



## ZMO-Colloquium Summer Term 2015

Thursday, July 2nd, 2015, 6 pm

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### Local commitments, national aspirations: the making of an African middle class

By Prof. Dr. Carola Lentz (University of Mainz and  
Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg Delmenhorst)

#### Venue:

Zentrum Moderner Orient  
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

The lecture explores the making of an African upper middle class, focusing on changing patterns of middle-class recruitment and reproduction, including its relations with the state; practices of middle-class cohesion as well as discourses of distinction and legitimacy; and the middle-class members' relations with broader constituencies. It pursues these themes through a case study of highly educated men from Northern Ghana who work in the public administration and the educational sector, the free professions (lawyers, doctors, etc.), the army, and the Catholic Church. The paper is part of a larger book project that will discuss the career trajectories, life styles, home ties, self-perceptions and personal ideals as well as associational activities and political ambitions of four generations of these men who emerged from distinct politico-historical circumstances. The book will examine how their experiences of social mobility and growing inequality have changed over time, and how these men have negotiated their professional careers and personal aspirations between the challenges of a modernising colonial and post-colonial order and the demands of more traditionalist role models.

The case study contributes to broader debates on mechanisms, experiences and legitimations of social mobility. Two aspects are of special importance: first, social stratification in Ghana emerges in a context of pronounced ethnic and regional heterogeneity; and secondly, social mobility takes place in a sociocultural context where the extended family and local community of 'origin' continue to be of great symbolic and economic importance. These dimensions of social stratification can throw new light on the more classical cases of middle-class formation in the Global North.

**Carola Lentz** is professor of social anthropology at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies at Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz and currently a fellow of the Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg Delmenhorst. She has been president of the German Anthropological Association since 2011 and was appointed member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW) in 2014. Her book *Land, Mobility and Belonging in West Africa* (Indiana University Press, 2013) received the Melville J. Herskovits Award of the African Studies Association in 2014. She has conducted fieldwork on labour migration and ethnicity, the history of chieftaincy and colonial rule, land rights and the politics of belonging in Ecuador, Ghana and Burkina Faso. In her current research, she explores the construction of a middle class in Ghana, and the role of memory and national-day celebrations in West African trajectories of nation-building.

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