



## > Organisation

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## > Place and Time

Thursday, January 14<sup>th</sup>  
 Schlossplatz 2, Senatssaal

Friday, January 15<sup>th</sup> and Saturday, January 16<sup>th</sup>  
 Johannisstraße 1-4, room: J119 (former room: J122)

An event hosted by the cluster of excellence “**Religion and Politics in Modern and Pre-Modern Cultures**” of WWU Münster. The research association is formed by over 150 academics from 20 humanistic and socio-scientific disciplines and from eleven countries. They investigate the complex relationship of religion and politics from Antiquity to the present and from Latin America and Europe to the Arab and the Asian World. It is nationally the largest research association of its kind and of the 37 clusters of excellence in Germany, it is the only one to deal with religions. The federal government and the federal states fund the project in the Excellence Initiative context with 37 million Euros until 2012.

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picture credits: Dr. Barbara Meier



Workshop of the Cluster of Excellence „Religion and Politics“

# > Spirits in Politics: Violence and Social Healing in African Societies

| 14. to 16.01.2010





Diviner and patient (Gulu – Uganda)

an active role in conflicts, warfare as well as reconciliation. Divination, possession and other ritual techniques reflect how people regain control over political processes that determine their lives. Instead of seeking causal explanations from a culturally distant point of view the participants to this workshop shall discuss and compare the logic behind these phenomena.



## > Spirits in Politics

While the humanities and social sciences view the ‘return of the Gods’ as recent social phenomenon in western societies, the recognition of an enduring prevalence of religion in the public sphere has been central in the anthropological discipline. The relation between transcendental agents such as spirits, ghosts and ancestors and public and political domains has effects on societies the world over. The workshop aims at taking a close-up look at the role of spirits in socio-political spheres in African societies. Do spirits enter the scene after politics have failed as a relapse into an allegedly pre-modern condition (as the concept of failed states suggests)? Or do they precede political processes as classic models of modernization try to establish? Social Anthropologists and other scholars committed to the understanding of current social processes in African societies ascertain that spirits feature persistently in political, economic and social action; either as subtle subtext or in decidedly apparent ways. Spirits’ involvement is not restricted to divination ceremonies or to ‘grass root’ local environments but is noted to determine interactions at various societal levels including government politics. Apparently, modernity and secularization as seemingly inseparable couple does not sit well with non-western concepts of how societies make sense of their world.

The organizers of the workshop would like to foster the discussion on the interface between religion and politics in African societies by providing the opportunity to compare and discuss current research results. Data from different regional backgrounds are welcome to enhance the discussion by widening up the regional focus. Violence (past and present) and subsequent processes of societal healing are particularly pronounced instances for the study of the interface between religion and politics. Case studies exemplify how – at various societal levels - spirits and other supernatural agents play

## > Programme

### Thursday, January 14<sup>th</sup>

14:00–14:30 Beginning and welcome address  
**Helene Basu, Münster**

14:30–15:30 Spirits in Politics: The Invisible Worlds of Religion and Capital  
**Stephen Ellis, Leiden [and Gerrie Ter Haar, Den Haag]**

15:30–16:30 Magic and politics in Equatorial Africa  
**Florence Bernault, Wisconsin**

16:30–17:30 Fighting Spirits – War and Peace among the Acholi in Northern Uganda  
**Barbara Meier, Münster**

Optional: Film ‘Fighting Spirits’ by Barbara Meier

### Friday, January 15<sup>th</sup>

09:00–10:00 The Politics of Spiritual Agency, Intersubjectivity and Collective Action in Postwar Mozambique  
**Victor Igrreja, Brisbane, and Limore Racin, Tel Aviv**

10:00–11:00 Spirits and Political Power among the Koh Mende in Sierra Leone  
**John Combey, Münster**

coffee break

11:30–12:30 Occult Powers, Spirits and Democratic Processes in Africa  
**Ferdinand Okwaro, Heidelberg**

12:30–13:30 Thus saith the Prophet: Religion, the Media and Regional Politics in the 2007 Kenyan Poll  
**Omanga Duncan Mainye, Bayreuth**

lunch break

15:00–16:00 Power, ‘Pygmisation’ and the Shrine Culture in Cameroon’s Politics and Governance  
**Henry Kam Kah, Buea, Cameroon**

16:00–17:00 The Spirit in the Voting Booth: Democracy and the Invisible Realm in Malawi  
**Arne Steinforth, Münster**

coffee break

17:30–18:30 Spirits, Trees and the Politics of Land: The Case of the Lower Shire Valley, Malawi  
**Menno Welling, Malawi**

### Saturday, January 16<sup>th</sup>

09:00–10:00 Spiritual Appropriations of Modernity: an Igbo Prophetess and her Cursade against ‘Paganism’  
**Johannes Harnischfeger, Frankfurt**

10:00–11:00 Remedies of Restoration: Spirits, Magic and Everyday-Life Politics in Zanzibar  
**Kjersti Larsen, Oslo**

coffee break

11:30–12:30 Witchcraft as Sub-Text: Deep Knowledge and the South African Public Sphere  
**Isak Niehaus, London**

12:30–13:30 Discussion/Conclusion