Agrarian Transformations (Geog 606: 04)

Term: Spring 2021
Class Time: Wednesdays 1:40-4:40pm
Location: TBD

Instructor: Dr. Kevon Rhiney
E-mail: kevon.rhiney@rutgers.edu
Office: LSH-B259
Office Hours: TBD

Course Description

The primary goal of this course is to explore key debates and critical perspectives on agrarian change and its relation to various imperial and capitalist formations. Materials will be drawn from a variety of academic subfields including peasant studies, food/resource geographies, critical agrarian studies, agroecology, cultural and political ecology and post/decolonial studies. We will examine the historical, political, economic and ecological contexts that have given rise to agrarian changes in different geographic settings, while considering the attendant implications for agrarian relations, subject formations, processes and actors. This includes paying close attention to the central issues that have long animated Marxian-inspired debates around the enduring agrarian question – how capitalism continually transforms agrarian systems and the degrees to which smallholders have been able to resist dispossession and the industrialization tendencies of modern agriculture – to more emergent and contemporary issues pertaining to food security, racial capitalism, food justice, land and labor struggles, climate change, and the ethical and ecological implications of an ever-expanding industrial capitalist agrifood system. Amidst a rapidly urbanizing and global world, how are newer circuits of labor and capital, particularly those associated with big agri-businesses and food conglomerates, reshaping agricultural communities across the globe? How is the agrarian subject gendered and racialized in modern day agrifood systems? What alternatives to industrial agriculture exist and what hopes do they offer for a just and equitable future? How have agrarian workers, farming and indigenous communities organized and resisted new regimes and processes of capitalist accumulation? In addressing these and other related questions, we aim to develop a broader understanding of the profound ways contemporary agrifood systems are being transformed by capitalist logics and how they are linked to wider histories of political-economic and environmental change.

The course will be reading-intensive and exploratory, drawing on a mix of theoretical traditions and classical and contemporary texts. The course is organized around several themes divided into three sections: (1) Roots examines the intellectual traditions that have informed debates in peasant and agrarian studies including classical Marxist and decolonial accounts of the peasantry and agrarian change; (2) Contemporary Agrarian Questions traces the various and contradictory ways in which modern capitalism continues to transform agrarian landscapes amidst new (and not-so-new) regimes of global environmental governance, techno-scientific fixes, alternative agrifood systems, land-based social movements and renewed forms of enclosure and financialization of land; (3) Agrarian Futures explores both popular and academic discourses on global food futures amidst ongoing land-based transformations, alternative food movements, the global climate crisis and what some may describe as an emerging fourth agricultural revolution (i.e. the turn to AIs, Big Data and other advanced technologies to unleash huge productivity gains in global agri-food systems).
Sample Texts:
This list provides examples of some of the reading material we will cover in this course. A more detailed reading list and schedule will be provided at a later date.

Section 1: Roots


Section 2: Contemporary Agrarian Questions


### Section 3: Agrarian Futures


