

Agrarian Transformations (Geog 606: 04)

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

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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

- Akram-Lodhi, H., & Kay, C. (2010). Surveying the agrarian question (part 1): Unearthing foundations, exploring diversity. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(1), 177-202.
- Baptiste, E. (2014). *The Half Has Never Been Told*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bernstein, H. (2006). Is there an agrarian question in the 21st century? *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 27(4), 449-460.
- Bernstein, H. (2009). V. I. Lenin and A. V. Chayanov: Looking back, looking forward. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(1), 55-81.
- Borras, S. M. (2009). Agrarian change and peasant studies: Changes, continuities and challenges – an introduction. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(1), 5-31.
- Carney, J. (2001). *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- De Janvry, A. (1981). *The Agrarian Question and Reformism in Latin America*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Fanon, F. 1965. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Goodman, D. and Watts, M. (Eds.) (1997). *Globalising Food: Agrarian Questions and Global Restructuring*. New York: Routledge.
- Guevara, C. 1998. *Guerilla Warfare*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- James, C.L.R. (1989). *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Kautsky, K. (1899/1988). *The Agrarian Question*. London: Zwan Publications.
- Lenin, V. I. (1899/2004). *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*. Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific. (Chapter 2, pp. 175-190)
- Mann, S. (1990). *Agrarian Capitalism in Theory and Practice*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- White, M. (2018). *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Williams, E. (1944/1994). *Capitalism and Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Wynter, S. (1971). Novel and History, Plot and Plantation, *Savacou* 5 (1971): 95-102.

Section 2: Contemporary Agrarian Questions

- Breger Bush, S. (2012). *Derivatives and Development: A Political Economy of Global Finance, Farming, and Poverty*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Crichlow, M.A. (2009). *Globalization and the Post-Creole Imagination: Notes on Fleeing the Plantation*. Duke University Press: Durham.

- Daschuk, J. (2013). *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*. Regina: University of Regina Press
- Ghosh, J. (2010). *The Unnatural Coupling: Food and Global Finance*. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 10(1), 72-86.
- Gilmore, R.W. (2007). *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gilam, C. (2018) *White Wash: The Story of a Weed Killer, Cancer, and the Corruption of Science*. Washington DC: Island Press.
- Guthman, J. (2019). *Wilted: Pathogens, Chemicals, and the Fragile Future of the Strawberry Industry*. University of California Press.
- Gray, M. (2014). *Labor and the Locavore*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Li, T.M. (2014). *Land's End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- McCook, S.G. (2002). *States of Nature: Science, Agriculture, and Environment in the Spanish Caribbean, 1760-1940*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Mitchell, D. (2012). *They Saved the Crops Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle over Industrial Farming in Bracero-Era California*. Athens GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Reese, A. M. (2019). *Black Food Geographies: Race, Self-reliance and Food Access in Washington DC*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Stoler, A.L. (1985). *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt, 1870-1979*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Wittman, H. (2009). Reworking the Metabolic Rift: La Via Campesina, Agrarian Citizenship, and Food Sovereignty, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(4), 805-826.
- Wolford, W. (2010). *This Land is Ours Now: Social Mobilization and the Meanings of Land in Brazil*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Section 3: Agrarian Futures
- McKittrick, K. (2013). Plantation Futures, *Small Axe* 17 (3): 1-15.
- Moore, J.W. (2015). *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. London: Verso.
- Sheller, M. (2014). *Aluminum Dreams: The Making of Light Modernity*. Boston MA: MIT Press.
- Taylor, M. (2014). *The Political Ecology of Climate Change Adaptation: Livelihoods, Agrarian Change and the Conflicts of Development*. London: Routledge/Earthscan.
- Tsing, A.L. (2017). *The Mushroom at the end of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Wallace-Wells, D. (2020). *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life after Warming*. New York: Tim Duggan Books.
- Yusoff, K. (2018). *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.