

ORGANIZATION

Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”

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VENUE AND REGISTRATION

Cluster of Excellence lecture theatre
Room JO 1
Johannisstr. 4
48143 Münster

To participate via Zoom, register until the day of the lecture at:
veranstaltungenEXC@uni-muenster.de

ANNUAL THEME 2024 / 2025 “BODY AND RELIGION”

In the world’s religions, the body is both an object and an expression of religious ideas. This is the issue that the Cluster of Excellence is exploring in the 2024/2025 annual theme “Body and Religion”. Whether healing and purification rituals, asceticism and fasting, head coverings and tattoos, or practices on the dead body – religious ideas about people, gods, and the worlds beyond are reflected in how people have treated the human body across epochs and cultures. The lines of tradition stretch from ancient polytheistic religions to today’s interpretations of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The annual theme presents the Cluster of Excellence’s current research on “Body and Religion” in an exhibition and an extensive programme of events that allow researchers and the general public to come together for discussion.

CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE “RELIGION AND POLITICS”

The Cluster of Excellence has been investigating the complex relationship between religion and politics across eras and cultures since 2007. The 140 researchers from 20 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences focus in this funding phase (2019 to 2025) on the “dynamics of tradition and innovation”. They analyze in transepochnal studies ranging from antiquity to the present day the conditions and factors that make religion an engine of political and social change, with their focus being above all on the paradox that religions often develop their innovative potential precisely by drawing on their traditions. The research network is the largest of its kind in Germany; and, of the Clusters of Excellence, one of the oldest and the only one to deal with the issue of religion. It will receive funding of 31 million euros from 2019 to 2025.

PUBLIC EVENING LECTURE WITH DEBORAH KAPCHAN

Face to Face with the Spirits:
Embodying the Imagination

Tuesday, 13 May 2025 | 6.15 pm



Image: Deborah Kapchan (Banning Eye, Afropop Worldwide)

PUBLIC EVENING LECTURE

Tuesday, 13 May 2025, 6.15 pm

Face to Face with the Spirits: Embodying the Imagination

Deborah Kapchan, the Hans Blumenberg Professor of 2025, has spent more than thirty years immersing herself in the sacred cultures of Morocco – from women’s song (l’aïta), to Sufism (mystical Islam), to syncretic possession cults where people fall into trance as spirits “rise up” in their bodies (the Gnawa). Her journeys into these various subcultures have required deep sensory engagement in ecstatic forms of cultural expression, testing the power of embodied performance to transform both personal and social realities.

In her evening lecture, Professor Kapchan draws on her field-work, as well as her own personal experiences with death and transition, to understand the intimate connection between body and imagination in human consciousness. What do visions, dreams and other altered states confer? Do rituals increase the ability to empathize, as in meditation? And what of the capacity to listen, and to hear? Drawing on the Sufi philosopher Ibn al-Arabi (1165–1240) and his understanding of the many intermediate realms of existence, Kapchan plumbs the paradoxes inherent in an imagination possessed to reveal the urgent necessity of attending to what philosopher Karen Barad calls “the alterity within.”

ABOUT DEBORAH KAPCHAN



Deborah Kapchan is Professor of Performance Studies at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts. As a writer, translator and ethnographer she specializes in North African Islam, art and poetry. She has received fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research,

the Fulbright Hays Foundation and the American Institute of Maghrib Studies.

Her many publications and editorships include works such as “Traveling Spirit Masters. Moroccan Gnawa Trance and Music in the Global Marketplace” (2007) and the anthology “Theorizing Sound Writing” (2017). Kapchan’s work has consistently bridged the boundaries between ethnology, music and oral and written poetry. This is particularly evident in her authored, translated and edited volume “Poetic Justice: An Anthology of Contemporary Moroccan Poetry” (2020), which was shortlisted for ALTA’s National Translation Prize for Poetry. Kapchan’s latest work, “Taking Leave”, a memoir about her relation to the three religions of the Book, is forthcoming from Duke University Press in September 2025.

HANS BLUMENBERG PROFESSORSHIP FOR RELIGION AND POLITICS

The “Hans Blumenberg Professorship for Religion and Politics” is named after Hans Blumenberg (1920–1996), a philosopher who worked at the University of Münster. It is intended to deepen interdisciplinary discussion at the Cluster of Excellence and to bring innovative ideas from international research to Münster. The professorship has been held in recent years by Kwame Anthony Appiah (New York University, USA), Sarah Stroumsa (Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel), Linda Woodhead (King’s College, London, UK), Maribel Fierro (CSIC, Madrid, Spain), Jóhann Páll Árnason (La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia), and Mark Juergensmeyer (University of California, Santa Barbara, USA).

HANS BLUMENBERG



Hans Blumenberg – the person whom the professorship is named after

Known internationally and to scholars across a wide range of disciplines, the philosopher Hans Blumenberg (1920–1996) was a professor at the University of Münster between 1970 and 1985. He made a significant contribution to defining the meaning of the term “modernity” in historical and philosophical discussions. He questioned the then prevailing theory of secularization, which argued that theological patterns of interpretation

from the Middle Ages continued to have an impact in the modern state even after the transition to the modern era. In “The Legitimacy of the Modern Age”, Blumenberg argued that the emergence of the modern period should be interpreted as an act of human self-assertion against the religious claims to absoluteness of late medieval thought. Blumenberg also dealt in his work on the history of concepts, intellectual history and the history of philosophy with the interpretation of myths and metaphors. His ideas still inspire heated discussions across disciplines to this day.