

DISASTER ANTHROPOLOGY IN  
THE CRISIS OF CAPITALOCENE /  
ANTHROPOCENE:  
EARTH (WITHOUT) EARHLINGS,  
BOTH HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN

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Introduction to thematic  
section

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*"In the north it's deathly cold / in the south penguins eat people / in  
the west people eat people / and the east strives to be like the west"*

(Let 3)

Within the thematic section of the *Studia ethnologica Croatica* journal, this contribution seeks to document the climate crises affecting all of Earth's inhabitants, both human and non-human, in ten published articles. The thematic section aims to provide insight into how these changes have been reflected in local contexts, where extreme weather conditions such as heatwaves and storms are becoming increasingly intense, sometimes prompting the relocation of entire urban infrastructures (as in the case of Jakarta). Meanwhile, floods, earthquakes, viruses, and the disappearance of plant and animal species have become almost everyday occurrences. In the background of these changes, tragic stories quietly unfold, such as the disappearance of bees (cf. Widger 2021) or penguins dying due to melting ice – hence we take the above dada-punk verses by the band Let 3 as our motto. In this context, Alf Hornborg (2020) raises the question of the relationship between anthropology and the Capitalocene/Anthropocene, noting that most anthropologists are still focused on understanding local experiences rather than global processes such as climate change<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the impacts and consequences

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<sup>1</sup> The term *Capitalocene*, coined by sociologist Jason W. Moore, criticizes the dominant Anthropocene narrative which suggests that human activity as a whole is responsible for environmental degradation. Moore emphasizes that "...the Capitalocene does not stand for capitalism as an economic and social system. It is not a radical inflection of Green Arithmetic. Rather, the Capitalocene signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature - as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology." (Moore 2016: 6).

of climate change are often discursively and euphemistically incorporated into national development and modernization projects. Frances D'Souza, the founder and director (1977–1983) of the International Disaster Institute, posed a crucial ethical question regarding anthropological research in 1985: “How far have anthropologists directed their attention towards the alleviation of suffering caused by disasters and how far have they been able to persuade aid agencies of the value of such an informed approach?” (Souza 1985: 18). In 2002, in the book *Catastrophe & Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, editors Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith highlighted the importance of anthropologists' engagement in this field: “When hazards threaten and disasters occur, they both reveal and become an expression of the complex interactions of physical, biological and sociocultural systems... Within disaster research, anthropology finds an opportunity to amalgamate past and current cultural, ecological, and political-economic investigations, along with archaeological, historical, demographic, and certain biological and medical concerns.” (Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 2002: 6). Or, as Adam Koons and Jennifer Trivedi state: “Disaster Anthropology uses theoretical and methodological tools from across anthropological subfields to understand the effects of disasters” (Koons, Trivedi 2021). There is also notable activity by supranational bodies in shaping recommendations and strategic documents aimed at reducing the impacts of climate change and enhancing community resilience to crises and disasters (e.g., DCAF 2020; United Nations 2020). Global research on disaster risk reduction and security sector reform emphasizes the need for collaboration between government institutions, the military, police, civil society, academia, and international organizations to improve preventive measures and mitigate the consequences of disasters, thereby strengthening societal and community resilience (DCAF 2020). In line with this and recognizing its significance, we aim to highlight the importance of academic discussion and increased engagement, striving to document various subfields of the so-called green cultural studies in observing disasters. Anthropology undoubtedly has a place in the field of disaster research, as Susannah M. Hoffman concludes: “Let me give one last reason anthropology is essential to the study of disaster. It is, in fact, the basic reason. After much examination and development in the entire risk and disaster field, encompassing seismology, climatology, city planning, meteorology, engineering, agronomy, ecology, environmental studies, and other pertinent studies, all agree on one basic premise: disasters do not spring up like sudden happenings from some unknown sphere. All disasters are human caused in one way or another.” (Hoffman 2020: 288). In this issue, we present ethnographies and studies that point to numerous micro-levels and capillary layers, impacts, speeds, and frequencies of the Capitalocene/Anthropocene at the local level. These local experiences are broadly framed and contextualized within the texts,

addressing the urgency of both local and global action. The issue serves simultaneously as a scientific and anthropological document of disaster and as an appeal to initiate change.

