

– Institute’s Colloquium –



**The Institute of Ethnology  
of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität  
is glad to welcome**

**Prof. Dr. Jean Comaroff**

(Harvard University)

**Monday, May 30<sup>th</sup> 2022, 4-6 p.m.**

“Vigilantism” and the Paradox of Popular Sovereignty in South Africa

Popular justice, or “vigilantism,” can be said to have returned with a vengeance in late modern times. So has academic interest in the writings of Carl Schmitt, a key theorist of modern populism. Not merely did Schmitt propose a concept of the political vested in the visceral contrast between friend and enemy rather than in the institutions of government. He was also famously skeptical of the capacity of the liberal state either to honor the social contract or to protect the demos from those willing to capture the political by suspending the rule of law. In this, Schmitt opens the possibility for thinking of populism as that which appears “other” to the logic of liberal democracy. Practices of popular justice raise related questions about forms of action often seen to be at odds with liberal reason -- like the generative power of ritual and collective effervescence, the force of demagoguery, or the violence of necropolitics. Why are these things so prominent in our current world? How, with Schmitt in mind, do we understand the meaning of contemporary populism? This paper explores these questions by plumbing the nature and increasing salience of popular justice, informal enforcement, and popular sovereignty in contemporary South Africa.

The Institute’s Colloquium will take place digitally. Please ask for the zoom link at [ifethno@uni-muenster.de](mailto:ifethno@uni-muenster.de).

**Everybody is welcome!**