

Feminist & Queer Ethnographies: Dystopia, Catastrophe, Extinction

WGSS S308 / ANTH S308 | Summer 2022, Session A

Tuesdays 9am – 12:15pm

Thursdays 9am – 12:15pm

Zoom: <https://yale.zoom.us/j/91249094939> (Passcode: 319319)

Instructor

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Office Hours

Mondays 1pm – 2pm
Zoom: <https://yale.zoom.us/j/97290963014>
(Passcode: 319319)
Sign up: <https://pepi.youcanbook.me>

Course Overview

This seminar centers the analytics and methods that feminist and queer ethnographic analyses have brought to the fore to revisit a cluster of topical issues, this year assembled around the theme: *Dystopia, Catastrophe, Extinction*. Key to the overall class will be the relation between humans and the world and, in particular, the way in which different “ends of the world” configure humankind as an entity to whom the world belongs. It has been said that ethnography sets out to build a believable world, but one that the reader will accept as factual. In this moment of anthropocenic, epidemiological, and sociopolitical crises – from climate change to the Covid-19 pandemic to renewed attention to police brutality worldwide – we will consider how feminist and queer ethnographies construct existing but also possible worlds, all the while retaining an alternate “made” world.

The course engages in decolonial readings of classic and contemporary ethnographies of dystopias and disasters—emerging from phenomena like slavery, the settler colonialism, gentrification in education, climate change, and loss and death of both individual and collective scales. Students will grapple with the processes of naturalization and denaturalization through which the “political” is mobilized and dyads like human/nonhuman, citizen/noncitizen, kin/stranger, are made to appear. Our emphasis will be to understand what epistemologies and etiologies are mobilized to produce universalizing panic about “crisis” and “extinction.” Over the course of the semester, we will be reading and talking about what constitutes a crisis or a catastrophe in ways that challenge the ineffable feeling that our times are exceptional. But we will also engage with feminist and queer methodologies that conjure up speculative fabulations for, what Saidiya Hartman has called, “the radical hope for living otherwise.”

Course Requirements

Please type all assignments in 12-point Times New Roman font, using double-spacing and one-inch margins on all sides. Always include your name, class, instructor information, week number, title, and date.

- Participation (20%): Please join our seminar as an active participant, prepared with questions on the assigned readings and your classmates' think pieces.
- Two Think Pieces (40%): Students will sign up for two classes in which they will write three-page think pieces based on that week's ethnography. Guidelines about what constitutes a think piece and how to approach writing within this genre can be found on Canvas. **Think pieces are due via email to the instructor the day before class by 5pm.**
- Final Research Paper or Science Fiction Essay (40%): At the end of the semester, students will be required to submit a 7- to 10-page final paper. If the student chooses to complete a research paper, they are expected to show both mastery of the relevant literature and some original research. If the student chooses to complete a science fiction essay, they are expected to draw from the themes, places, and people we have explored in the class. **The final paper is due via email to the instructor on July 8th by 5pm.**

Grading Scale

<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Grade</i>
93-100%	A
90-92%	A-
87-89%	B+
83-86%	B
80-82%	B-
77-79%	C+
73-76%	C
70-72%	C-
67-69%	D+
63-66%	D
60-62%	D-
59% and below	F

Writing Resources

I encourage all students to take advantage of the free writing tutoring services offered by the Yale College Writing Center, now located in Sterling Library. For more information, see <http://ctl.yale.edu/tutoring/writing-tutoring>

Absence & Tardiness Policy

Attendance and participation are critical to your success in this course. **Absences must be made up by writing a three-page think piece about the readings of the class you missed.** If you must come late for any reason (or request to leave early), please let me know. Frequent tardiness will be penalized.

Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Resource Office on Disabilities (ROD). Professional staff will evaluate

the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare a Letter of Accommodation for faculty dated in the current semester in which the request is being made. Students should start this process as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The ROD is located at 35 Broadway (rear entrance), Room 222 (phone: 203-432-2324). Office hours are held Monday through Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. URL: <http://rod.yale.edu>

Accommodations for University-Sponsored Extracurricular Activities and Sports

Academic accommodations for absences due to commitments to university-sponsored extracurricular activities and sports will be considered on a case-by-case basis as long as students approach me as soon as schedules are known, ideally at the start of the semester. It is the responsibility of students to communicate with me about conflicts with class and assignment deadlines and to arrange for making up missed work.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, using the logic and ideas of another source without attribution (even if the exact wording has been changed), cutting and pasting wording and phrasing from sources without attribution into your own text, and copying the work of other students. Plagiarism is academic fraud; it is committed when others' intellectual work or writing is represented as one's own work or writing. Any student who turns in a paper that contains plagiarized material or is plagiarized in full will be severely sanctioned by the university. The most common penalty is suspension from the university, but students caught plagiarizing are also subject to lowered or failing grades as well as the possibility of expulsion. If you are in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism in the context of a particular assignment, talk with the instructor. For more information, visit:

<http://catalog.yale.edu/undergraduate-regulations/policies/definitions-plagiarism-cheating/>.

