



## ZMO-Colloquium Winter Term 2016/2017

Thursday, 24 November 2016, 5 pm

### Caste, knowledge, and the politics of becoming: Young Dalits' Choices in Contemporary Nepal

Lecture by Prof Dr **Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka** (Bielefeld University)

#### Venue:

Zentrum Moderner Orient  
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

The personal trajectories of young Dalits (members of castes previously classed as 'untouchable') have been significantly affected by the thoroughgoing social transformations that have taken place in Nepal over the last two decades. Changing value systems buttressing the quest for social justice as well as the increased connectivity have opened new avenues for political activism. At the same time, Dalit aspirations and choices, desires and hopes impact upon the pace and nature of these dynamics. Powerful social boundaries, including caste boundaries, are now subject to social reflexivity and critique; yet, they have not lost their salience. Lived experience often collides with such ideological notions as 'social inclusion' and 'political empowerment,' because social mobility, such as the Dalits' entry to social spaces previously closed to them, tends to instigate resentment and even open conflict. Social boundaries are therefore simultaneously challenged and shifted, while also being re-drawn and accentuated.

From the point of view of young Dalits, different tensions affect their choices and aspirations – that will be discussed in this presentation. First, we need to learn more about the (development of) commitments embraced by Dalit students and young professionals. Here, the process of knowledge production acquires the key-importance. Following on this, we need to establish how professional and political choices are weighted against each other and/or combined. How are individual strategies shaped vis-à-vis collective concerns, in particular within and across specific caste-boundary-lines? In the same vein: which resources are deployed for rendering these strategies effective? How do young Dalits navigate under the conditions of these tensions? -This discussion of Dalit self-assertion in Nepal will draw on comparisons and entanglements with Indian Dalit movements while also paying attention to the globalized nature of these struggles.

**Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka** is Professor of Social Anthropology at the Faculty of Sociology, Bielefeld University, Germany. She currently also acts as Co-Director of the ZIF, the Center for Interdisciplinary Research at Bielefeld University. Her research interests in ethnicity/race, inequality, and democratization are currently incorporated into preoccupations with universities and processes of studying as well as with knowledge politics.

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