

Theories of agrarian transformations and modernization, 7,5 ECTS

PhD course within the National program for research education in Human geography

Fall 2019

Course coordinators: Lowe Börjeson, Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University and Don Mitchell, Department of Social and Economic Geography, Uppsala University.

Other teachers:

Brian Kuns, Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University

Anders Wästfelt, Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University

We hope to engage at least two more teachers, including guest teachers from outside Stockholm/Uppsala.

Course venue: Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University and Department of Social and Economic Geography, Uppsala University. Wednesday 9th to Saturday 12th October 2019. Followed by a Webinar in December (no fixed date yet).

This course is directed to geographers, anthropologists, sociologists and economic historians who are pursuing research that relates to farming in some way. The course is conducted as a Swedish national PhD-course in Human Geography, which means that in case of a large number of applications, priority will be given to PhD-students at member departments, i.e. Human Geography departments in Sweden.

Course capacity: 18 students

Language of instruction: English

Syllabus: Approx. 1000 pages of obligatory readings.

Course description

This PhD course aims to give PhD students an overview of agrarian political economy, focusing on both historical agrarian transformations and debates about them and contemporary transformations. The course aim is to understand agrarian change in broad terms, and its impacts in terms of livelihoods, the environment, and the question of food security – from the era of agricultural modernization and industrialization, beginning in the mid-1800s, through the current restructuring of agro-food systems around the world. Hence, this course will deal with varied transformations in different time periods and places (building on both teachers and student familiarity with cases), and theoretical debates about the significance of these transformations, tracing how discussions in agrarian political economy have evolved over the last (roughly) 150 years. This course is conceived primarily as a theoretical course, helping participating PhD students to comprehend debates within agrarian political economy, and to understand their relevance to related debates in geography (e.g. on landscape, political ecology, labor geography etc.), and incorporate specific aspects of this theory into their own research.

A central goal of this course will be to understand the role and fate of agricultural labor and/or peasants in different parts of the world as they were or are incorporated into or excluded from “modern”

farming. Historical events have an interest in and of themselves, of course, but as Bernstein writes, prior agrarian transformations define what is possible today (Bernstein 1996, 39). Another goal of this course will thus be to draw connections and make comparisons between agrarian change in different time periods and different parts of the world, including both developing and developed countries. Thirdly, classic political economy approaches tended to neglect the interplay between farming and the environment, with the obvious exception of Marx whose thinking in this regard influences much contemporary scholarship. A third goal of this course will then be both to draw on the threads already present in Marx, but also to engage more recent research in order to explore and better understand the connections between farming and the environment. This impact has, for the most part, been negative, though not uniformly so, and this variation will also be studied. Finally, as the unsustainability of modern farming systems comes under increasing scrutiny today, the question of how agrarian transformations affect our ability to “feed the world” will be explored. Among other questions to be addressed, we will explore links between sustainability, livelihoods and food security, critically examining mainstream discourses on trade-offs between them. We will also discuss possible alternative farming systems whose potential for greater sustainability, while preserving livelihoods and productive potential, appears great, but where there is uncertainty on the potential for “up-scaling” proven local solutions to larger areas.

In short, while the focus of this course is on farming – what are its production relations, what are the driving forces of change, who is favored by this change, and who is disfavored, and what is the impact of this change on livelihoods and employment for farm workers, smallholders, on the environment and on food security (comparing different historical and geographical contexts) – farming should here be seen as a point of theoretical engagement with relevance to a broad range of topics that are related to issues of agrarian transformations. Hence, PhD-students researching any such topics are welcome to participate in the course.

A list of topics covered:

- Farming and its production relations in different times and places
- Agrarian change related to livelihoods, environment and food security, in the era of modernization and industrialization (ca 1850 to now)
- History of agrarian change theories (political economy theory) and helping participants to comprehend debates – to incorporate specific aspects in their own work
- Empirical comparisons over time and space
- Role and fate of agricultural labor
- Farming and environment
- Our ability to “feed the world”... explore links between sustainability, livelihoods and food security, critically examining mainstream discourses on trade-offs between them
- Possible alternative farming systems and potential for up-scaling

Learning Outcomes

- Be well acquainted with the major theoretical approaches to studying agrarian change at local, national, and global levels.
- Acquire a detailed historical understanding of agrarian change in the era of modernization, and its drivers and impacts.
- Connect theories of agrarian change to discussions on broader environmental trends, including climate change, and to debates on food security.

Course schedule and requirements

Admission

Students apply to the course by sending a letter of motivation to Lowe Börjeson (lowe@su.se) that should describe the students PhD-topic and how it relates to farming (in some way, e.g. can be about food, environmental issues, rural issues, ...), as well as initial thoughts on how the student intend to engage the course content in her/his own work or theme of choice. Applications should be submitted at the latest on Monday 6th May, 2019.