You can find a fuller discussion of using sources and avoiding plagiarism on the Yale College Writing Center website: <http://ctl.yale.edu/writing/using-sources>

Content Warning

During the course of this class, some difficult topics may come up, including gender-based and race-based violence and sexual assault. There are other topics in this class that may also trigger difficult memories for you. You should feel free to talk to me about any issues you have with the topics we are discussing and ask for excused absences.

Statement of Inclusivity and Diversity

This classroom is a hate-free zone, and is part of WGSS's commitment addressing and redressing racism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, anti-Blackness, and all systems of privilege and oppression in our classes, in our academic units, and in higher education. To that end, you are expected to engage with one another with respect.

Course Materials

All required readings will be made available on our Canvas course page.

SCHEDULE

PART I: EPISTEMOLOGIES Perpetual Catastrophe, Refusals, Counter-Lineages

Week 1 – Tuesday: Cautionary Tales – Grief, Nostalgia, Annihilation

This class will commence with an introductory lecture that lays out the themes of the course and provides an overview of the history of feminist and queer anthropology. After a short break, we will embark on a seminar discussion of the assigned readings.

- Kurzweil, Amy. 2020. “(Me)chanical Reproduction.” In *Tehnnofeelia*, vol 3: <https://bit.ly/3pMNeoo>
- Wells, H. G. 1894. “The Extinction of Man: Some Speculative Thoughts.” <http://www.online-literature.com/wellshg/certain-personal-matters/24/>
- Rosaldo, Renato. 1989. “Introduction: Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage.” In *Society of Others: Kinship and Mourning in a West Papuan Place*. Beacon Press: 1-21.

The fascination of Western publics with extinction can be primarily traced to the nineteenth century, when Charles Darwin articulated the principle of natural selection—made visible in popular publications and exhibitions of fossils. In this introductory class, we consider loss and grief in its concrete and abstract, individual and collective dimensions. While personal death and grief had always already preoccupied humans, a demographic anxiety emerging from the prospect of threatened humanity was a distinctly 19th-century conception. We build on Janet Chernela’s observation that it is worth considering the extent to which it was not so much the idea of “common origins” in Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* as the specter of a “common ending” between human and nonhuman animals (lying outside the book itself) that posed the biggest challenge to Western visions of humanity’s destiny. Humanity was for the first time included in a possibility of a final, meaningless end – an end that would reduce or return us to our animal origins, as configured by the epistemic framework of natural selection. This new ontological orientation made possible scientific investments in race, gender, and sexuality that continue to shape our worldview today. The class introduces feminist and queer ethnography as anti-disciplinary responses to this racialized and gendered invention of man.

Week 1 – Thursday: Slavery and the Logics of Storytelling Traditions

- Hurston, Zora Neale. 2018 [1927]. *Barracoon: The Story of the Last “Black Cargo.”* Amistad.

Barracoon — the word comes from the Spanish word for "barracks" — came about in 1927, when the then-unknown Hurston was assigned a task by famed anthropologist Franz Boas: interviewing an 86-year-old former slave living in the tiny town of Plateau, Alabama. Oluale Kossula, also known by the slave name of Cudjo Lewis, had a remarkable past. Raised to the age of 19 in West

Africa, he was captured and brought to the United States as a captive on *Clotilda*, the fabled last ship ever to ply the waters of the transatlantic slave trade. He was then the only person alive to tell the story of this integral part of the nation's history.

Hurston was there to record Cudjo's firsthand account of the raid that led to his capture and bondage fifty years after the Atlantic slave trade was outlawed in the United States. In 1931, Hurston returned to Plateau, the African-centric community three miles from Mobile founded by Cudjo and other former slaves from his ship. Spending more than three months there, she talked in depth with Cudjo about the details of his life. Unlike other well-known slave narratives, which often include escape or bids for self-purchase, or speak to the abolition struggle, *Barracoon* stands alone. The narrative does not recount a journey forward into the American Dream. It is a slave narrative in reverse, journeying backwards to barracoons, betrayal, and barbarity. And then even further back, to a period of tranquility, a time of freedom, and a sense of belonging."

