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CROSSROADS ASIA LECTURE SERIES

Decommodifying knowledge: Recuperating the interdisciplinarity of area studies by Prof. Shelley Feldman (Cornell University)

Keynote Lecture at the 5th International Crossroads Asia Conference: Area Studies' Futures

Mapping, like censuses and identity cards, are political projects that mark belonging and regulation as well as shape knowledge production. These practices highlight the commodification of knowledge that is instantiated through policies that colonize world regions and connect the academy to the servicing of global capital. It is therefore hardly surprising that how we generally organize the academy reproduces disciplinary divisions and shapes the development of professional and technical expertise. Area studies (AS) can be viewed as a challenge to this effort in one critical detail: it offers a multidisciplinary and substantive understanding of particular places and world regions. Globalization and the increasing density of connections across world regions has already contributed to interrupting traditional AS approaches given the complex mobilities of capital and labor that now constitute kin and social networks, and as studies of the Atlantic and Indian oceans now suggest. Counter-intuitively, then, it can be argued that area studies – the concern to understand not an aspect of a place or community but the complex social and interstitial relations that comprise everyday life, its rituals, practices, rules, and conventions – can be re-appropriated precisely because it can be engaged as a strategic intervention to decommodify knowledge and challenge epistemic hegemonies. In this paper I draw on feminist, postcolonial, and queer theory and border studies to expose the potential of a project of decommodification able to challenge deployments of area studies as rhetoric, frame, and policy map.

Prof. Shelley Feldman recently retired as International Professor at Cornell University and as Visiting Professor, Binghamton University. Previously she served as Director of Feminist, Gender & Sexuality Studies, the South Asia Program, and President of the American Institute of Bangladesh Studies. She is currently researching the making of the Bangladeshi Hindu citizen as other, a theme that interrogates borders, belonging, citizenship, rights, and law.

**Thu.
22 Sept. 2016
3:00 to 4:15 p.m.**

ZEF Conference Rooms

**Walter-Flex-Straße 3,
53113 Bonn**