progress report, Part I’, *Department of State Bulletin*, 55, 1424, 1966, pp. 559–63; Lyndon B. Johnson, *Public papers of the presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson: 1965*, Washington, DC: GPO, 1966, p. 397.

particularly proponents of modernization theory such as Lucian Pye and Klaus Knorr, had been enthusiastic about joining development and defence in 1962. By the end of the decade, however, various social science critics were questioning not US goals in Vietnam per se but methods at the village level. Applied anthropologists urged policymakers to heed the traditions of peasant culture. Yet, where earlier anthropologists had promised to explain local culture and translate development into local idioms, the RAND anthropologists Gerald C. Hickey and R. Michael Pearce now argued that tradition could serve as a useful bulwark against rebellion.⁷⁰ Although they rejected such culturalist explanations, economists and political scientists reinforced these prescriptions by arguing that aid projects gave peasants reasons to rebel. Applying econometrics and game theory models, RAND social scientists such as Edward Mitchell, Charles Wolf, and Nathan Leites concluded that relative prosperity and land ownership correlated with more insurgency. By contrast, emphasized Mitchell, 'greater inequality means greater control'. 'From the point of view of government control', policymakers wanted the 'docility and low aspirations of poorer peasants.'⁷¹ If Mitchell advised an end to social welfare measures, Wolf and Leites proposed a new focus on 'coercion' over 'persuasion'. They depicted peasants as rational actors who calculated the costs and benefits of acquiescence and resistance and would respond to calibrated threats and punishments. Counterinsurgency must demonstrate to villagers the 'price' of rebellion.⁷²

In a bitter echo of the rural reconstruction models of the interwar years, the 'strategic village' became another transnational construction. By the late 1960s, the victory of coercive counterinsurgency could be seen not only in US actions but also in international enthusiasm for peasant relocation and the construction of fortress villages. While Johnson and his military advisors ratcheted up 'search and destroy' missions in Vietnam to separate villages from the NLF and then destroy village infrastructure, ideas about village pacification circulated globally, crossing national and imperial lines. US counterinsurgency experts sought details about the French policy of 'regroupment' during the Algerian war, when up to two million peasants were forcibly relocated, into camps or 'model villages' that amounted, according to one observer, to severe overcrowding in 'pathetic clusters of sheet-metal shacks'.⁷³ Portuguese colonial authorities, fighting resistance movements in Mozambique and Angola, borrowed from both the French and the US experiences to forcibly resettle and concentrate millions of Africans into new villages surrounded by barbed wire and trenches. In India in 1967, the army rounded up hundreds of thousands of the secessionist Mizo tribe in Assam state and placed them into 'Progressive and Protected Villages', which

70 On US social scientists and counterinsurgency in Vietnam, see Ron Robin, *The making of the Cold War enemy: culture and politics in the military industrial complex*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001, pp. 185–205; Jefferson P. Marquis, 'The other warriors: US social science and nation building in Vietnam', *Diplomatic History*, 24, 1, 2000, pp. 79–105.

71 Edward J. Mitchell, 'Inequality and insurgency: a statistical study of South Vietnam', *World Politics*, 20, 3, 1968, pp. 432, 423.

72 Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, Jr, *Rebellion and authority: myths and realities reconsidered*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1966.

73 John J. McCuen, *The art of counter-revolutionary revolutionary war*, Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1966, pp. 22–3; Alf Andrew Heggoy, *Insurgency and counterinsurgency in Algeria*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1972, pp. 214, 223; Matthew Connolly, *A diplomatic revolution: Algeria's fight for independence and the origins of the post-Cold War era*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 95; Jules Roy, *The war in Algeria*, New York: Grove Press, 1961, p. 50.

promised new schools, community centres, and homes. It was, declared a study by an advisor to the Indian Ministry of Defence, a 'strategic hamlet' initiative, following the blueprints of RAND social scientists and emphasizing the proper calibration of persuasion and coercion.⁷⁴

Perhaps nowhere in the world were techniques of village control adopted so eagerly, and with such tragic effects, as in Central America. In the 1960s and 1970s, US army personnel specializing in counterinsurgency moved from Vietnam to El Salvador and Guatemala, where they helped to organize rural militias and disseminate tactics of interrogation, surveillance, and 'selective terror'. By the early 1980s, El Salvador's and Guatemala's respective campaigns to crush political and military opposition had produced an all-out war on each country's peasantry.⁷⁵ Along with executions, rape, and torture, both governments deployed the strategic village as an instrument for military control and political re-education. In El Salvador, the USAID mission helped design and fund Project One Thousand, an initiative to settle half a million people driven from their homes by war into a thousand newly built villages under government control.⁷⁶ In neighbouring Guatemala, where approximately 100,000 Mayan peasants had been killed or 'disappeared' between 1981 and 1983, the government declared regions decimated by war as *Polos de Desarrollo* (Regional Centres of Development). USAID-funded 'model villages' were built, often on the ruins of villages burned or bulldozed by the Guatemalan army. With street names such as 'Liberty Street' and 'New Life Road', the new villages concentrated approximately 900,000 Mayan peasants into tight grids of gravel streets, one-room houses, and bright streetlights overseen by military garrisons. Model villagers were required to perform military drills, join work squadrons, and participate in civil defence patrols that went on 'guerrilla hunts' targeting fellow villagers accused of being subversives.⁷⁷ Interviewed about the programme in 1984, the Guatemalan army colonel in charge of it quoted from the army's *Manual of counterinsurgency*: 'Countersubversive war is total, permanent, and universal, and it requires the massive participation of the population like the subversive war it confronts . . . our objective is the population.'⁷⁸

