



ZMO-Colloquium Summer Term 2015

Thursday, March 26th, 2015, 6 pm

Geology, Potentiality, Speculation: On the Indeterminacy of “First Oil”,

By Dr. Gisa Weszkalnys (London School of Economics)

Venue:

Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

The lecture explores what the petroleum industry calls “first oil” to shed light on the uneven process of resource making on the margins of global zones of extraction. In particular, I examine how the double obscurity of hydrocarbon prospects – both geologically obscured and their worth not yet revealed by the market – generates particular material constraints and setbacks that are characteristic of petroleum production. My analysis draws on ethnographic and archival material from São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) where repeated attempts to explore offshore oil have yet to transform geological potential into an economic asset. I highlight the incongruous effects of certain epistemic practices and devices (contract, zone and well) aimed at managing uncertainty in the exploration process. Instead of realising petroleum potential, they work as gestures of an indeterminate matter whose existence has continued to be doubted.

GEFÖRDERT VOM



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Gisa Weszkalnys is assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology at the London School of Economics (LSE). Her research focuses on the ethnographic study of natural resources, specifically oil in Africa. She has explored the speculations, fears, and disappointments that have animated the prospective oil economy of São Tomé and Príncipe. In the past, Gisa has carried out intensive research on the politics of urban planning, resulting in the monograph *Berlin, Alexanderplatz: Transforming Place in a Unified Germany* (2010) and an edited volume *Elusive Promises: Planning in the Contemporary World* (ed. with S. Abram, 2013). She has also worked on interdisciplinary research policy and practice in Germany, the UK, and the US.