This thematic section gathers ten research papers that address, actualize, analyze, and critically examine the complex issues of the Capitalocene/Anthropocene. **Sanja Potkonjak** explores the social consequences of constructing the HES Kosinj reservoir lake, viewing this infrastructural project as an example of developmental violence against a local community. She analyzes how the community responds to the threat of displacement and submergence of their land, emphasizing the discursive mobilization strategies used to counter arguments of “social benefit” and “national importance” of the project. These narratives of uncertainty and concern are interpreted as forms of resistance to the domination of the center over the periphery. **Sanja Puljar D'Alessio** investigates contemporary environmental challenges in the forests of Gorski Kotar through the lens of interrelations among various species, including humans, plants, and insects. She underscores the importance of aligning human activities with the needs of forest ecosystems, advocating for equal consideration of the ecological, economic, and symbolic values of forests to preserve their vitality. **Andrija Filipović**, within the framework of waste and disposability studies, focuses on the Vinča landfill in Serbia, interpreting it as an example of necroecology. In 2024, waste-to-energy production began at the Vinča thermal power plant. However, the incinerator's capacity is insufficient to manage the annual waste influx, leading to the rapid, unplanned filling of the new landfill site<sup>2</sup>. **Vesna Kuraica** examines the cultural dimensions of earthquakes through the perspective of Japanese mythology and folklore. Japan's rich oral and written heritage links earthquakes to mythical and animal entities. The 2011 Fukushima earthquake and tsunami, in addition to human casualties and material damage, also resulted in numerous animal victims. **Milka Car**, drawing on the principles of ecocriticism as a transdisciplinary paradigm, analyzes the poetics of disappearance in the novels of Esther Kinsky and Judith Schalansky, raising questions about the ecological vulnerability of a globalized world. **Marijeta Bradić** explores non-human/animal actors in the works of two Hungarian artists

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. Stanić, Tijana. 2024. “Proizvodnja energije iz otpada: U Vinču stiže skoro duplo više đubreta nego što može da se spali”. <https://vreme.com/mozaik/proizvodnja-energije-iz-otpada-u-vincu-stize-skoro-duplo-vise-djubreta-nego-sto-moze-da-se-spali/>

On the occasion of the European Week for Waste Reduction, the environmental NGO Zelena akcija [Green Action] organized an international hybrid conference titled “Let's Choose Reuse” on November 20th 2024, in Zagreb. With this conference, Green Action concluded its efforts, as highlighted in the media announcement, to build capacity for addressing reuse practices within the framework of the Erasmus+ project “Towards Communities of Reuse Practice.”

and collaborators: writer László Krasznahorkai and screenwriter and director Béla Tarr. Through Krasznahorkai's prose work *Animalinside* and Tarr's film *The Turin Horse*, Bradić identifies a "double dialectic" and a reevaluation of anthropocentrism in two distinct media. **Noel Putnik** examines two short stories - *Bez obale* (2007) and *Valcer pored lepog plavog Dunava* (1990), the novella *Naselje sunca* (1988) by Boban Knežević, one of the most significant contemporary Serbian science fiction writers and publishers, and the novel *Štangla* (2023) by Boško Martinović, which focuses on a local dystopia. Putnik demonstrates that the dystopian reflections of Knežević and Martinović are political in nature and deeply tied to the cultural-historical and sociopolitical context of post-war Yugoslavia and late 20th-century Serbia. **Simon Ryle** delves into the poetic world of W. S. Merwin, documenting mass extinctions and environmental devastation in the collections *The Lice* (1967) and *The Rain in the Trees* (1988), highlighting the black garden of Merwin's poetics of ecocide. **Milan Tomašević** focuses on disaster films, one of the most persistent cinematic genres, concluding that this genre merely detects phenomena and details we can relate to but never initiates changes affecting our comfort, habits, and consumption. **Neto and Lins**, using a non-Cartesian theoretical foundation, introduce the concept of liminal biology into the realm of spiritual ecology, documenting how global ecological changes cause diseases, deformities, and death among elementals.

**In Memoriam:** The golden toad is the first species proven to have fallen victim to climate change. It disappeared from its habitat in Costa Rica in the late 1980s.

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