Week 2 – Tuesday: Settler Colonialisms and Indigenous Refusals

- Simpson, Audra. 2014. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Duke University Press: 37-66, 115-176.

Mohawk Interruptus is a challenge to dominant thinking in the fields of Native studies and anthropology. Combining political theory with ethnographic research among the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke, a reserve community in what is now southwestern Quebec, Audra Simpson examines their struggles to articulate and maintain political sovereignty through centuries of settler colonialism. The Kahnawà:ke Mohawks are part of the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois Confederacy. Like many Iroquois peoples, they insist on the integrity of Haudenosaunee governance and refuse American or Canadian citizenship. Audra Simpson thinks through this politics of refusal, which stands in stark contrast to the politics of cultural recognition. Tracing the implications of refusal, Simpson argues that one sovereign political order can exist nested within a sovereign state, albeit with enormous tension around issues of jurisdiction and legitimacy. Finally, Simpson critiques anthropologists and political scientists, whom, she argues, have too readily accepted the assumption that the colonial project is complete. Belying that notion, *Mohawk Interruptus* calls for and demonstrates more robust and evenhanded forms of inquiry into indigenous politics in the teeth of settler governance.

Week 2 – Thursday: Engendering the Banality of Violence – Hunger and Love

- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 1993. *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. University of California Press: 128-166, 340-399.

When lives are dominated by hunger, what becomes of love? *Death Without Weeping* is an account of the everyday experience of scarcity, sickness and death that centers on the lives of the women and children of a hillside "favela" in Northeast Brazil. Bringing her readers to the impoverished slopes above the modern plantation town of Bom Jesus de Mata, where she has worked on and off for 25 years, Nancy Scheper-Hughes follows three generations of shantytown women as they

struggle to survive through hard work, cunning and triage. It is a story of class relations told at the most basic level of bodies, emotions, desires and needs. Most controversial is her finding that mother love, as conventionally understood, is something of a bourgeois myth, a luxury for those who can reasonably expect, as these women cannot, that their infants will live.

PART II: ETIOLOGIES

Apocalypse Now – Make Live and Let Die

Week 3 – Tuesday: Progressive Dystopia and Liberal Antiracism

- Shange, Savannah. 2019. *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiracism, and Schooling in San Francisco*. Duke University Press: 22-43, 66-91, 123-150.

San Francisco is the endgame of gentrification, where racialized displacement means that the Black population of the city hovers at just over 3 percent. The Robeson Justice Academy opened to serve the few remaining low-income neighborhoods of the city, with the mission of offering liberatory, social justice--themed education to youth of color. While it features a progressive curriculum including Frantz Fanon and Audre Lorde, the majority Latinx school also has the district's highest suspension rates for Black students. In *Progressive Dystopia* Savannah Shange explores the potential for reconciling the school's marginalization of Black students with its sincere pursuit of multiracial uplift and solidarity. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and six years of experience teaching at the school, Shange outlines how the school fails its students and the community because it operates within a space predicated on antiracism. Seeing San Francisco as a social laboratory for how Black communities survive the end of their worlds, Shange argues for abolition over revolution or progressive reform as the needed path toward Black freedom.

Week 3 – Thursday: The Tragedy and Vulnerability of Refugees

- Cabot, Heath. 2014. *On the Doorstep of Europe: Asylum and Citizenship in Greece*. University of Pennsylvania Press: 73-166.

Greece has shouldered a heavy burden in the global economic crisis, struggling with political and financial insecurity. Greece has also the most porous external border of the European Union, tasked with ensuring that the EU's boundaries are both "secure and humanitarian" and hosting enormous numbers of migrants and asylum seekers who arrive by land and sea. The recent leadership and fiscal crises have led to a breakdown of legal entitlements for both Greek citizens and those seeking refuge within the country's borders.

On the Doorstep of Europe is an ethnographic study of the asylum system in Greece, tracing the ways asylum seekers, bureaucrats, and service providers attempt to navigate the dilemmas of governance, ethics, knowledge, and sociability that emerge through this legal process. Centering on the work of an asylum advocacy NGO in Athens, Heath Cabot explores how workers and clients grapple with predicaments endemic to Europeanization and rights-based protection. Drawing

inspiration from classical Greek tragedy to highlight both the transformative potential and the violence of law, Cabot charts the structural violence effected through European governance, rights frameworks, and humanitarian intervention while also exploring how Athenian society is being remade from the inside out. She shows how, in contemporary Greece, relationships between insiders and outsiders are radically reconfigured through legal, political, and economic crises.

