

# The Ethnography Circle

Where is the Theory in my Data?

1st Meeting Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> November

## Complexity, Collaboration, and Multi-site Ethnography with Prof. Alice Mah



This seminar addresses the challenges and possibilities of collaborative and multi-site research for scaling up ethnographic research to address complex systemic issues, while also attending to the importance of local and regional contexts. It offers insights from conducting research in different sites in the US, China, and Europe for a large research project on environmental justice and the global petrochemical industry, funded by the European Research Council. Each researcher in this project has examined different topics, ranging from in-depth case studies of petrochemical “fenceline” communities in the US, China, and Europe, to mapping corporate networks, discourses, emissions, and environmental health data. One of the key challenges throughout the project has been the question of how the different parts can fit together, conceptually as well as methodologically, to address wider questions. Gradually, the problem of complex systems emerged as a core theme for looking at the global petrochemical industry as a whole, which has thousands of sites, vast value and supply chains, and multiple forms of expertise. The problem of complex systems is methodological, concerning both the nature of the object of study and the question of how to study this object. The problem is also political, concerning the challenge of how to critically intervene.



Bio: Alice Mah is Professor of Sociology and Principal Investigator of the European Research Council-funded project “Toxic Expertise: Environmental Justice and the Global Petrochemical Industry” (2015-2020). She is the author of *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline* (2012); *Port Cities and Global Legacies: Urban Identity, Waterfront Work, and Radicalism* (2014); and the forthcoming book (with Thom Davies) *Toxic Truths: Environmental Justice and Citizen Science in a Post-Truth Age*. She has conducted comparative, mixed-method sociological research in the UK, France, Belgium, Russia, China, the US, and Canada, and is currently working on a new book on the global petrochemical industry.

Readings: Mah, A. and X. Wang. 2019. “Accumulated Injuries of Environmental Injustice: Living and Working with Petrochemical Pollution in Nanjing, China.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* DOI: 10.1080/24694452.2019.1574551.

Davies, T. 2018. “Toxic space and time: Slow violence, necropolitics, and petrochemical pollution.” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 108 (6):1537–53. DOI: 10.1080/24694452.2018.1470924.

**Seminar will be conducted between 3-4:30 pm at Wolfson Research Exchange, Uni of Warwick, Library, CV4 7AL**

**For information and to register please contact: [ethnography@wbs.ac.uk](mailto:ethnography@wbs.ac.uk)**

Admission is  
free and open  
to students  
from other  
institutions

**PPI@Warwick**

Process Practice Institution

Research Programme