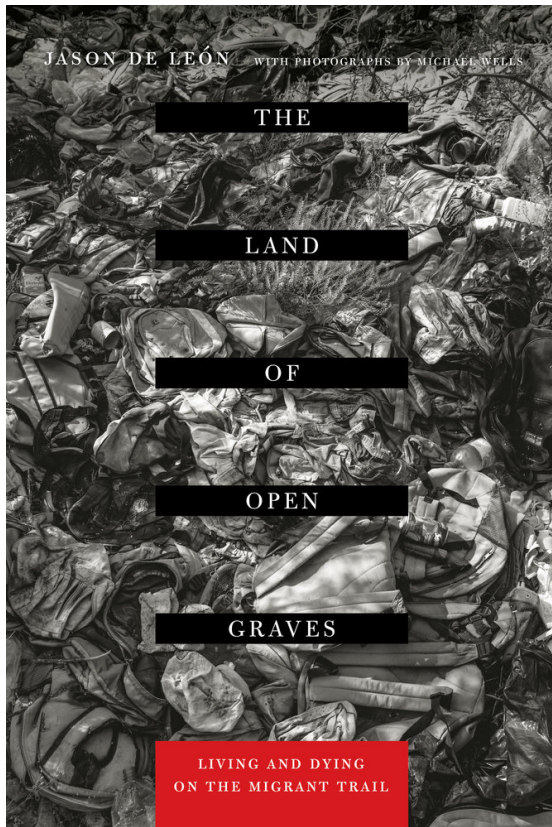


FALL 2015 COLLOQUIA SERIES

Date: Wednesday, October 21

Time: 3:15 – 5PM

Location: Social Sciences 1, room 261



Dr. Jason De León

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The Land of Open Graves: Necroviolence and the Politics of Migrant Death in the Arizona Desert

Since the mid-1990s', the U.S. federal government has relied on a border enforcement strategy known as "Prevention Through Deterrence." Using various security infrastructure and techniques of surveillance, this strategy funnels undocumented migrants towards remote and rugged terrain such as the Sonoran Desert of Arizona with the hope that mountains ranges, extreme temperatures, and other "natural" obstacles will deter people from unauthorized entry. Hundreds of people perish annually while undertaking this dangerous activity. Since 2009, the Undocumented Migration Project has used a combination of forensic, archaeological, and ethnographic approaches to understand the various forms of violence that characterize the social process of clandestine migration. In this presentation I focus on what happens to the bodies of migrants who die in the desert. Drawing on the archaeological concept of taphonomy (i.e., the various post-mortem processes that impact biological remains), I argue that the way that bodies decompose in this environment is a form of hidden political violence that has deep ideological roots. Using ethnographic data from New York and Ecuador, I focus on the families of people who have lost loved ones in desert and demonstrate how the post-mortem destruction of migrant corpses creates devastating forms of long-lasting trauma.