Student preparations in advance

Students should read a majority of the assigned course literature in before the course venue! A c. 2000 word long text that engage with the course literature and with a few of the specific concepts (see list below), and any empirical and theoretical topic that relate to the course theme. The text should be handed in two weeks prior to the course start. Handing in the text is a prerequisite to participate in the course. Course attendants will be able to use a web based discussion forum during the time of writing this text.

Teacher preparations in advance

Teachers will read all submitted texts and use them to structure topics for discussion, i.e. focus on those concepts and issues that students mainly focus on, and organize discussion groups based on the submissions.

Final submission and examination

A final version of the course paper should be submitted 10th January 2020. This paper should not be longer than 3000 words. Teachers read and give short written feedback on papers. All papers are made available on a course website.

Preliminary program for the course meeting (Wednesday 9th to Saturday 12th October 2019)

Day 1:

10 AM: Welcome and presentations of all participants (and teachers). The format for presentations will be as a speed poster mingle session. Posters will be sent in advance and printed at SU. Each participant (and teacher) will get 3 min to present. The posters should contain a minimum of information (a bit of text, pictures, figures...), and are aimed at a very brief presentation of the research interests of the course participant.

Lunch

13.30-15.00. Two lectures by invited guests/teachers, including time for questions.

Coffee

15.30-17.00: Discussions/seminar on key concepts (in smaller groups).

Day 2.

Full day excursion (organized by Anders Wästfelt). The excursion will focus on agrarian transformation since the mid-20th century at a location outside Stockholm. More info about the excursion will be provided at the start of the course.

Day 3

9.00-10.30. Two lectures by guests/teachers.

Coffee

11.00-12.30: Discussion/seminar on two key concepts (in smaller groups)

Lunch

14.00-15.30. Two lectures by guests/teachers

Coffee

16.00-17.30: Discussion/seminar on two key concepts (in smaller groups)

Day 4 (only up to lunch)

10.00-12.00: Short, 15 min, individual feedback sessions with teachers, which run in parallel with student's peer to peer feedback (see below). Each student meet with one of the teachers to get comprehensive feedback and suggestions for the final write up.

10-12: Peer to peer feedback between students in groups of 3-4 students. The students in each group read the papers of other group members and spend ca 30 min discussing each paper.

End of course meeting.

Webinar (ca 3 hours in December)

A final course meeting is organized in December as a webinar. Students will be assigned a discussion topic that will relate to one or a few specific concepts. Their task is then to debate this topic drawing on the paper they have written for the course. Teachers will in advance produce discussion topics and assign these too groups of students. More information about the Webinar debate will be provided at the start of the course.

Key Concepts and preliminary list of readings

This preliminary literature list is structured around six topics (also preliminary) focused on specific key concepts. Students can choose to place focus on a few of these topics, and are not required to read more than 1000 pages in total.

1) Primitive accumulation and derivative/related terms (accumulation by dispossession, landgrabbing, etc...).

- Behrman, J., Meinzen-Dick, R., Quisumbing, A., 2012. The gender implications of large-scale land deals. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, 49–79.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2011.652621>
- Cotula, L., 2012. The international political economy of the global land rush: A critical appraisal of trends, scale, geography and drivers. *J. Peasant Stud.* 39, 649–680.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2012.674940>
- Fairbairn, M., 2015. Foreignization, financialization and land grab regulation. *J. Agrar. Change* 15, 581–591.
- Hall, D., 2013. Primitive Accumulation, Accumulation by Dispossession and the Global Land Grab. *Third World Q.* 34, 1582–1604. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.843854>
- Hall, R., Edelman, M., Jr, S.M.B., Scoones, I., White, B., Wolford, W., 2015. Resistance, acquiescence or incorporation? An introduction to land grabbing and political reactions ‘from below.’ *J. Peasant Stud.* 42, 467–488. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2015.1036746>
- Harvey, D., 2005. *The New Imperialism*, GERAL edition. ed. Oxford University Press, Oxford ; New York.
- Hussain, A., Tribe, K., 1983. *Marxism and the Agrarian Question*. MacMillan Press Ltd, London.
- Marx, K., 1990. *Capital*, Volume I: A Critique of Political Economy. Penguin Classics, London. (chapters 7,8)
- Li, T.M., 2014. What is land? Assembling a resource for global investment. *Trans. Inst. Br. Geogr.* 39, 589–602. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12065>
- Li, T.M., 2011. Centering labor in the land grab debate. *J. Peasant Stud.* 38, 281–298.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2011.559009>

