Ethnopolitics

Studies of Ethnicity and Race in Poland, Politics, and the International Circulation of Knowledge, 1918–1958

My investigation grows out of a question: Is there a prehistory of American Area Studies of East Central Europe in the region itself? If so, what was the rationale behind the development of these "indigenous" regional studies? To answer these questions, I propose to focus on the intersection of politics and science. In particular, I will investigate the development of expertise in anthropology in interwar Poland (1918–1939) and related social scientific endeavors conducted in the United States from the interwar period up to the early Cold War. In Poland, the rapid growth of modern expertise in anthropology (that is ethnology, ethnosociology, and racial anthropology) was a result of the state's seemingly internal concern for control over the multiethnic society it governed and the increasing desire to manage processes of social transformation toward a "civilization of the future". It also occurred against the backdrop of the post-WWI geopolitical situation, specifically the emergence of new political powers – the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, both aggressively intervening in science and academia and using expertise for modern authoritarian political purposes.

The studies of ethnicity and race in interwar East Central Europe developed in a close relationship to the German-speaking scholarship, French tradition, and the Anglosphere, as well as often unacknowledged influence of the Soviet project. On the basis of an exhaustive use of archival sources, I will argue that these studies are intimately interconnected with early American Area Studies. My monograph is a first broader analysis of the impact of the East Central European scholarship on the development of social scientific studies in the United States. It also provides a first account of the engagement of anthropologists, ethnologists, and sociologists in state policies and modernization of the society of the Second Polish Republic.