

Entangled History and the Environment: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

Prof. Dr. Eleonora Rohland

Summer Semester 2020

Interdisciplinary Theory Seminar (MA History) // History of the Americas // Advanced History of the Americas (MA IAS) // Entwicklung der Wissenschaften I/II (MA HEPS)

Bi-weekly Seminar on Tuesdays 2-6 p.m.

As long as COVID-19 prevents face-to-face meetings, my **office hours** will happen via Zoom/ Jitsi and/or email. Please send me a message to arrange for individual dates (eleonora.rohland@uni-bielefeld.de)

About this course:

The current diagnosis of the “Anthropocene” – the Age of Humans – does not only have very material implications for present and future human societies on this planet, but also, on a more epistemic level, for the traditional division between the humanities/ social sciences and the natural sciences (Chakrabarty 2009).

This course starts out with an introduction into what the “Anthropocene” is, and with a review of the current state of the art on the concept and its dating as to the Anthropocene Working Group and researchers associated with it (Steffen et al., McNeill et al, Rockström et al.). This involves interdisciplinary perspectives from Earth System and Climate sciences. We then dive into several theoretical texts by historians and literary scholars (Chakrabarty, Ghosh, Mauelshagen, Latour and others) who reflect on the implications of this new era for the humanities and historical research in particular. In a next step we will look at voices critical of the concept of the “Anthropocene”, suggested alternatives (think “Capitalocene”, “Plantationocene” etc.) and consider their scope. Most of these perspectives have emerged from postcolonial studies, which have rightfully pointed to the unequal responsibilities and power differentials involved in the coming-about of the Anthropocene (Malm & Hornborg, Lewis & Maslin, Todd & Davis and others). In a last cycle we will look at conceptual and methodological approaches (Entangled History and the Environment, World System Analysis, Social Metabolism) that may be able to connect the humanities with the natural sciences in order to come to a more inclusive perspective of the present and how we got to this point in history.

This course is largely global in its geographical scope though it puts specific emphasis on the Americas in the pre-history of the Anthropocene. Its temporal scope reaches from the European Expansion to the present.

Exams/ Term Papers:

Depending on the MA program you’re studying this course through, you have different exam formats. Students of the History Master should study this course in conjunction with the Theory Seminar "The Environment and Animals. New Perspectives on the European Expansion" (220102)

and will sit through a 20 min oral exam with me (and another 20 min with Prof. Flüchter) based on a *Thesepapier*.

Students of the IAS Master will study this course as the seminar and "The Environment and Animals. New Perspectives on the European Expansion" as the historical contextualization of the IAS history module. At the end of this course, they will write a 20-25 pages seminar paper on a topic of their choice within the subject scope of this course.

HEPS MA Students will write a 6000 words seminar paper on a topic of their choice within the subject scope of this course.

Studienleistung:

Written contribution to the collaborative course-Wiki on the Anthropocene (see Wiki-Tool in LernraumPlus)

Syllabus:

Date	Session Theme	Texts	Tasks/ Assignment
21.04.	Personal Introductions (Webinar) and thematic Introduction and Why the Anthropocene is not Climate Change...	Adeney Thomas, Why the Anthropocene (2019) Steffen et al. Planetary boundaries (2015), 1-10. See also: The Planetary boundaries graph on the stockholmresilience Webpage And Johan Rockström's TED Talk introducing the Planetary Boundaries (2010)	
05.05.	Dating a New Epoch, the Importance of the Americas, and the Great Acceleration	Lewis & Maslin , Defining the Anthropocene (2015) Anthropocene Working Group , Colonization of the Americas (2015) Waters et al. , The Anthropocene (2016) See also: The Future Earth website with the so-called Steffen Graphs that picture the Great Acceleration since 1950	
19.05.	The Anthropocene and its Challenge for the Humanities	Chakrabarty , Climate of History (2009) Ghosh , The Great Derangement (2016), Chapter 1 (Stories) Simon , Why the Anthropocene (2017)	
02.06.	The Anthropocene and "Western Modernity"	Mauelshagen , Dirty Metaphysics (2020) Chakrabarty , Postcolonial Studies (2012)	Moderation:

Date	Session Theme	Texts	Tasks/ Assignment
		See also: Amitav Ghosh's Berlin Family Lectures at U Chicago (2015)	
16.06.	Criticism of the Anthropocene Concept and Alternative -“cenes”	<p>Malm & Hornborg, Geology of Mankind (2014)</p> <p>Moore, Capitalocene (2017)</p> <p>Haraway, Staying with the Trouble (2016), Chapter 2</p> <p>See also: EdgeEffects Website and Blog: Interview of Gregg Mitman (U Madison Wisconsin) with Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing on the Plantationocene and Blog post Plantation Legacies</p>	
30.06.	The Anthropocene from the Perspective of the Global South	<p>Inoue, Many Worlds (2016)</p> <p>Escobar, Degrowth (2015)</p> <p>Hecht, Interscalar Vehicles (2018)</p> <p>See also I: for the Spanish-speakers among you: the special issue of Desacatos on Cambio Climático y Antropoceno with Latin American, German, French and U.S.-American authors</p> <p>See also II: Kathryn Yusoff's black feminist approach: A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None (2018)</p>	Moderation:
14.07.	<p>Conceptual Approaches for Bridging the “Great Divide”</p> <p>Q&A on how to write the <i>Hausarbeit</i></p>	<p>González de Molina & Toledo, Social Metabolism (2014)</p> <p>Rohland, Entangled History & The Environment (2020)</p>	

Further Online Resources:

- Check out the Center for InterAmerican Studies (CIAS) homepage and the videos of our [Lectures4Future Bielefeld](#) series (unfortunately in Germany only) which all deal with Anthropocene themes
- Have a look at the [Alternautas Blog](#), a blog that shares an against-the-mainstream perspective on development from Latin American scholars in English
- Check out the latest articles the interdisciplinary Anthropocene journals [The Anthropocene Review](#) and [Anthropocene](#)
- Have a look at the photographer J. Henry Fair's website and his [Artefakte exhibit](#). His photographs are a disturbing rendition of the Anthropocene.

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