

# Ethnographies of Struggle

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EP&E, ANTH, CLAIS, AAS

Summer Class 2025 / June 30 – August 1 / Tu-Th 9am-12:15

## Course Description

Struggle is everywhere—from grassroots movements fighting for justice to everyday acts of resistance against inequality. But what does "struggle" really mean in ethnographic research? How do anthropologists navigate the tensions between observing, engaging, and becoming part of the struggles they study?

In this course, we dive deep into the multiple dimensions of struggle, from political theory to real-world case studies.

- **Weeks 1 & 2:** We explore how capitalism shapes struggles over natural resources, livelihoods, and survival, particularly in the Global South. How do communities resist, adapt, or transform their realities in the face of systemic pressures?
- **Weeks 3–5:** We turn the lens on the ethnographer. What happens when the researcher's own identity—race, gender, politics—intersects with the struggles they study? How do issues of access, engagement, and positionality shape the fieldwork experience? These questions come to life through discussions on the lecturer's ongoing research on the ELN guerrilla movement in Colombia.

This course it's an opportunity to challenge perspectives, debate real-world issues, and rethink the role of ethnography in political and environmental struggles. If you're curious about activism, global politics, or the ethics of research, this course will give you the critical tools to engage with the world in new ways.

Let's explore these pressing global issues together!

## Learning Objectives

After the attendance of the course, students will be able:

- To identify and critically evaluate struggles faced by people and social movements in the 'global South;'
- To recognize possible struggles between the ethnographer and her/his fieldwork;
- To discuss the limits and possibilities for ethnography to disrupt the normative pull of conventional academic research;
- To critically assess an academic paper;
- To share and discuss their criticism in public

## Assessment details

Final grades will be assigned based on the following assignments:

Active Participation 20%

Weekly Response papers 25%

Leading Class Discussion & Presentations 25%

## Final Papers 30%

Active Participation: This is a discussion-based class. Careful preparation for each of the seminars and informed contribution is expected. Always bring an electronic or print copy of that day's readings, your reading notes, and your weekly response papers (see below) to class. Come to the seminar ready to share your reflections and critique, raise questions, and engage graciously in a conversation with your peers.

Attendance to all sessions is mandatory. If you will be missing class, please let me know by email at least 24h in advance.

\*Readings: Each week includes about 100 pages of readings. Please take notes on the points that most inspire and/or provoke you. Active, careful, and schematic reading will be of enormous help to you in writing your weekly response papers.

Weekly Response papers: These 1.5 page (font size 12, line spacing 1.5) papers give you an opportunity to react to and reflect on the assigned readings. On the first half page of the paper you should provide a summary of the reading, explaining its main arguments and key points. In the second part of the paper (which must be at least twice as long as the summary part) it is expected that each of you will develop your own preferred style for writing a reflection on the readings. For example, you can select one or a few quotes (or a short paragraph) that draws your attention, then analyze them, either on their own terms or by comparing them to other readings covered in this (or other) class that address similar issues. Response papers should be submitted via email by 12am (midnight) on the Sunday preceding Tuesday's class.

Leading Class Discussion & Presentations: Each week two students will initiate discussion by raising a set of issues and questions related to the readings. Students will briefly introduce some of the main points of the readings assigned for that day and pose some questions for class discussion. Then, they will contribute to the discussion by raising new questions and critical points (please note that this might change depending on the number of students).

There will also be two group presentations (4 or 5 people depending on the number of students) during the course. These are 12-15 minute presentations with power point. I require everyone to actively participate, during the in-class presentation as well as in the preparation of the latter.

Final Papers: In the middle of the semester and at the end of the semester, students are required to submit a Final Paper. The two final papers are 6 pages long (font size 12, line spacing 1.5). In these papers students define an ethnographic case-study of their choice and analyze it with the theoretical tools learned in class, thus referencing the readings as well as my lectures.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### **Week 1: Foundations of Power & Ecology**

*How does capitalism shape our world? What are the roots of political ecology?*

- Capitalist Developments: Exploring the capitalist mode of production, dependency theory, and world system theory.
- Political Ecology: From deep vs. social ecology to the "myth of the wild" and the four theses of political ecology.

### **Week 2: Unveiling Injustice & Post-Development**

*Who suffers most from environmental crises? How does tourism fit into global development?*

- Environmental Racism & "Natural" Disasters: Case studies from La Toma (Colombia), Sri Lanka, and Haiti.
- Tourism & (Post-)Development: The contrast between 4S vs. 3F tourism and the anthropology of post-development.

### **Week 3: Debt, Violence & Meaning**

*How do economies shape societies? What defines political violence?*

- Film Screening & Discussion: Life and Debt (2001) - A deep dive into global financial systems and their impact.
- Student Presentations – Part I
- Anthropology of Violence: Understanding extraordinary vs. everyday violence, the reification of violence, and political violence as a struggle for meaning.

### **Week 4: Peace, Conflict & Ethnography**

*What is peace? How do we study conflict ethnographically?*

- Anthropology of Peace: Structural violence, the reification of peace, and neoliberal vs. social peace.
- An Intersectional Ethnography I: Selecting research subjects, a historical overview of the Colombian conflict, and the peace process.

