



Research and Ideological (Dis)Engagement

Guest Editors:

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The aim of this thematic issue is to interrogate the relation between academic research and ideological engagement, both historically and in the present.

The war waged on Ukraine triggered discussions concerning ideological convictions and how they inform understandings of such issues as NATO enlargement, cooperation with Russian academics, and the obligation to respond to unprovoked violence. These discussions have marked deep disagreements within our discipline that reveal diverse convictions underlying research agendas that measure, respond, or encourage (non)action. What are the implications of these newly exposed divisions? How will we engage in discussions if Russian scholars are unwilling to mention “war” or invoke human rights fearing criminal persecution? We welcome contributions that can help us understand debates about the present war in Ukraine and the situation in Central/Eastern Europe more generally. However, our pages are open to all researchers and various topics.

We understand ideology broadly, as a network of ideas - not necessarily logically coherent although often considered as such by its bearers - that is applied beyond epistemological purposes. Ideologies, such as communism or liberalism, have been engaged to lead to social change or at least indicate long-term, even if utopian, goals. Political ideologies articulate how the world should be; often however ideology is surprisingly at variance with the practical actions of its bearers.

In public spaces ideologies materialize in slogans, newspaper headlines, and street names. They may be invisible, hidden in everyday practices, words, and choices. They shape the image of the world and are crafted to influence its future. At the same time, ideological engagement is often attributed to others, while less visible in our own work. As researchers, we are trained to see our positionality, to be reflexive of our own presumptions, advantages, and goals. In practice, however, especially when confronted with drastically divergent ideological positions, we tend to see ‘them’ as entangled in ‘ideology,’ and in some cases as strange, irrational, or repugnant.

How have anthropologists historically engaged with dominant political ideologies that contextualized their research, and what form might ideological engagement take in the future? In the past, anthropologists actively engaged in public debates, often as critics of the dominant political and social ideologies of their times. Lewis Henry Morgan, James Frazer, and Edward Burnett Tylor contributed to public debates on race and evolution. Bronisław Malinowski opposed violence and war, but collaborated with colonial governments. Franz Boas actively protested racism. Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead showed the public anthropology’s fresh approach to

human diversity and gender, and yet were criticized for their involvement in colonial state administrations. In Central Europe, Jan Stanisław Bystróż criticized national megalomania and Józef Obrębski reflected on Polish colonialism in Polesie.

Not only critics of dominant ideologies and colonial hegemonies of their time, anthropologists, ethnologists, and ethnographers did research under national socialist and communist regimes. They also worked for colonial governments and served state apparatuses during the Cold War. Some supported those ideological goals and built academic careers. Others actively challenged dominant discourses driven by alternative ideological convictions. Finally, others tried to retain 'scientific objectivity' by variously engaging or disengaging from the dominant political and ideological trends.

Some anthropologists say political conviction should be a defining feature of anthropological work (Scheper-Hughes 1995), while others experience misunderstanding and even ostracism among their colleagues if they engage specific topics (Harding 1991; Pasięka 2019). Moreover, some research agendas have important political implications: is a critique of the social conditions of knowledge production a factor contributing to difficulties distinguishing fact from political fiction? By extension, does anthropology face challenges defending its scientific status against attacks by right wing activists that social science departments are mere purveyors of ideology?

This special issue provides a platform for reflection on the entanglement, opposition, and (mutual) support between anthropological and other social science research vis-à-vis dominant or counter-hegemonic political and social ideologies. Rather than normative reflections on how the relationship between ideology and research should work, we encourage analyses that illuminate how in practice, in real life situations, anthropologists and others position their research vis-a-vis dominant political and social ideologies, and how this is received by the academic community, political actors, and the general public. We encourage articles that historically or comparatively consider research interests/agendas in changing political and social contexts; theoretical and reflective articles on anthropological debates; ethnographies of encounters with state regimes; and working among groups that clearly engage ideological positions.

We hope this collection will help answer the following questions:

1. How have anthropologists over time perceived the role of our discipline vis-à-vis political and social ideologies, such as liberalism, communism, nationalism, Marxism, colonialism, decolonization, and the like?
2. Which methodological and theoretical discussions resulted from intertwining the academy with the public sphere and its political ideologies, and how have anthropologists navigated via their research and writing to challenge these perspectives?
3. How have anthropologists studied difficult topics, such as war and violence, the radical right, and authoritarianism, when cultural relativism had to be suppressed?
4. Which ideological positions do anthropologists engage when they side with marginalized populations?
5. How has anthropology contributed to understanding the interfaces that link ideology, culture, opinion, and fact?

Information for Contributors:

Ethnologia Polona is a peer-reviewed English-language journal focused on cultural/social anthropology and ethnology, but open to other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. It is published by the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

The journal's aim and scope are to serve as a platform for discussion concerning critical issues emerging in anthropology/ethnology in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond. The journal stays close to the empirical, while remaining attentive to current theoretical debates in the humanities and social sciences.

Expressions of interest (300-word abstracts) should be sent by email to ethnologia.polona@iaepan.edu.pl before 06.06.2022.

Full articles (6000 to 7000 words) should be submitted through the *Ethnologia Polona* [submission system](#). See [Author's Guidelines](#). The deadline for submission of full articles is **31.01.2023**. The issue will be published in 2023. For informal inquiries and questions concerning potential contributions please contact us at [**ethnologia.polona@iaepan.edu.pl**](mailto:ethnologia.polona@iaepan.edu.pl).