

What can ethnography really do?

13th ethnodoks* workshop for PhDs &
International Workshop of the Vienna Doctoral School of Social Sciences

Ethnography seems to have acquired a golden method status in the social sciences, promising in-depth and holistic understandings otherwise unattainable. But outside of its discipline of origin, the scientific status of ethnography is often questioned or appears removed from its initial aspirations. Contemporary ambivalence around ethnography raises the questions of what it can or cannot *actually* do. For which research questions is it meaningful? What does it mean for knowledge production? Which critical potential does it bear? What is ethnography in the first place: an encounter, a method, a form of writing or knowledge, an identity or a theory?

Deploying ethnography has aesthetic, theoretical and pragmatic implications that our workshop aims to dissect. After all, there is not but one way of going about it. Since its birth on the Trobriand Islands with Malinowski, ethnography has endured and has been widely used and discussed, undergoing conceptual changes on its way. Over the last century, ethnography developed from being tied to local communities to being geographically unbound, following people, ideas and goods to multiple and increasingly diverse sites – a development that is also evident in the rise of digital ethnographies that have gained visibility in the ongoing pandemic. Across various fields of the social sciences it continues to spark discussions about subjectivity, researcher-participant relations and the cognitive process itself.

This year's 13th ethnodoks* doctoral workshop presents the opportunity to engage with such themes with peer researchers, alternately viewing ethnography as a mode of inquiry, as method and as theory. This workshop is self-organized by and for PhD candidates in anthropology, sociology and neighboring fields. As usual in this workshop series, the organizers propose thematic fields which can be adjusted based on the participants' interests and needs. This time we decided to make the event more inclusive by making English its working language. Based on the brief introduction above, our workshop is centered around the following questions:

- 1) What is ethnography? How can we conceptualize it?
- 2) What is ethnography's potential, what are its limits?
- 3) How is ethnography useful in the diverse research and writing tasks that make up our individual PhD projects?

The workshop will offer doctoral students spaces for exchange, networking and further developing their own research project. A panel discussion with more senior anthropologists dealing with the core questions of the workshop is planned for Friday 4th. This discussion is intended as an intellectual kick-off for our workshop. The names of the panelists will be published on <https://ethnodoks.wordpress.com/> .

Details:

When: **June 4th to 6th 2021**

Where: **Vienna**, Department for Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna

Register by sending us an email with:

- your name and affiliation,
- approximately where in the PhD you are
- a short text detailing your relation and current concerns with ethnography, possibly engaging with one or more of the thematic questions suggested above, and your interests in the workshop (max. 1 page)
- info about whether you'll need to be hosted and intend to ask for reimbursing travel costs. Please specify the estimated amount.

The first 35 applicants will be registered for the workshop and there is a waiting list for further applicants. Please send the application documents as PDF files to **ethnodoks@gmail.com** by **April 6th 2021**.

We aim to connect those of you in need of accommodation in Vienna with people able to host you, and there will be limited possibilities of reimbursing travel costs. When confirming your registration, we will ask for an attendance fee of 20 euros to be paid by April 14th. This fee facilitates planning and covers the costs of the welcome dinner on Friday evening. Please note that this event may be moved online (in this case we will pay back the attendance fee).

Organizers:

Marlene Persch – Social Anthropologist and sowi:docs fellow at the Doctoral School of Social Sciences, University of Vienna

Catherine Polishchuk – Social Anthropologist and ÖAW doc fellow at the Doctoral School of Social Sciences, University of Vienna

Milo Strauss – Social Anthropologist and University assistant at the Department for Cultural Analysis, University of Klagenfurt