



ICONS IN CRISIS: EXPLORING GLOBAL ICONOCLASTIC POLITICS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Researchers

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Additional Information

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Description

This research project addresses iconoclasm – the deliberate destruction of images and visual signs – as a transhistorical and transversal cultural phenomenon, carried out by individuals, grassroots movements, and institutions of power across the globe. Whereas previous historical research established structural similarities between instances of religious and political iconoclasm, ICONS provides the first socio-anthropological analysis of contemporary iconoclasm as a form of political expression in modern liberal democracies.

Why do acts of iconoclasm continue to be socially and politically meaningful for diverse actors across different contexts? Perceiving the spectacular destruction of monuments – from those associated with the end of the Soviet era in Eastern Europe to those representing racist and colonial power in Western societies – as a visual and behavioural manifestation of radical social transformations, the project explores this question through three interconnected hypotheses: iconoclasm as a form of immediate group-building oriented toward the present (1), as a form of historical truth-seeking oriented toward the past (2), and as a form of performative justice-making for underrepresented communities and causes, oriented toward the future (3).

ICONS sets out to break new ground in anthropological research by crafting a cross-cultural analytical framework that transcends regional and politico-historical divisions. Methodologically, ICONS is grounded in comparative ethnography. Through three extended case studies situated in post-colonial (DRC-Belgium), post-socialist (Ukraine), and liberal contexts (USA), enhances anthropological interpretations of contemporary societies, and brings forms of contemporary iconoclasm to the forefront of socio-anthropological research.

The project is designed as a collaborative ethnographic investigation by three independent scholars, each responsible for a subproject, under general supervision by the PI, focusing on the post-socialist case.

