

Call for PhD Applications

Trading Truths: Missions, Mediations, and Extractions in the South Caucasus (TRASUS)

This project, funded by the European Research Council, invites applications for 3 PhD positions based in the Anthropology department at the LSE, two of which will cover a Studentship and Home UK Fees, and one will cover a Studentship and Overseas Fees. Applicants should apply to the MRes/PhD Programme in Anthropology by 15 January 2026, the details for which can be found here: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/study-at-lse/graduate/mresphd-anthropology>

As part of their application, they will need to design a research proposal which clearly outlines the case study – their PhD research project – that they envision undertaking as part of the larger TRASUS project. Research proposals will be evaluated based on their thematic relevance, their analytical and theoretical potential, their proposed methodology, and their feasibility, as fitting within the TRASUS framework.

Interested candidates are encouraged to contact the Principal Investigator, professor Mathijs Pelkmans (m.e.pelkmans@lse.ac.uk) to receive further information. A short description of the project can be found below.

Summary of TRASUS

TRASUS investigates how religious and political truths move across boundaries. The objectives are to identify the modalities of how truths travel, to propel incisive understandings of how truth-values are attached to collective ideas, and how the resulting truths configure and reconfigure social worlds. Such an in-depth study that theorizes the workings of truth is of paramount importance in an age of misinformation and fake news, in which the transmission of truth is a crucial weapon of power. The project will examine the ‘trade of truths’ along three modalities of transmission (which can intersect and overlap): a missionary modality involving the projection of truth onto those ‘in need’; a diplomatic modality involving the tactful mediation and management of knowledge; and an extractive modality geared towards excavating hidden truths. These modalities will be tested in the South Caucasus, a region onto which expansionist projects have long projected their civilizing truths, and where sociopolitical fragmentation confounds the exchange of knowledge. By carrying out six case studies, the project will examine how these modalities are mobilized in missionary endeavors aimed at converting others, in the projection of nationalist truths onto ethnically cleansed areas, in efforts to mediate between opposing ethnic and religious groups, and in top-down practices of surveillance and bottom-up efforts of critique. Based on long-term, historically informed ethnographic field research, the project will analyze how old and new technologies are mobilized in knowledge encounters, follow relevant ‘truth merchants’, and trace the trajectories of specific truths claims. In doing so, TRASUS will reveal the shifting interlocking of epistemic objects, human engagements with them, and the situations in which they are entangled. This will offer comprehensive and dynamic understandings of how truth is produced; and it will produce new insight into the biases, gaps, and limitations.

Your tasks

- PhD students will design and carry out an original doctoral project with 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the South Caucasus, leading to a PhD thesis.
- PhD students will contribute to the broader research project, led by Prof. Mathijs Pelkmans, including a series of workshops and several collaborative writing projects.
- PhD students will be part of the MRes/PhD Anthropology programme at the LSE and will be supervised by Prof. Pelkmans and one other faculty member.

How to apply?

- Submit your application through LSE's online application system, the instructions for which can be found here: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/study-at-lse/Graduate/Prospective-students/How-to-Apply>
- Make sure to mention in your cover letter that you are applying for inclusion in the TRASUS project.
- As mentioned, you are encouraged to contact Prof. Pelkmans by email, to receive a more detailed outline of the larger project, and possibly to discuss the feasibility and suitability of your research ideas.
- The deadline for applications is 15 January 2026.