2) Production and labor relations and agrarian questions

- Bernstein, H., 2016. Agriculture/industry, rural/urban, peasants/workers: some reflections on poverty, persistence and change, in: Boltvinik, J., Mann, S.A. (Eds.), *Peasant Poverty and Persistence in the 21st Century: Theories, Debates, Realities and Policies*. ZED Books, London, pp. 171–205.
- Bernstein, H., 1986. Capitalism and Petty Commodity Production. *Soc. Anal. Int. J. Soc. Cult. Pract.* 11–28.
- Djurfeldt, G., 1996. Defining and Operationalizing Family Farming from a Sociological Perspective. *Sociol. Rural.* 36, 340–351. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.1996.tb00026.x>
- Djurfeldt, G., 1981. What Happened to the Agrarian Bourgeoisie and Rural Proletariat under Monopoly Capitalism?: Some Hypotheses Derived from the Classics of Marxism on the Agrarian Question. *Acta Sociol.* 24, 167–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000169938102400303>
- Friedmann, H., 1980. Household production and the national economy: Concepts for the analysis of Agrarian formations. *J. Peasant Stud.* 7, 158–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066158008438099>
- Friedmann, H., 1978. Simple commodity production and wage labour in the American plains. *J. Peasant Stud.* 6, 71–100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066157808438066>

- Hall, R., Scoones, I., Tsikata, D., 2017. Plantations, outgrowers and commercial farming in Africa: agricultural commercialisation and implications for agrarian change. *J. Peasant Stud.* 44, 515–537. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2016.1263187>
- Mann, S.A., Dickinson, J.M., 1978. Obstacles to the development of a capitalist agriculture. *J. Peasant Stud.* 5, 466–481. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066157808438058>

3) Food Regimes

- Fairbairn, M., 2008. Framing resistance: International food regimes and the roots of food sovereignty. *Food Sovereignty Reconnecting Food Nat. Community.*
- Friedmann, H., 1993. The Political Economy of Food: A Global Crisis. *New Left Rev.* 29–57.
- Friedmann, H., McMichael, P., 1989. Agriculture and the State System: The rise and decline of national agricultures, 1870 to the present. *Sociol. Rural.* 29, 93–117. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.1989.tb00360.x>
- McMichael, P., 2009. A food regime analysis of the “world food crisis.” *Agric. Hum. Values* 26, 281. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-009-9218-5>
- McMichael, P., 2012. The land grab and corporate food regime restructuring. *J. Peasant Stud.* 39, 681–701. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2012.661369>
- Weis, A.J., 2007. *The Global Food Economy: The Battle for the Future of Farming.* Zed Books, London.

4) Food Sovereignty and agroecology

- Bernstein, H., 2009. V.I. Lenin and A.V. Chayanov: looking back, looking forward. *J. Peasant Stud.* 36, 55–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150902820289>
- Bernstein, H., 2014. Food sovereignty via the “peasant way”: a sceptical view. *J. Peasant Stud.* 41, 1031–1063. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2013.852082>
- Chayanov, A.V., 1986. *A.V. Chayanov on the Theory of Peasant Economy.* Univ of Wisconsin Press.
- Jansen, K., 2015. The debate on food sovereignty theory: agrarian capitalism, dispossession and agroecology. *J. Peasant Stud.* 42, 213–232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2014.945166>
- Rosset, P., Altieri, M., 2017. *Agroecology: Science and Politics.* Fernwood Books Ltd, Black Point, Nova Scotia.
- Shanin, T., 2009. Chayanov’s treble death and tenuous resurrection: an essay about understanding, about roots of plausibility and about rural Russia. *J. Peasant Stud.* 36, 83–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150902820420>
- van der Ploeg, J.D., 2014. Peasant-driven agricultural growth and food sovereignty. *J. Peasant Stud.* 41, 999–1030. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2013.876997>
- van der Ploeg, J.D., 2014. *Peasants and the Art of Farming: A Chayanovian Manifesto.* Practical Action Publishing, Bourton-on-Dunsmore.
- van der Ploeg, J.D., 2009. *The New Peasantries: Struggles for Autonomy and Sustainability in an Era of Empire and Globalization.* Routledge.

5) Financialization of agriculture

- Clapp, J., 2015. Distant agricultural landscapes. *Sustain. Sci.* 10, 305–316. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-014-0278-0>
- Fairbairn, M., 2014. ‘Like gold with yield’: evolving intersections between farmland and finance. *J. Peasant Stud.* 41, 777–795. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2013.873977>

- Henderson, G. L. 2003. *California and the Fictions of Capital*. Temple University Press. (Chapters 1 and 2)
- Martin, S.J., Clapp, J., 2015. Finance for Agriculture or Agriculture for Finance? *J. Agrar. Change* 15, 549–559. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12110>
- Russi, L., 2013. *Hungry Capital: The Financialization of Food*. Zero Books, Winchester, UK; Washington, USA.

6) Biophysical Contradictions of capitalist farming / Marx and Ecology / Metabolism

- Foster, J.B., 2013. Marx and the Rift in the Universal Metabolism of Nature. *Mon. Rev. N. Y.* 65, 1–19.
- Moore, J.W., 2015. *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. Verso Books, London.
- Weis, T., 2010. The Accelerating Biophysical Contradictions of Industrial Capitalist Agriculture. *J. Agrar. Change* 10, 315–341. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0366.2010.00273.x>