ANTH 6391: SOCIAL JUSTICE & RURAL CONFLICT
(Fall 2011)
Thurs. 6:10-8 pm
Dr. Eric B. Ross

A common view, dating to the colonial period, is that rural conflict is either a form of social pathology inherent in the nature of pre European cultures, or a reflection of the personality type of indigenous peoples, views that have typically embodied and rationalized the so called “civilizing” mission of Western development. To this is often added the assumption that, to the extent that such conflict needs to be attributed to material factors, it is due to “population pressure,” which is due, again, to failings of social character. This course explores the theoretical/empirical flaws in this general approach, through a largely case oriented, historical and comparative contextualization of rural conflict, beginning with the onset of European capitalism in the early 16th century and extending to the present day. A key focus will be on the structural sources of food insecurity, with special emphasis on the role of the global market for non food resources, and, in the case of peasants, on their increasingly marginal access to land and other productive resources (e.g., water).

Assessment: One 20-page term paper (on an agreed topic)--due on the last day of class--and one (short) class presentation.

1. Sept 1: INTRODUCTION
This class provides a general introduction to the premises and promises of the course and a discursive framework for the issues to come. The emphasis is chiefly on the parameters of the centuries-old conflict between the local subsistence needs of peasants and the process of agricultural commercialization perpetually seeking to transform food crops into commodities, a process that is now occurring on a global scale.

Readings:
http://users.manchester.edu/FacStaff/ssnaragon/Naragon/misc/Klee.html


2. Sept. 8: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW
In this section, students will gain an introductory understanding of the general historical relationship between rural society, conflict and land and an initial appreciation of the varying theoretical/ideological perspectives on this crucial nexus and their implications for different models of social change.

Readings:
http://books.google.com/books?id=sCK8AAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=eric+hobsbawm+primitive+rebels&source=bl&ots=9JcA_PP1A&sig=5frN9AsONKUbYGr0EUYN2NGZA&hl=en&ei=duV7TJvtFcP7lweop43sCw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&sqi=2&ved=0CBQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false
http://books.google.com/books?id=sCK8AAAAIAAJ&pg=PA187&lpg=PA187&dq=eric+hobsbawm+violence&source=bl&ots=9JcA0IqTiz&sig=u57kqDaOrErtayT_z776qMxj0I&hl=en&ei=198TILjFkK0lQf9s7XrCw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CBSQ6AEwATgU#v=onepage&q&f=false

Berger, John 1979 *Pig Earth* (Historical Afterword). New York: Pantheon.


In this session, students will develop an understanding of the reasons for the rise and preeminence of Malthusian (and neo Malthusian) thinking in Western models and theories of development and how this has influenced or obscured our understanding of the origins of rural conflict. The paradigmatic case of Ireland in the 19th century will be a central focus of the discussion and a prelude of issues to come.

Readings:


In this session, students will appreciate the way in which land issues (and the of “land reform”) briefly dominated the Western development agenda, when and why it was eventually marginalized and why, for peaceful and equitable development, in the words of writers such as James Putzel, “There is a pressing need to ‘bring agriculture’ back in to the international development lexicon.”

*Readings:*


**5. Sept. 29: VIOLENCE AS DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF COLOMBIA**
In this session, students will appreciate the exemplary case of Colombia, where violence has been an especially brutal and chronic fixture of rural life for most of the last 60 years, moving beyond simplistic explanations that have located the “cause” in national character, to understand the relationship of such conflict to the development process itself.

*Readings:*


6. Oct. 6: MEXICO, LAND POVERTY AND MIGRATION
Violence and population movement (largely to the United States) are longtime features of rural Mexico that have enormous implications for U.S. policy, though the latter typically has failed to address their underlying cause. In this session, students will appreciate the structural relationship between rural Mexican society and the dominance of the country’s agrarian development by U.S. interests, including the Green Revolution in its various phases.

*Readings:*


In this session, students will appreciate some of the complex linkages between regional rural conflict, reflected here in the case of the Zapatista Uprising in southern Mexico, historical patterns of national development and the international economy and, hence be in a better position to generalize from specific place to a global, comparative theoretical framework.

*Readings:*


**FILM: Zapatista**
As in the previous section, this offers students an opportunity to understand a particular case in a way that transcends the historically and culturally specific. The focus this time is the case of Kenya’s Mau Mau insurrection, which will be considered, not as it was typically regarded, as a resurgence of African tribal aggression, but as a peasant uprising not dissimilar to movements outside of sub Saharan Africa.

Readings:

9. Oct. 27: DIAMOND WAR IN SIERRA LEONE
Through this session, students will appreciate some of the underlying economic and political causes of one of the most persistent civil wars in recent West Africa history which, on the surface, appears to confirm may conventional stereotypes about African governance (see Robert Kaplan’s The Coming Anarchy) but, in fact, suggests the ways that foreign interests may distort the nature of the modern African state.

Readings:
The Forgotten War: The Sierra Leone Civil War. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiqHKFMPhHw

FILM: Cry Freetown (Sorious Samura/Ron McCullagh)

10. Nov. 3: THE RADICALIZATION OF ERNEST FEDER
In this session, students will explore the work of one of the most innovative and important thinkers in agricultural development, appreciate how his work fits into the larger framework of competing development perspectives that have characterized the last half century, and consider the nature of his legacy for current work on the general problematic of Third World development.

Readings:


At its outermost limits, rural conflict has sometimes assumed genocidal proportions, in a way that has taxed academic explanation, while putting competing theoretical paradigms to a strenuous test. In the case of Rwanda, there are many reasons that a Malthusian explanation would be the most convenient, but, in this section, students will be able to assess its relative power in the face of alternative views that (much as in the previous case of Sierra Leone) give greater attention to the international economic context.

Readings:


Thanksgiving Break: no class on Nov. 24

Although most students of rural economic and social justice have traditionally focused on land issues, there has been growing attention to other, associated factors of production, most notably water, which often presents a distinctive set of questions, particularly in the face of worldwide efforts toward privatization. All of these issues came to a head in the case of the struggle over the water system of the Bolivian city of Cochabamba, the origins, nature and implications (not the least, the
mobilization of the coca growers association and the election to the presidency of its leader, Evo Morales), which students will become acquainted with in the course of this session.

Readings:

FILM: Cocalero (2006)

It is sensible to bring the course back home, to seek some understanding of the contradictions that characterize the U.S. economy and that underlie its particular patterns of endemic violence, closely associated with various forms of economic and social injustice. The case students will focused on here is that of the coal mining region of Harlan County, Kentucky, the scene of a violent strike in the 1930s and of another major strike in the 1970s.

FILM: Harlan County USA (Barbara Koppel)

PAPERS DUE ON DECEMBER 15. They should be mailed in electronically.