

## Anthropology, Africa and the Anthropocene (A006650)

**Course size** *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

**Credits 5.0**                      **Study time 150 h**

**Course offerings in academic year 2026-2027**

A (semester 1)	English	Gent
B (semester 1)	English	Gent

**Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027**

Rahier, Nick	LW21	lecturer-in-charge
Stroeken, Koenraad	LW21	co-lecturer

**Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027**

	crdts	offering
<a href="#">Master of Science in Teaching in Languages(main subject African Languages and Cultures)</a>	5	A
<a href="#">Virtual Mobility</a>	5	B
<a href="#">Master of Arts in African Studies</a>	5	A

**Teaching languages**

English

**Keywords**

- Anthropocene
- Environmental Anthropology
- Africa
- Climate Change
- Multispecies Relations
- Sustainability and Justice
- Environmental Governance
- Cultural Anthropology
- Human-Environment Relations
- Ethnography

**Position of the course**

This course explores critical issues of the Anthropocene through a regionally focused lens. At the MA level, it offers advanced insights into the evolving relationships between humans and their environments.

**Contents**

This course explores critical issues of the Anthropocene through a regionally focused lens. It examines how human activity became a dominant planetary force, while critically interrogating the framing, political implications, and underlying assumptions of the Anthropocene narrative.

Focusing on African case studies, students engage with environmental challenges through themes such as multispecies entanglements, environmental precarity, the commodification of nature, toxicity and pollution, critiques of Eurocentric understandings of environmental change, etc.

Guest speakers bring empirical case studies based on original fieldwork into the classroom, enriching theoretical discussions with grounded examples.

**Theory:**

Students are introduced to foundational and critical concepts of the Anthropocene, including debates on human-environment relations, multispecies ethnography, climate change, toxicity, pollution, and the political economies shaping environmental futures. Readings engage both mainstream approaches and decolonial, relational, and indigenous critiques of Anthropocene discourse.

**Methodology:**

Through practical sessions, an individual fieldwork exercise, and (guest) lectures, students will develop ethnographic and analytical tools to examine lived experiences of environmental and social change, while critically reflecting on how knowledge about the environment is constructed, circulated, and contested.

**Empirical Contexts:**

Case studies from Africa serve as entry points for analyzing how global environmental discourses are translated, appropriated, resisted, or reimagined in specific local contexts. Guest speakers further enrich these discussions with diverse examples from across the continent.

**Initial competences**

*Students are expected to have completed introductory courses in Anthropology or to have acquired equivalent competences through prior study or relevant experience.*

**Final competences**

1 Knowledge

- Understanding the key concepts, theories, and debates surrounding the Anthropocene.
- Demonstrating knowledge of the social, cultural, and environmental challenges it presents.

2 Skills

- Applying ethnographic methodologies to analyze Anthropocene-related issues.
- Critically evaluating case studies and empirical data to draw informed conclusions.
- Communicating complex ideas effectively through discussions, presentations, and written work.

3 Attitudes

- Adopting a critical and reflective approach to global and local environmental challenges.
- Demonstrating sensitivity to diverse cultural and regional perspectives, particularly in African contexts.
- Engaging constructively in debates about sustainability and justice.

**Conditions for credit contract**

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is unrestricted: the student takes into consideration the conditions mentioned in 'Starting Competences'

**Conditions for exam contract**

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

**Teaching methods**

Excursion, Lecture, Practical, Independent work

**Extra information on the teaching methods**

Students are expected to attend and participate actively in all course activities, as these provide the theoretical and methodological grounding for a collective scientific project. The course structure includes lectures, independent small-scale fieldwork, a presentation in class, and the production of a final paper.

**Study material**

Type: Slides

Name: slides of lectures

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Language : English

Type: Reader

Name: Selection of core study materials (articles, books, and video content) that will structure and guide the lectures.

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Language : English

Available on Ufora : Yes

## References

Among the readings that will be discussed in class will be:

### Core Conceptual Foundations:

- **Thomas Hylland Eriksen** (2016) *Overheating: An Anthropology of Accelerated Change*. Pluto Press.
- **Gibson, Hannah and Sita Venkateswar** (2015) *Anthropological Engagement with the Anthropocene: A Critical Review*. *Environment and Society* 6.
- **Steffen et al.** (2015) *The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration*. *The Anthropocene Review*.
- **Dipesh Chakrabarty** (2009) *The Climate of History: Four Theses*. *Critical Inquiry*.
- **Bruno Latour** (2014) *Anthropology at the Time of the Anthropocene* (Distinguished Lecture, AAA).
- **Kathryn Yusoff** (2019) *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. University of Minnesota Press.