### **Week 5: Intersectionality & Student Insights**

*How do identity and access shape fieldwork? What have we learned and how?*

- An Intersectional Ethnography II: Access and positionality, intersectionality, and identity construction among armed groups.
- Student Presentations – Part II (Final Review / Wrap-up)

## READINGS

### **Week 1:**

#### **Capitalist Developments**

Cadena, Marisol de la, and Mario Blaser, eds. 2018. *A World of Many Worlds*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. *Introduction*

Galeano, Eduardo 1973. *Open Veins of Latin America; Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*. New York: Monthly Review Press. *Introduction; Chapter 1: Pp. 21-42; Chapter 2: Pp. 145-148; Chapter 3: Pp. 149-154, 172-182; Chapter 4: Pp. 219-224; Chapter 5: 265-268*

Wolf, Eric R. 2010. *Europe and the People Without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press. *Chapter 3: Pp. 73-79 ; Chapter 10; Chapter 11: Pp. 310-317, 350-353*

#### **Political Ecology**

Marfurt, F. 2023. Participatory Guarantee Systems in Senegal: Shifting Labour Dynamics in Agroecology. *Journal of Peasant Studies: 1-29*.

Ruiz-Serna, Daniel. 2023. *When Forests Run Amok: War and Its Afterlives in Indigenous and Afro-Colombian Territories*. Durham: Duke University Press. *Introduction: Pp. 1-30; Chapter 2; Chapter 3*

### **Week 2:**

#### **Environmental Racism and “Natural” Disasters**

Fakier, K. (2018). Women and Renewable Energy in a South African Community: Exploring Energy Poverty and Environmental Racism. *Journal of International Women's Studies, 19*(5), 165-176.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2022. *Abolition Geography: Essays Towards Liberation*. Edited by Brenna Bhandar and Alberto Toscano. London New York: Verso. *Chapter 2 & 6*.

Okafor-Yarwood, Ifesinachi, and Ibukun Jacob Adewumi. 2020. “Toxic Waste Dumping in the Global South as a Form of Environmental Racism: Evidence from the Gulf of Guinea.” *African Studies 79* (3): 285–304.

Van Sant, Levi, Richard Milligan, and Sharlene Mollett. 2021. “Political Ecologies of Race: Settler Colonialism and Environmental Racism in the United States and Canada.” *Antipode 53* (3): 629–42.

#### **Tourism and (post-)Development**

Devine, Jennifer, and Diana Ojeda. 2017. “Violence and Dispossession in Tourism Development: A Critical Geographical Approach.” *Journal of Sustainable Tourism 25* (5): 605–17.

Escobar, A. (2011). *Encountering Development : The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. *Preface; Chapter 6*

Loperena, Christopher. 2022. *The Ends of Paradise: Race, Extraction, and the Struggle for Black Life in Honduras*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Chapter 2, 3, Conclusion

### **Week 3:**

#### **Life and Debt**

Anders, Gerhard. 2008. "The Normativity of Numbers: World Bank and IMF Conditionality." *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 31 (2): 187–202.

Johnson, Lauren C. 2014. "Work at the Periphery: Issues of Tourism Sustainability in Jamaica." *Culture Unbound* 6 (5): 949–62.

#### **Anthropology of Violence**

Khayyat, Munira. 2022. *A Landscape of War: Ecologies of Resistance and Survival in South Lebanon*. Introduction, Chapter 4, Conclusion

Schmidt, Bettina, and Ingo Schroeder, eds. 2001. *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict*. 1st edition. London: Routledge. Chapter 7

Skurski J. & Coronil F. (2006). States of Violence. *Introduction: States of Violence and the Violence of States*. Pp. 1-31

### **Week 4:**

#### **Anthropology of Peace**

Burnyeat, Gwen. 2022. *The Face of Peace: Government Pedagogy amid Disinformation in Colombia*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Introduction; Chapter 4; Conclusion

Lederach, Angie. 2023. *Feel the Grass Grow: Ecologies of Slow Peace in Colombia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Chapter 1 & 2

Santos, B. S. (2017). Colombia Between Liberal Peace and Democratic Peace. *In Factis Pax*, 11(2), 41-62.

#### **An Intersectional Ethnography I**

Biehl, J. 2013. "Ethnography in the Way of Theory." *Cultural Anthropology* 28 (4): 573–97.

Boeri, Miriam, and Rashi K. Shukla, eds. 2019. *Inside Ethnography: Researchers Reflect on the Challenges of Reaching Hidden Populations*. Chapters 1; 10; 11; 12; Conclusion

### **Week 5:**

#### **An Intersectional Ethnography II**

Berry M. J., Chávez Argüelles C., Cordis S., Ihmoud S., and Velásquez Estrada E. 2017. "Toward a Fugitive Anthropology: Gender, Race, and Violence in the Field." *Cultural Anthropology* 32 (4): 537–65.

Bernasconi, A. "Building territoriality in the aquatic space: An ethnography of the ELN's fluid governance in the Colombian Pacific Region." *Journal of Latin American Studies*

Escobar, Arturo. 2020. *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Chapters 4 & 5

\*A Word About Academic Integrity: Plagiarism is the act of using the ideas or words of others without giving proper credit. It is a serious academic offense that undermines the integrity of scholarship and research. In this course, all work submitted by students must be their own original work. Any use of the ideas or words of others must be properly cited and credited. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, copying and pasting text from sources without proper citation, using someone else's ideas without proper attribution, and submitting work that has been previously submitted in another course. If a student is found to have plagiarized, they will be subject to disciplinary action, which may include a failing grade for the assignment or the course. Students are encouraged to seek guidance from the instructor or writing center if they have any questions about proper citation and attribution.

For further information, please consult the Center for Teaching and Learning's website on citation practices: <http://ctl.yale.edu/writing/wr-instructor-resources/addressing-academic-integrity-and-plagiarism>