



Gastvortrag

IN KOOPERATION MIT DER ÖSTERREICHISCH-INDONESISCHEN
GESELLSCHAFT UND DEM VEREIN WELTMUSEUM WIEN FRIENDS

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Epical Protests: A South/Southeast Asian narrativity in politics

Mittwoch, 16. Jänner 2019, 18:30 Uhr, NIG, Universitätsstraße 7, IKSA, Seminarraum A



Bernard Arps is fascinated by worldmaking through performance, texts, and media, particularly in religious contexts in Southeast Asia. Currently Professor of Indonesian and Javanese Language and

Culture at Leiden University, his most recent book is "Tall tree, nest of the wind: the Javanese shadow-play Dewa Ruci performed by Ki Anom Soeroto; a study in performance philology" (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016).

Cultural life in the South and Southeast Asian cultural region, from Afghanistan to the Philippines and Indonesia, favours a specific kind of narrativity. This 'story-ness' manifests itself most palpably in storytelling proper, and it is especially pronounced in the grand and complex hero- and heroine-focused narratives that are often styled epics. The famous Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa exhibit it, but so do the 'romance' of Amir Hamza (uncle and contemporary of the Prophet Muhammad) which used to be popular throughout Muslim Asia and many other heroic narratives. Across a dynamic spectrum of locally and historically specific inflections, epics small and large exhibit the distinctive features of a typical South/Southeast Asian narrativity. In my talk I propose that this epicality (as I will call it) does not manifest itself in storytelling alone. It runs under the surface too, engrained in cultural dispositions. Its significance therefore is not always readily discernable, and in part for this reason it shows remarkable longevity despite sweeping religious, political, social, and technological change. Paradoxically, therefore, this epical narrativity may animate and pattern even ostensibly anti-epic activism, such as the Islam-inspired protests against the erection of Mahābhārata-based statues in a town in West Java (Indonesia) in 2010–2016.