74 One could also see the shift to increasingly coercive policies in Tanzania. In 1973, President Julius Nyerere transformed his campaign to persuade Tanzanians to inhabit *ujamaa* villages, imagined as socialist cooperatives, into a national decree for compulsory villagization: Scott, *Seeing like a state*, pp. 223–61. See also Stanley Meisler, 'Mozambique villages fortified by Portuguese', *Los Angeles Times*, 2 April 1968, p. A1; Gerald J. Bender, 'The limits of counterinsurgency: an African case', *Comparative Politics*, 4, 3, 1972, pp. 331–60; Ernest Weatherall, 'India reinstates strategic hamlets', *Christian Science Monitor*, 28 January 1970, p. 4; Utpal K. Banarjee, *Operational analysis and Indian defence*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1980.

75 Greg Grandin, *Empire's workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the rise of the new imperialism*, New York: Henry Holt, 2006, pp. 90–101; Stephen M. Streeter, 'Nation-building in the land of eternal counter-insurgency: Guatemala and the contradictions of the Alliance for Progress', *Third World Quarterly*, 27, 1, 2006, pp. 57–68.

76 Chris Hedges, 'Is Salvador using humanitarian aid in its war against leftists?', *Christian Science Monitor*, 11 January 1984, p. 9; William D. Montalbano, 'Aid: life at Salvadoran grassroots', *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1983, p. B1.

77 James LeMoyné, 'Guatemala crushes rebels its own way: ruthlessly', *New York Times*, 13 January 1985, p. E3; Peter Ford, 'Rural Guatemala: under army's forceful thumb', *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 June 1986, p. 9; Beatriz Manz, *Refugees of a hidden war: the aftermath of counterinsurgency in Guatemala*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988, pp. 96–114; Susanne Jonas, *The battle for Guatemala: rebels, death squads, and U.S. power*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991, pp. 149–51.

78 Loren Jenkins, 'Guatemala building strategic hamlets', *Washington Post*, 21 December 1984, p. A28.

Conclusion

The post-war development regime and US policies in the Cold War were each built on aspirations for, and fears about, village transformation. Rural social engineering was held together by a series of connected assumptions. First, villages constituted a commensurable category of underdevelopment, through which conclusions and practices forged in one place could be applied globally. Second, people in this category had been roused by outside forces to new desires and expectations. Third, the village could be moulded and reshaped. Whether that reshaping would occur by development experts or communist revolutionaries represented, for US policymakers and allied experts and foundations, one of the essential challenges of the Cold War. In the 1950s, experts and policymakers coupled their concerns about stopping communism with visions of the emancipatory potential of village development. Deeply paternalistic, their plans nonetheless projected an end point, in which the rights and social welfare of 'Third World' peasants looked more like those of the citizens of Western nations.

By the late 1960s, such dreams had been eclipsed, as assumptions about rural reconstruction were tested in the field. The strategic village had been an attempt to separate the peasant from communists and inculcate the values and behaviour of development and nationalism in a controlled setting. However, the experience of war in Southeast Asia challenged the image of the apolitical and malleable peasant. Even as US officials desperately gathered up evidence of their development and military progress in Vietnam, Vietnamese peasants defied the imagined boundaries that elites had constructed between innocent villagers and communist insurgents. Peasant resistance to US intervention in 'Third World' politics revealed them to be far more politically savvy and less plastic than experts and policymakers had imagined. The destruction of Southeast Asian villages, including the massacre at My Lai in 1968, can be seen, in part, as the culmination of frustrations about the resistance and intractability of the village to elite designs. The line between paternalist coercion and outright violence thinned in the practice of counterinsurgency; the new logic of counterinsurgency abandoned efforts to persuade villagers to accept modernity on expert terms. Although the fortress village, from Mozambique to Guatemala, contained the trappings of social welfare, political leaders had largely abandoned the view that rural reconstruction could produce useful political results.

During the Cold War, US, colonial, and 'Third World' policymakers and experts thought *through* villages as they fashioned development policies and projects. Persistent images of villagers as fatalistic, traditional, and naive undergirded their efforts. Embedding the history of post-war development within a longer story of rural reconstruction allows us to see the long-standing rhetorical frameworks about village backwardness on which post-war projects drew. Nevertheless, discourses about the village changed over the course of the twentieth century. From an ancient entity immutable to change, the village became an impressionable global newborn, and then an obstinate adolescent. The transformation was in part the result of shifting intellectual currents and political imperatives between the 1920s and 1960s. But it was also driven by the evolution and global proliferation of village projects from rural reconstruction to fortified, strategic hamlets. The practice of village

development shaped discourse about the village. It also shaped state policy. Rural development policy was made not only in the metropolises of Washington, London, and Lisbon, but through the widening gap between the Cold War demands on village transformation and the disappointments of, and with, experts in the field. In the early 1960s, few US development experts associated their work with firefights in Vietnamese villages. Yet the paternalism and coercion of expert projects to remake rural peoples, shaded, in the priorities of war, into force and violence. If the village stood for the 'Third World', then failure to control the village represented the failures of the United States in the 'Third World'.

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