

Spring 2009
Research Seminar (3-5 units)
Wednesday, 5:15-8:05 pm, bldg: 240-101

Anthro 337A - FrenGen 367



Violence, the Sacred and Rights of the Dead

This course will provide students with an overview of current concepts, theories and approaches for studying relations between violence, the sacred and the rights of the dead as a way of conceiving what remains of the sacred in political life today. The „politics of dead bodies“ and the „reburial issue“ have become key issues in the humanities during the past few decades and link scholars from various disciplines (history, archaeology, anthropology, law, forensic sciences, art). Questions of whether it is justifiable to disinter human remains and examine them for scientific purposes have caused intense controversies, as has the problem of putting the dead to political use. Tensions arise between the expectations of the living and the rights of the dead, for whom, as it is often assumed, the body no longer matters. Even speaking of the personality of the dead body in the context of its inviolability (law) and memory (doing honor to the dead person) involves the ubiquitous „politics of heritage.“ In this context, the contemporary examples of reburial practices of indigenous people, exhumation of disappeared bodies in Latin America, exhibitions of human remains, representation of dead bodies in art will be analyzed. In the course we will discuss notions of posthumous dignity, posthumous privacy, posthumous reputation, posthumous wrongs, posthumous punishment, and posthumous reparation. Rene Girard's theory of the relationship between violence and the sacred will serve as the base for theorizing the problem.

First meeting: Wednesday, April 1st, 5:15 pm, bldg 240-101

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