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PhD Seminar
4-8 May 2026
Peace Research Institute Oslo

Advanced Qualitative Methods in Conflict Studies

A Doctoral Course within the Research School on Peace & Conflict

Overview: This course provides an in-depth introduction to field-based methods and process analytics. We begin with important preliminaries (meta-theory, ethics, transparency); then survey differing ways to access the field (case studies, multi-sited approaches) and the methods needed to capture process. The latter include political ethnography, interviewing, process tracing, practice tracing and following techniques. Whenever possible, students will be introduced to both neo-positivist/critical-realist and interpretive variants of particular approaches and methods.

In the course's second part, we move from the conceptual to the applied, examining case, site and process methods in action - in civil wars, post-conflict settings, and zones of political violence. Meta-theory, ethics, measurement, data quality and transparency are key themes throughout. The fundamental goal is for students to acquire sufficient knowledge to be smart, meta-theoretically plural and rigorous users of field-based research in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Credits: 10 ECTS.

Requirements: There are two mandatory requirements; two others are optional.

Mandatory

1) Active Participation in Class Discussions: The course will be run as a seminar, where debate and discussion are the norm; for each session, written discussion questions will serve as our starting point. For this to be successful, students need to read the seminar readings prior to our first meeting on 4 May.

2) Preparation of Discussion Points: For each class session, students should prepare a brief list of discussion questions and comments (2-3 in number); these should be based on the readings. Your questions-comments should reflect a critical assessment of those readings. What are their strong and weak points? Their meta-theoretical, theoretical, methodological, ethical, empirical contributions/limitations? How do they relate to or build upon other readings or discussions? Your discussion questions should be uploaded to the seminar Dropbox prior to our first meeting on 4 May.

Optional

1) Completion of an Analytic Essay: If students wish to receive ECTS credits for the course, they must submit an analytic essay. You have two options. (I) Prepare an analytic review on a topic that is of special interest and is consistent with the course's purpose and theme; or (II) prepare a draft research design for a PhD project where qualitative methods and process analytics play some role. In either case, essays should be 6000-10000 words, and are due by ***10 August 2026***. By the first day of class – Monday, 4 May - students should upload

to the seminar Dropbox a 1-2 page introduction to their proposed essay. These overviews will then be discussed at one-on-one meetings on the morning of Wednesday, 6 May, 0900 - 1200, when there will be no formal class sessions.

2) Participation in Half-Day Workshop: On the afternoon of Wednesday, 6 May, 1330-1600, students will have the opportunity to attend a workshop, where, in a hands-on, group setting they will apply the field-method/process literature to their own PhD projects. The workshop – while not required – is open to all course participants. If you wish to have your dissertation project and its methods discussed, please upload to the seminar Dropbox a 3-page overview of your thesis, and do so by Monday, 4 May. The overview should explain and justify your choice of methods and the practical/data-related/ethical challenges you are encountering as you seek to operationalize them.

Readings: Key texts for the seminar include the following.

Autesserre, Severine, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Bennett, Andrew and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

Cohen, Dara Kay, *Rape during Civil War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016)

Fujii, Lee Ann, *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach* (London: Routledge, 2018)

Fujii, Lee Ann, *Show Time: The Logic and Power of Violent Display*, Edited by Martha Finnemore (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021)

George, Alexander and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005)

Procter, Caitlin and Branwen Spector, Editors, *Inclusive Ethnography: Making Fieldwork Safer, Healthier and More Ethical* (London: Sage Publications, 2024)

Simmons, Erica and Nicholas Smith, Editors, *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021)

Seminar readings are accessible in a variety of ways.

- Books & Chapters in Books: *All* books on the syllabus are available as e-books, and should thus be available from your local university library.

- Journal Articles: These are easily obtained electronically through your local university library.

If you encounter any problems accessing seminar readings, please contact Jørgen Jensehaugen (jorjen@prio.org).

Syllabus and Class Schedule

Part I - Field-Based Approaches & Methods, Process Analytics

Day #1: Monday, 4 May

Session I (0900 – 1130): The Preliminaries – Meta-Theory, Ethics, Transparency

della Porta, Donatella and Michael Keating, "How Many Approaches in the Social Sciences? An Epistemological Introduction," in Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating, Editors, *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Chapter 2.

