



# Lecture Series in Social Anthropology

Spring  
Semester  
2025

Tuesday 13 May 2025 | 4.15 p.m. | Room AND-4-06

## Beyond Sargassum: Narrating Ecological Disaster in Mexico

**Dr. Laura Otto (Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg)**

Sargassum, a genus of brown macroalgae, has surged to global attention as unprecedented blooms have begun disrupting ecosystems and livelihoods back in 2015. Particularly affected are Caribbean coasts, including the famous Riviera Maya in Mexico. Dominant narratives in media and policy often frame Sargassum as an invasive enemy, casting humans as embattled heroes in a war against nature. Yet, such masculinized discourses oversimplify the complex socio-ecological realities surrounding this phenomenon. The talk is based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Caribbean, exploring the nuanced perspectives of researchers, especially marine biologists, who study Sargassum. Moving beyond sensationalist rhetoric, the talk reveals Sargassum's multiple roles as both a source of ecological harm and a site of unexpected beauty and productivity. By documenting the embodied experiences of scientists working amidst these challenges, the presentation aims to reframe how we understand and respond to environmental crises, advocating for narratives that embrace complexity, agency, and relations which are told by both anthropologists and biologists. This perspective challenges us to rethink the binaries of harm and beauty, offering a richer framework for engaging with ecological upheavals in the Anthropocene.

### **Organization:**

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Entrance free of charge.

Subject to change. For details see: <https://t.uzh.ch/1s7>

