Anthropology of Memory, Trauma and Commemoration

Dr. Carol Kidron

4 weekly hours per semester.

Course Description:

The commemoration of the past plays a central role in the personal-private and public-collective work of culture. Traumatic memory has especially attracted attention in academic discourse as well as in everyday popular culture and mental health settings. Despite this growing interest, there have been few anthropological and ethnographic studies undertaken to explore the processes and practices of personal and collective trauma related memory work. In order to explore basic themes relating to the anthropology of memory, traumatic memory and commemoration, the course will examine the following key concepts: representation, history, genocidal trauma, personal and collective memory, testimony and witnessing, and survivorhood.

Holocaust memory and commemoration will be explored as a contemporary case study of Israeli trauma related memory work. The course will critically evaluate a variety of forms of Holocaust testimony, representation and commemoration and Holocaust trauma related therapy all of which sustain the presence of the past in everyday Israeli life. Cultural practices and sites of memory will be explored including: Holocaust memory in the private sphere, monumental Holocaust commemorative sites and ceremonies, cinematic representations of traumatic memory, and the politics of genocide in Israel. Expanding upon the case study of Holocaust memory, class discussion and student presentations will also examine war-related and terror-related traumatic memory work, bereavement and the politics of memory. The course will also expand upon the Holocaust case study by examining Holocaust memory and commemoration by comparatively exploring other case studies of global mass violence, trauma, and genocidal commemoration.

Course Requirements:

In an attempt to define the parameters of an Anthropology of Memory, Trauma and Commemoration students will be asked to go out into the field of Israeli culture in order to seek out sites of memory and trauma related identities where the personal and/or collective traumatic past is made present and commemorated. Students will be asked to undertake interviews and/or participant observation at sites of memory and to write an empirical research paper (20-25 pages) that presents qualitative data and a sociological and or anthropological analysis unpacking the processes and practices of memory work. Your analysis must utilize relevant academic literature appearing in the reading list below and of course in the academic literature in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Students will be asked to submit a 1-2 page proposal outlining their research topic, research site, tentative research questions and reading list (15 references). You may begin working on...
your research paper only after you receive my authorization of the proposal. Submission date for the proposal and final paper will be determined during the semester.

In addition all students will be requested to select an article or book chapter on a topic of interest from the reading list of recommended readings and present a 10-15 minutes talk in class summarizing and analyzing the research in question. Presentations may be made jointly by 2 students.

Finally, you will be asked to submit 5 reading reports, one page long each, including a brief summary of the reading and a quote of your choice with an analysis of the quote. Reports must cover required readings and be submitted prior to the lecture in which the topic will be discussed.

Attendance is mandatory.

Grade breakdown: 80% - Empirical research paper, 10% Class presentation, 10% reading reports.

**Lecture Topics and Reading List:**

**Meeting 1:**

Introduction: Diverse Representations of the Traumatic Pasts in Everyday Life

- What is commemoration of the past? How for example is the Holocaust made present in everyday life? Can the topic of Genocide and Trauma be deconstructed despite its sanctity, and unspeakability?
- What is Anthropology’s contribution to an understanding of Holocaust and Genocide and its aftermath? How might one create an Anthropology of the Holocaust and Genocide and what would its contribution be?

**Meeting 2:**

In search of Authentic Representation/Commemoration of the Past:

History vs. Memory

- History – Positivist Legacy and the Limits of Holocaust Representation. Are all forms of presence legitimate? Are all forms of history authentic?
- Memory – Witnessing, Authenticity, Subjectivity, Authentic Reenactment vs. Distortion, Personal Lived Memory vs. Collectively constructed memory.
- The Transformation of Personal memory into Collective memory – history and historicity.
- History and the Representation of the Holocaust and Genocide

Required Reading:
Meeting 3:

Transformation of Personal Memory into Collective Memory

Required Reading:


OR in Hebrew


Pp. 68-87


Film: Night and Fog

Meeting 4:

Saving Images of the Holocaust Past:
Photographs, images, documentary footage – the iconic presence of the past

:Required Reading


Meeting 5:

- Memory as Testimony

  - First Hand Witnessing: Survivorship, Authentic Witnessing, Testimony as Narrative
Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


Film: Truth and Lies

Meeting 6:

Memory as Testimony – Second Hand Witnessing

- Transmitted Traumatic Legacies and the constitution of Witnesses once removed, second and third generation survivors, and vicarious witnessing
- Private-familial memory, mementos from the past and person-object interaction

:Required Reading


Recommended Reading

Film: Because of that War

Meeting 7:

Harnassing Memory: The Presence of the Holocaust as National, Political or Personal Symbolic Capital

1. Constructing Collective Memory
   - Nationalization and the Enlistment of Personal Memory and the Construction of Collective Memory, Ideological Framing of Collective Memory. Holocaust as National Mythic Narrative and Civil Religion
   - Memory as Symbolic Capital – the Politics of Memory

Required Reading:


Meeting 8:

1. 2.Commemorative Rituals, Museums, Monuments, and Pilgrimages to the Past

- Commemorative Rituals – Reenactment in the Service of the State
- Museums and Monuments – Institutionalizing and Grounding the Past in Space and Time
- Pilgrimages and Youth Trips - Reenacting Jewish/Israeli Key Scenarios

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:


**Meeting 9:**

Commemorative Rituals continued

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


Film: Yizkor: Slaves to Memory

**Meeting 10:**

- Rewriting Memory or Representing the Presence of Lost Memory

- **Narratives, Scenarios, and Changing Images – Holocaust Representation as a Prism of Changes in Israeli Society**
- From Silence and Univocal Nationalism to Empathy and Multivocality – form "Shoa and Redemption/Heroism, and Sheep to the Slaughter to the "Heroism of Perseverence"

Required Reading:


Meeting 11:

Revisionist Presence: Resisting and Challenging the Myth

- The Emergence of Personal Voice
- Alternative Holocaust Ceremonies
- Shoah Business: Banalization of the Holocaust
- Holocaust Humor: Bad Taste or Resisting the limits of Representation
- Holocaust as Metaphor for Human Suffering – Universalizing the Holocaust

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


Meeting 12:
The Limits of Representation Revisited: Summary of the Course

- Loosing the Monopoly on Suffering and Victimhood – The concept of Genocide, Politics of Victimhood and Humanitarian Intervention
- Limited Presence or the Limits of Construction
- Temporality or the Framers as Limiting Presence

Required Reading:


Appendix
Case Studies of Genocide and Commemoration of Traumatic Pasts – for class presentation and/or empirical papers:

- Memory and commemoration of Wars in Israel
- Bereavement in Israel
- Rabin Assassination
- Palestinian private and public memory and emergent forms of commemoration
- Gypsy Genocide
- Armenian Genocide
- Hiroshima and Nagasaki as Contested Memory
- Cambodia – Auto Genocide
- Remembering and Forgetting in Argentina
- Vietnam – from Forgetting to Multi-vocal Memory
- Globalization of Trauma: Humanitarian Global Intervention and the constitution of Truth Tribunals

Reading List for Class presentations and Empirical papers:

http://www.jstor.org/stable/645789


(Genocide and Western Intervention in the Balkans)

(Genocide in Sierra Leone)


Vinitsky Seroussi, V. 2001 Commemorating a Difficult Past: The Yitzhak Rabin Memorial Day in Israeli Schools. Qualitative Sociology 24: 245-268
http://www.springerlink.com/content/w701544653780507/