### Ontological Turn & Nature-Culture Debates:

- **Philippe Descola** (2006) *Beyond Nature and Culture*. *Proceedings of the British Academy*.
- **Eduardo Viveiros de Castro** (2013) *Cannibal Metaphysics: Amerindian Perspectivism*.
- **Eduardo Kohn** (2013) *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. University of California Press.

### Multispecies Living & Environmental Entanglements:

- **Anna Tsing** (2015) *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press.
- **Donna Haraway** (2016) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.
- **Elizabeth Povinelli** (2016) *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*. Duke University Press.

### Climate Change and Action:

- **Susan Crate & Mark Nuttall (eds.)** (2016) *Anthropology and Climate Change: From Actions to Transformations* (2nd Edition). Routledge.
- **Susan Crate** (2011) *Climate and Culture: Anthropology in the Era of Contemporary Climate Change*. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40.

### Environmentalism, Conservation, and Commodification:

- **R. Fletcher, W. Dressler, B. Büscher** (2014) *Nature™ Inc.: The New Frontiers of Environmental Conservation*. University of Arizona Press.
- **Bram Büscher & Robert Fletcher** (2020) *The Conservation Revolution: Radical Ideas for Saving Nature Beyond the Anthropocene*.
- **Jim Igoe and Dan Brockington** (2007) *Neoliberal Conservation: A Brief Introduction*. *Conservation and Society*.

### Toxicity, Food, The Organic and Urban Ecology:

- **Nick Rahier** (2021) *Overheated Stomachs: Notes on Urban Life and Toxicity in Nakuru, Kenya*. *Africa*.
- **Nick Rahier** (2023) *Tasting 'Kienyeji': Gustatory Explorations of City Futures in Nakuru, Kenya*. *Africa*.
- **Nick Rahier & Emelien Devos** (2024): African Studies Keyword: Organic
- **P.W. Geissler & R.J. Prince** (2020) *Toxic Worldings: Introduction to Toxic Flows*. *Anthropology Today*.

### Critical and Decolonial Perspectives on the Anthropocene:

- **Heather Davis and Zoe Todd** (2017) *On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene*. *ACME*.
- **Alf Hornborg** (2017) *Dithering While the Planet Burns: Anthropologists' Approaches to the Anthropocene*. *Reviews in Anthropology*.
- **Lucas Bessire and David Bond** (2014) *Ontological Anthropology and the*

*Deferral of Critique. American Ethnologist.*

- **Andreas Malm & Alf Hornborg** (2014) *The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative. The Anthropocene Review.*

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### **Course content-related study coaching**

Weekly available during speaking hours; guidance through mail and/or Ufora

### **Assessment moments**

end-of-term and continuous assessment

### **Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period**

Peer and/or self assessment, Presentation, Assignment

### **Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period**

Peer and/or self assessment, Presentation, Assignment

### **Examination methods in case of permanent assessment**

Participation

### **Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment**

not applicable

### **Extra information on the examination methods**

Continuous assessment for this course is based on active participation in the preparation of fieldwork through in-class follow-up sessions. This includes writing an abstract and project summary of the chosen topic, providing peer review on other groups' project summaries, and presenting the fieldwork findings during a class session. Successful completion of these tasks is required to qualify for participation in the final paper.

Each group will select and map out a *feral ecology* of their choice. The way the feral ecology is mapped and presented can be creative and multimodal—using vignettes, observation logs, interviews, drawings, recordings, or other formats—but must be accompanied by a final paper of 4000–5000 words. Retakes during the second examination period require an individual paper, subject to prior approval, and are only allowed in cases of exceptional circumstances (when participation in classes is not possible due to force majeure)

### **Calculation of the examination mark**

The final grade is based 100% on the final paper.

Submission of the paper is only permitted after successfully completing the continuous assessment, which includes active participation, the completion of exercises, and presentations during the course. The continuous assessment is evaluated on a pass/fail basis, focusing exclusively on participation and engagement.

Students must fulfill all participation and assessment requirements to be eligible to complete the course successfully.

### **Facilities for Working Students**

- Students may request an exemption from educational activities requiring attendance; a substitute assignment will be determined in consultation with the lecturer.
- It is possible to reschedule the examination to a different time within the same academic year, subject to agreement with the other group members involved.
- Feedback can be provided via email, telephone, or during an appointment scheduled during or outside office hours.

For more information concerning flexible learning: contact the monitoring service of the faculty of Arts and Philosophy and <http://www.flw.ugent.be/flexibelstuden>.