



Invitation ZMO-Kolloquium WS 2008/09

“Speaking, Listening, Reading, Seeing – Shaping the World Through Media”

Thursday, 26 March 2009, 6 pm

“There is a Spirit in that Image.” Mass Produced Jesus Pictures and Protestant- Pentecostal Animation in Ghana

Lecture by Prof. Birgit Meyer

Venue

Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

Exploring the central role of Protestant Christianity in shaping contemporary public culture in Ghana, in this lecture I argue that it would be mistaken to associate the excessive spread of Christian imagery that is facilitated by the availability of technologies of mass production with a loss of substance. Instead the materiality of pictures, and their grounding in particular semiotic ideologies that induce particular modes of looking and valuations of pictures needs to be taken as a point of departure. I will show that anxieties regarding religious pictures are rooted in longstanding inherently paradoxical views of religious things that were shaped in the mid-nineteenth-century encounters between Protestant missionaries and local populations. Focusing on current, mass produced pictures of Jesus, I will explore Pentecostal valuations of such imagery, placing particular emphasis on anxieties regarding Jesus pictures as potentially demonic and idolatric. It will be argued that such anxieties, that are grounded in Christian-Protestant views of traditional objects as “fetishes” and “idols,” thrive on a particular haptic visuality through which pictures and beholders are entangled in a structure of mutual animation. This analysis seeks to shed light not only on religious audiovisual culture in Ghana, but to contribute to developing a conceptual framework that allows us to explore the intersection of the rise of outreaching religions such as Pentecostalism and the use of technologies of mass reproduction that allow for the circulation and animation of religious pictures.

GEFÖRDERT VOM



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Birgit Meyer is professor of Cultural Anthropology at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam. She is Vice-president of the International African Institute, Co-director of the VU Institute for the Study of Religion, Culture and Society and member of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences. Her publications include *Translating the Devil. Religion and Modernity Among the Ewe in Ghana* (1999), *Globalization and Identity. Dialectics of Flow and Closure* (edited with Peter Geschiere, 1999), *Magic and Modernity. Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment* (edited with Peter Pels 2003), *Religion, Media and the Public Sphere* (edited with Annelies Moors, 2006), and *Aesthetic Formations. Media, Religion and the Senses* (fc). She is co-editor of *Material Religion*.