

International Conference

Biohistorical Anthropology: DNA and Bones in Cultures of Remembrance

Location: Universität Zürich, Karl Schmid-Str. 4 (KO2-F-152)

Host: Marianne Sommer (SNSF-Professorship for the History of Science and Science Studies, University of Zurich)
Gesine Krüger (Professor for Modern History and Non-European History, University of Zurich)

The conference addresses the 'genomic revolution' in anthropology and history, and the new meanings human remains have acquired in diverse cultures of remembrance. The scientific projects concerned with the reconstruction of kinship and history on the basis of genetic technologies and DNA-sequences affect human populations globally. While such research may mean disempowerment of research subjects, genetic knowledge about group history and identity has also become part of political movements for recognition. Some groups even actively search the service of population genetics – a service that has on the individual level been commercialized in genetic ancestry tracing companies.

Like DNA, bones serve as 'carriers of history' in locally and historically specific cultures of remembrance. Human bones may be interpreted as the remains of national and/or ethnic founders and ancestors.

Beginning in the 1980s, 'on the eve of globalization', the so-called reburial issue was in full swing and concerned officials in museums and other institutions in the US, Australia, and beyond. Neo-indigenous organizations, first-nation movements, and subaltern or marginalized groups around the globe are reclaiming ancestral bones to found a historical narrative and to claim rights of belonging. This brings to the fore the fact that the meaning of bones – as well as of DNA – is polyvalent in both western and non-western cultures; they are "things" with "social lives".

Different disciplinary approaches and historical and geographical foci are brought together with the aim to gain insights into the complexities through which 'DNA' and bones become carriers of historical memory.

Friday, October 8, 2010

10 Uhr

Introduction by Marianne Sommer and Gesine Krüger

11 Uhr

Yulia Egorova (Lecturer, Dept. of Anthropology, Durham University)

„On DNA, Authenticity and Historical Memory“

12 Uhr

Lunch break

13.30 Uhr

Alondra Nelson (Associate Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Columbia University)

„Ground Work: Foundations of African Ancestry and the Social Life of DNA“

14.30 Uhr

Gísli Pálsson (Professor and Chair of the Dept. of Anthropology, University of Iceland)

„Make no Bones about it: Human Variation in Iceland, Scandinavia, and the Arctic“

15.30 Uhr

Coffee break

16.00 Uhr

David Hesse (PhD student, Scottish Centre for Diaspora Studies, University of Edinburgh)

„To Join a Clan: Expressing Scottish Ancestry and Affinity“

Saturday, October 9, 2010

10 Uhr

Joost Fontein (Lecturer, Dept. of Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh)

„Between Tortured Bodies and Resurfacing Bones: The Politics of the Dead in Zimbabwe“

11 Uhr

Ciraj Rassool (Associate Professor, Dept. of History, University of the Western Cape)

„Bone Memory: Human Remains, Heritage and Transitional Justice in South Africa“

12 Uhr

Lunch break

13.30 Uhr

Oliver Hochadel (Centre d'Estudis d'Història de la Ciència, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

„The Making of a Magic Mountain: The Fossils of Atapuerca and the New Beginning of Spanish History“

14.30 Uhr

General discussion

Contact & application: nicolodi@fsw.uzh.ch

Further information: www.phylogenetic-memory.uzh.ch/conference2010.html