



## Key Concepts of the Humanities and Social Sciences

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The IASH is a research institute of the Philosophical-Historical Faculty of the University of Bern. It offers PhD students support and professional training and envisions an international orientation of academic research.

**Wednesday, 23 May 2012, 18:15 to 19:45**  
**Unitobler, University of Bern, Lerchenweg 36**  
**Room F021**

# Ritual Violence: Blood Libels and Ritual Misrepresentation

Prof. Dr. Kathryn McClymond, Georgia State University

Ritual has long been associated with violence, usually in the form of sacrifice or bodily disfigurement. However, violence also occurs in representations of ritual, particularly misrepresentations by outside parties. McClymond will examine traditional discussions of ritual violence, and then present an under-represented form of ritual violence, ritual misrepresentation. She will argue that blood libels (misrepresentations that Jews used the blood of innocent victims in their religious rituals) constitute a particularly powerful and malicious form of ritual violence. In this form, ritual is a tool used to characterize a minority group as morally inferior and dangerous. Such misrepresentation involves slippage between actual and purported ritual activity, forcing the misrepresented party on the defensive. Most interestingly, ritual misrepresentation also reveals a great deal about the dominant religious/cultural community, highlighting its own anxieties about the role of the body in constituting religious identity.

**Kathryn McClymond** is Professor and Chair in the Department of Religious Studies at Georgia State University. She is a comparative historian of religion, with a special emphasis on Vedic and Mishnaic ritual. Her first book, *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (2009, Georgia Author of the Year Award 2009), argued against prevailing conceptions of sacrifice as a violent, destructive activity. She is currently working on *Ritual Gone Wrong: Case Studies in Ritual Disruption* (Oxford University Press), which examines ritual mistakes, sabotage, and disruption and their significance for ritual theory. McClymond is a recipient of the Distinguished Honors Professor Award (2002) and the Outstanding Teaching Award (2006) in the College of Arts and Sciences at Georgia State University. She is a steering committee member of the American Academy of Religion Comparative Studies in Religion Group.

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