Week 4 – Tuesday: Fossil-Fueled Utopias and Climate Change

- Günel, Gökçe. 2019. *Spaceship in the Desert: Energy, Climate Change, and Urban Design in Abu Dhabi*. Duke University Press: 37-64, 101-126, 157-182.

In 2006 Abu Dhabi launched an ambitious project to construct the world's first zero-carbon city: Masdar City. In *Spaceship in the Desert* Gökçe Günel examines the development and construction of Masdar City's renewable energy and clean technology infrastructures, providing an illuminating portrait of an international group of engineers, designers, and students who attempted to build a post-oil future in Abu Dhabi. While many of Masdar's initiatives—such as developing a new energy currency and a driverless rapid transit network—have stalled or not met expectations, Günel analyzes how these initiatives contributed to rendering the future a thinly disguised version of the fossil-fueled present. *Spaceship in the Desert* tells the story of Masdar, at once a “utopia” sponsored by the Emirati government, and a well-resourced company involving different actors who participated in the project, each with their own agendas and desires.

Week 4 – Thursday: Posthuman Labor and the Factory Farm

- Blanchette, Alex. 2020. *Porkopolis: American Animality, Standardized Life, and the Factory Farm*. Duke University Press: 45-72, 177-202.

In the 1990s a small midwestern American town approved the construction of a massive pork complex, where almost 7 million hogs are birthed, raised, and killed every year. In *Porkopolis* Alex Blanchette explores how this rural community has been reorganized around the life and death cycles of corporate pigs.

Drawing on over two years of ethnographic fieldwork, Blanchette immerses readers into the workplaces that underlie modern meat, from slaughterhouses and corporate offices to artificial insemination barns and bone-rendering facilities. He outlines the deep human-hog relationships and intimacies that emerge through intensified industrialization, showing how even the most mundane human action, such as a wayward touch, could have serious physical consequences for animals. Corporations' pursuit of a perfectly uniform, standardized pig—one that can yield materials for over 1000 products—creates social and environmental instabilities that transform human lives and livelihoods. Throughout *Porkopolis*, which includes dozens of images, Blanchette uses factory farming to rethink the fraught state of industrial capitalism in the United States today.

Week 5 – Tuesday: Fantasies of White Supremacy

- Hage, Ghassan. 1998. *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*. Pluto Press: 48-104, 117-140, 165-178, 232-247.

White Nation is a journey through the lived, rather than the official, realities of Western multiculturalism. Anthropologist and social critic Ghassan Hage explores one of the most complex and troubling of modern phenomena: the desire for a white nation. Using the experience of immigration policy and the rise of Pauline Hanson's neo-fascist One Nation party in Australia, Hage asks whether that desire is indeed limited to racists. Hage argues that governments have promised white citizens that they would lose nothing under multiculturalism. However, migrant settlement has changed neighbourhoods, challenged white control, created new demands for non-whites, and led to white backlash. This book suggests that white racists and white multiculturalists may share more assumptions than either group suspects.

PART III: METHODOLOGIES

Feminist Speculative Fabulations | Theory for the World to Come

Week 5 – Thursday: Decolonizing Extinction – Living with Pain and Loss

- Parreñas, Juno. 2018. *Decolonizing Extinction: The Work of Care in Orangutan Rehabilitation*. Duke University Press: 33-60, 83-104, 131-176.

At a global moment of environmental crises and family separations, Parreñas presents an account of care and hope in the face of extinction. Situated in rehabilitation centers for traumatized and endangered orangutans in Sarawak, Malaysia, *Decolonizing Extinction* calls for creative approaches to bio-cultural scholarship by asking how feminist analyses of violence might offer humane alternatives to the “palliative care” the species currently receives due to deforestation and industrial agriculture. Parreñas’s radically interdisciplinary and heartbreaking ethnography draws on primatology, queer theory, and archival history to argue that a feminist sense of welfare must include the possibility of pain and loss. This ethnography is asking us to imagine the intellectual tools necessary to rethink what it means to be autonomous and dependent, to suffer and to care.

DUE JULY 8th by 5pm:

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER or SCIENCE FICTION ESSAY