George, Alexander and Andrew Bennett, "Case Studies and the Philosophy of Science," *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), Chapter 7.

Jackson, Patrick, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics, Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2016), Chapters 1, 2.

Procter, Caitlin and Branwen Spector, Editors, *Inclusive Ethnography: Making Fieldwork Safer, Healthier and More Ethical* (London: Sage Publications, 2024), Chapters 1, 2, 3, 10.

Kapiszewski, Diana and Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Ethics, Epistemology, and Openness in Research with Human Participants," *Perspectives on Politics* 20/3 (2022): 948-964.

Jacobs, Alan, *et al*, "The Qualitative Transparency Deliberations: Insights and Implications," *Perspectives on Politics* 19/1 (March 2021): 171-208.

Session II (1130-1200, 1300 - 1500): Accessing the Field - Case Studies & Sites

George, Alexander and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), Chapters 1, 3, 4, 5.

Simmons, Erica and Nicholas Smith, Editors, *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), Chapters 1, 6, 9

Simmons, Erica and Nicholas Rush Smith, "How Cases Speak to One Another: Using Translation to Rethink Generalization in Political Science Research," *American Political Science Review* 120/1 (February 2026): 110-122.

Both, Maxine, Ophelia Nicole-Berva and Juliette Saetre, Editors, "Symposium – From Case to Phenomenon: Incorporating the Multi-Sited Approach in Political Science," *QMMR: Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 23/1 (Spring 2025): 24-79.

Session III (1500 - 1630): Conceptualizing Process in the Field – Causal Mechanisms, Social Practices, Following Things

Hedstrom, Peter and Petri Ylikoski, "Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences," *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 49–67.

Adler, Emanuel, "Practices, Background Knowledge, Communities of Practice, Social Orders," in Emanuel Adler, *World Ordering: A Social Theory of Cognitive Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), Chapter 4.

Marcus, George, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 95-117.

Day #2: Tuesday, 5 May

Session IV (0900 – 1100): Process Data – Interviewing & Political Ethnography

Fujii, Lee Ann, *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach* (London: Routledge, 2018).

MacLean, Lauren, "The Power of the Interviewer," in Layna Mosley, Editor, *Interview Research in Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), Chapter 3.

Wood, Elisabeth, "Ethnographic Research in the Shadow of Civil War," in Elisabeth Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Chapter 2.

Session V (1100 – 1200, 1330 - 1600): Measuring Process – Process Tracing, Practice Tracing, Following Methods

Bennett, Andrew and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), Chapters 1, 7.

Schwartz, Rachel and Scott Straus, "What Drives Violence against Civilians in Civil War? Evidence from Guatemala's Conflict Archives," *Journal of Peace Research* 55/2 (2018): 222–235.

Pouliot, Vincent, "Practice Tracing," in Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), Chapter 9.

Pouliot, Vincent, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), Appendix.

Adler-Nissen, Rebecca and Alena Drieschova, "Track-Change Diplomacy: Technology, Affordances, and the Practice of International Negotiations," *International Studies Quarterly* 63/3 (2019): 531–545.

Söderberg, Nora, "Multi-sited Research Disrupted: Chokepoints and the Panama Canal," *Qualitative Research* 25/6 (2025): 1195-1215.

Day #3: Wednesday, 6 May

Session VI (0900 - 1200): Individual Meetings on Course Essays

Session VII (1330 - 1600): Workshop – Methods in Action

Part II - Cases, Sites and Process in Action: Civil Wars, Post-Conflict and Political Violence

Day #4: Thursday, 7 May

Session VIII (0900 - 1200): Field Methods and Civil War

Cohen, Dara Kay, *Rape During Civil War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 3, Conclusion.

Session IX (1330 - 1600): Field Methods and Post-Conflict

Autesserre, Severine, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5.

Day #5: Friday, 8 May

Session X (0900 - 1200): Field Methods and Political Violence

Fujii, Lee Ann, "'Talk of the Town': Explaining Pathways to Participation in Violent Display," *Journal of Peace Research* 54/5 (2017): 661-673.

Fujii, Lee Ann, *Show Time : The Logic and Power of Violent Display*, Edited by Martha Finnemore (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), Preface, Introduction, Chapters 3, 4, Epilogue.