



**University of
Zurich** ^{UZH}



ONLINE WORKSHOP: Doing Ethnography during a Pandemic

Date: 26th February and 1st March 2021

Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies (ISEK)

Workshop Programme

We look forward to the participation of interested researchers. Please send an email to gbanhishikha@gmail.com to confirm your participation and the link to the workshop would be forwarded to you in the 3rd week of February.

While the world has been going through a catastrophic health crisis due to COVID 19, social researchers (especially social anthropologists) have been affected enormously in multifarious ways as well. Ethnography (and in some cases participant observation), is a sine qua non to undertake research in social anthropology. Some of the researchers are facing impediments to go to the field

due to international border restrictions, others may be already in the field but are still unable to conduct their research due to government-imposed lockdowns. This is notwithstanding the fact that for a select few who still can get access to the field, the contagious nature of COVID 19 poses a huge threat to them and their interlocutors. The problem is even more intense for early career stage researchers, (e.g., the ones in their PhD), who engage in timebound research.

The challenge for many researchers now is how to do their academic research ‘work’ despite not being able to physically access the ‘field’? As the pandemic impedes into their fieldwork plans, the prospect of continued ethnographic research in the same vein seems uncertain. A growing number of medical experts and observers believe that we might never return to ‘normal’, leading many anthropologists to indicate that long-term ‘traditional’ fieldwork could become an impossibility in the coming years (Gökçe Günel, Saiba Varma, Chika Watanabe; 2020). To manage such a crisis during ‘new-normal’, anthropologists are gradually coming up with novel responses including ‘patchwork ethnography’ (Gökçe Günel, Saiba Varma, Chika Watanabe; 2020) and nuanced ‘online ethnography’ (Miller Daniel, 2020).

What is the aim?

This workshop proposes to address the challenges that the Pandemic unfurls for early career researchers in particular. It attempts to do so through the insights of expert social scientists who can throw some light and provide insights/resolutions to the impediments that researchers witness in their fieldwork. Its long-term goal is to build a cohort of the participating researchers who would continue to serve as a support group throughout their research period, even after the workshop is over.

Proposed Activities:

- a) The workshop aims to benefit through the lectures by experts who specialise in dealing with qualitative research. These lectures may shed light into: How to build rapport in the pandemic setting? How to engage in nuanced yet ethical research in online settings? How to ‘participate’ and ‘observe’ despite being physically absent from the lived realities of the field?
- b) Finding the way out: what are the alternative methods available to the researcher?
- c) How can the researcher plan to operationalise the available alternatives?
- d) If there a change of focus required (to a limited or large degree), how can the researcher visualise the change?

Workshop schedule **[Swiss time]**

26th February 2021

- a) 10 - 10.35 am: Introductions
- b) 10.35 - 10.45 am: Welcome Note by **Johannes Quack**, Professor, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Zurich.
- c) 10.45 - 11 am: Break
- d) 11 am -12 pm: Talk by **Edward Simpson**, Professor and Head of Social Anthropology, Director of the SOAS South Asia Institute.
- e) 12.15 - 1 pm: Break

- f) 1.15 - 2.45 pm: Discussion Session with **Andreas Streinzer**, Research Associate, University of St Gallen.
- g) 2.45 - 3pm: Break
- h) 3- 4 pm: Talk by **Ilmari Käihkö**, Associate Professor, Department of Security, Strategy and Leadership, Swedish Defence Academy.

1st March, 2021

- a) 10 - 11 am: Talk by **Andrew Dawson**, Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Melbourne.
- i) 11 - 12 am: Talk by **Simone Dennis**, Professor and Head of Social Anthropology, Australian National University.
- b) 12.15 - 1 pm: Break
- c) 1 - 2.15 pm: Workshop Activities in break out rooms.
- d) 2.15 - 2.30 pm: Break
- e) 2.30 - 3.30 pm: Talk by **Maitrayee Chaudhuri**, Professor, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

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[<https://www.isek.uzh.ch/en/anthropology/Staff/staff/G/banhishikhaghosh.html>]