

# Bandits and Barbarians

## Exploring Subaltern Resilience and State Power

**Peter van Dommelen**

In the imaginations of ancient Greeks and Romans, the urban centers of 'civilization' were surrounded by wild lands where barbarians roamed. Likewise, mountains, marshes, forests, and deserts are today seen as the realms of bandits, primitive tribes, warlords, and terrorists. From 'shepherd-bandits' in highland Sardinia and 'red-faced Gauls' in Roman France to 'marginal tribes' in the Kabyle mountains of Algeria and the 'wild people' of the Ethiopian borderlands, this course explores peripheral lands and marginalized communities through time and across the globe. We will critically examine such stereotypical representations, to understand how their inhabitants carved out their own spaces in the interstices of ancient and modern states.



In this course, we will read and discuss anthropological, historical and archaeological literature to consider and compare societies and communities, who have been marginalized by state and/or colonial powers, and who have invariably been labeled as bandits, rebels, terrorists or outlaws by those same authorities. The historian Eric Hobsbawm, whose work we will study in detail, first drew systematic attention to these attempts to resist expanding states and empires: "banditry of the Robin Hood type, rural secret societies, various peasant revolutionary movements of the millenarian sort, pre-industrial urban 'mobs' and their riots, some labour religious sects" are but some of the instances of resistance and resilience that he termed 'Primitive Rebels' (Hobsbawm 1959).

Rebellion, terrorism and banditry are not just early modern or contemporary phenomena, however, and they can be readily traced back into the deep past as well. Classical authors seem to discuss similar situations when they describe barbarians, who were conquered or displaced by expanding ancient empires. The comparative approach taken to explore subaltern resilience and state power in this course is thus not only global but also long-term diachronic; case studies to be considered will include the Samnites of first millennium BC Central Italy, the Sicilian mafia, the 19th century southwest Asian Highlands, 20th century Indonesia and the Ethiopian lowlands

## ***Bandits and Barbarians* - syllabus**

### **Course Organization**

The course is built up of four main parts, each of which will be assessed in a different way. The course begins with an overall introduction and zooms in on the underlying theoretical concepts (weeks 1-2); the second part focuses on three major notions in as many weeks (#3-5), examining them in a range of relevant historical contexts. The following four weeks (#6-9) make up the third part of the course that delves into the details of a number of major case studies, each of which highlights a particular theme. The final four weeks (#11-14) are set aside for student investigations and concluding discussions how we can use these insights to think about our current historical situation.

A course blog for students to discuss readings will help to tie together concepts and events. The fourth part of the course (weeks 11-13) is mostly dedicated to student-led presentations and discussions that are thematically organized, and in which students are encouraged to combine theoretical notions with specific historical, ethnographic or archaeological evidence. The course is wrapped up with a concluding discussion (week 14).

The course will be assessed through two short written assignments and blog posts during the parts two and three of the course (weeks 3-9) as well as a substantial final paper due by the end of the course. Students are also required to lead a class discussion and to make an in-class presentation. Overall course participation will be monitored and assessed through contributions to class discussion, presentations and a course blog.

### **Course Requirements and Assessment** (in order of weight)

- 35% two short writing assignments (see below 1-2);
- 30% final paper (see below 3);
- 15% project presentation (see below 4);
- 10% blog posts (see below 5);
- 10% class participation (see below 6).

### **Writing Assignments and Project** (in chronological order)

1. 10%: due **February 25**: a short discussion of a contemporary situation anywhere in the world in terms of resistance, banditry, terrorism or state occupation (1000 words).
2. 15%: due either **February 28** or **March 21** (10am): film review of either *Banditi a Orgosolo* (*Bandits at Orgosolo*, V. De Seta, 1961) or *La battaglia di Algeri* (*The Battle of Algiers*, G. Pontecorvo, 1966) in terms of key concepts as discussed in the course (1500-2000 words).
3. 30%: due **May 13**: final paper, to discuss how postcolonial theories may change our understanding of social banditry and grassroots rebellion in the face of state and colonial occupation. At least one historical or ethnographic case study should be used to support your arguments (5000 words).
4. 15% in **weeks 11-13**: substantial oral presentation (ca. 20 mins) of an ethnographic, historical or archaeological case study of rebellion, colonialism or oppression, in which both the wider setting and one or more grassroots contexts are discussed.
5. 10% throughout **weeks 3-9**: one or more blog posts.
6. 10% **throughout the course**: class participation as evident from class participation and comments on the course blog.

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Over 14 weeks, students will spend three hours per week in class (42 hours total). Required reading and/or watching of video material for the class and seminar meetings is expected to take up approximately seven or eight hours per week (110 hours). In addition, writing and commenting to blog posts as well as researching for and writing of the class presentation and final paper are estimated at a total of approximately 50 hours over the course of the term.

### **Course Outline**

Jan. 27	1: Course Introduction
Feb. 1-3	2: Thinking about Power and Resistance
Feb. 8-10	3: Inventing Barbarians
Feb. 15-17	4: Social Banditry
Feb. 24	5: Primitive Rebels?
March 1-3	6: The Sicilian Mafia
March 8-10	7: Resisting the State
March 15-17	8: Fighting for Independence
March 22-24	9: Rebels with a Cause
March 29-31	[no classes]
April 5-7	11: (Student Presentations)
April 12-14	12: (Student Presentations)
April 19-21	13: (Student Presentations)
April 26-28	14: Engaging the State

### **Reading and Text Books**

Students are required to read three to four chapters or articles every week as listed in Canvas. Journal articles and book chapters will be made available as pdfs but you are expected to buy one text book.

**REQUIRED:** Hobsbawm, E. 1969: *Bandits*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Note that the course canvas pages *always* offer the most up-to-date, correct and more detailed information:

**<https://blogs.brown.edu/anth-1145-s01-2022-spring/>**

### **Practical Information**

- Instructor: Peter van Dommelen ([peter\\_van\\_dommelen@brown.edu](mailto:peter_van_dommelen@brown.edu))
- Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursday, 2.30-3.30 - Rhode Island Hall, room 009 (basement)

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform us if you have a disability or other condition that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with us after class or during office hours. For more information, contact Student and Employee Accessibility Services at 401-863-9588 or [SEAS@brown.edu](mailto:SEAS@brown.edu).

## **Key Bibliography**

- Blok, A. 1974: *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village, 1860-1960: a Study of Violent Peasant Entrepreneurs*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Dench, E. 1995: *From Barbarians to New Men. Greek, Roman and Modern Perceptions of Peoples of the Central Apennines*. (Oxford Classical Monographs). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Friedman, J. (ed.) 2003: *Globalization, the State, and Violence*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- González Ruibal, A. 2014: *An Archaeology of Resistance. Materiality and Time in an African Borderland*. (Archaeology in Society). Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.
- Hobsbawm, E. 1959: *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Norton & Company: New York.
- Hobsbawm, E. 1969: *Bandits*. New York: Delacorte Press.
- Hobsbawm, E. 2003: *Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.
- Pansters, W. (ed.) 2012: *Violence, Coercion, and State-Making in Twentieth-Century Mexico: The Other Half of the Centaur*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Scott, J. 2009: *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. (Yale Agrarian Studies). New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Wolf, E. 1973: *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Woolf, G. 2011: *Tales of the Barbarians. Ethnography and Empire in the Roman West*. (Blackwell Bristol Lectures on Greece, Rome and the Classical Tradition 2). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.