

REL SEMINAR SERIES

TRANSLATING "SPIRIT"

Based on my work as part of an international team that tracks the trajectory of a collection of spiritual artifacts from South-eastern Gold Coast (now Ghana) and South Togo by missionaries of the Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft to the Übersee-Museum Bremen, in this lecture I address the pressing question how to find a language to speak about the "items" included in this collection. Undertaking an archaeology of the subsequent meanings and values bestowed on – and thus contained in – these displaced matters, pertinent questions arise about how to speak about the first layer in which the artifacts were called dzokawo, legbawo, and aklama. How did the subsequent translations, by missions and museum anthropology, into registers as "idolatry" or "fetishism", "charm" or "magic" and "ethnographic object" occur? What can be shown to be lost in these hegemonic translations through their critical deconstruction? How to retranslate the English term "spirit" outside of the frame of religion? My concern is to avoid essentializing pitfalls that come with a view of Africa shaped by terms as spirit, spiritual or animist, and at the same time, inspired by Bachir Diagne, to offer hospitality to translations of "spirits" in decolonial modes of knowledge making.



**PRESENTED
BY:**

**PROF BIRGIT MEYER
(UTRECHT UNIVERSITY)**



Caption: Dzokawo, Übersee-Museum Bremen
(Photo Birgit Meyer)



TUESDAY

23 SEPTEMBER 2025

13H00 – 14H00

REL SEMINAR ROOM

LS 5.67

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Online Via MS Teams

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