

Funded PhD Fellowship on Maize-Human Relatedness in Mexico
Université libre de Bruxelles and École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales

Context

Applications are open for a fully funded PhD position in social anthropology joint-supervised between the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris (EHESS). The fellowship is part of the project “Flourishing Seeds. Value Creation and Relatedness in AgroBiodiversity Hotspots,” funded by the ERC Starting Grant SeedsValues (950220).

Project abstract:

We still lack fundamental knowledge to identify the manifold values of agricultural plants. While the value of crop varieties is usually assessed in economic terms, we need to also consider the ethical engagements that incentivise farmers to perpetuate biodiverse agriculture. This will be achieved by examining seed-human relatedness - both affective and instrumental - in three agrobiodiversity hotspots: potato cultivation in Peru, maize in Mexico and rice in Laos. Prominent on global markets, also distinguished by international institutions as highly promising to reach “global food security” on our damaged planet, these crops are dear to the Indigenous people who cultivate and eat them daily. The SeedsValues project draws on ethnographic enquiries at the crossroads of interspecies studies, economic anthropology, anthropology of ethics, anthropology of technique and anthropology of life, to shed new lights on the process of value creation in agricultural activities. We contend that agriculture offers a unique ethnographic object to overcome the current split between the economic and the ethical studies on value, thereby contributing to the elaboration of a general anthropology of value still lacking to date.

Under the supervision of Olivia Angé (SeedsValues PI at Laboratoire d’Anthropologie des Mondes Contemporains - LAMC) and Perig Pitrou (CNRS, Head of the team Anthropology of Life at Laboratoire d’Anthropologie Sociale - LAS), the successful candidate will carry out a long-term ethnography into maize-human relatedness in a highland agricultural community of Mexico (in the state of Oaxaca or Chiapas). (S)he will be working in collaboration with the SeedsValues team members; including a comparative tandem with a postdoctoral fellow who will study intensive maize cultivation in the lowlands of the same region.

Conditions

The fellowship covers a period of 4 years on a full-time basis, starting on the 1st of October 2021. Initial monthly salary is 2049€ approx. net. The candidate will affiliate her-/himself with the Doctoral Programme in social anthropology at both the ULB (LAMC - Prosperity and Livelihoods cluster) and EHESS (LAS – Anthropology of Life team). (S)he should be prepared to settle in Belgium, spend research stays in Paris, and conduct extensive fieldwork in Mexico.

Applicants should hold an excellent MA in anthropology, sociology, geography, or other related disciplines (agronomy is also appreciated if strong interest in social sciences is manifest). Fieldwork experience involving the use of ethnographic methodologies to study related topics or geographic area is appreciated. Proficiency in English or French is required, basic knowledge in Spanish is an asset (the cultivators’ language is to be learned during fieldwork). Excellent writing capacities are necessary.

Application

Application (in French or English) includes the following documents:

- A curriculum vitae;
- A sample of academic work (preferably a pdf of the MA thesis, if available);
- Copies of all academic degrees acquired (if the MA is in progress, please provide a letter from the thesis supervisor confirming completion by September 2021);
- A cover letter (not exceeding 3 pages) explaining interest in the project, any former experience or expertise pertinent to the project, and preliminary research intentions;
- The name, institution and email of two academics who may be contacted for letters of recommendation.

These documents should be sent electronically to Olivia Angé (Olivia.Ange@ulb.be) and Perig Pitrou (perig.pitrou@college-de-france.fr) by the 20th of April 2021. For further information, you are welcome to contact us at these same addresses.