

SEA-NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia

MAY 2024



ALUMNI
COLUMN

In our Alumni column this month we give the opportunity to Ramayda Akmal to give her impression about the time she was in Hamburg to work on her PhD. Thesis.

Ramayda Recalling Memorable Moments at The University of Hamburg

Ramayda graduated from the Department of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia at the Asia-Africa Institute of the University of Hamburg in June 2022. For her PhD. Project, she researched contemporary Indonesian travel literature on Europe from a postcolonial perspective.

Besides doing her PhD project, Ramayda was trusted to organise two lecture series. One dealt with Indonesian creative writing, which resulted in the publication of a short story anthology entitled *Sebab Engkau Pasir dan Engkau Akan Kembali Menjadi Pasir*, "For Dust you are, and to dust you Shall Return" (2020). Among the contributors were the students participating in her creative writing course. The other seminar Ramayda organised was on Indonesian cinema, which was concluded with the production of several short movies.

What Ramayda recalls as the most valuable experience during her study in Hamburg is learning how a transparent scientific work ethic can be implemented and noticing how an egalitarian academic climate made security and equality felt as experienced by the university members. She also honed her knowledge about the application of different scientific paradigms

and methods, guided by her supervisors, Prof. Dr. Jan van der Putten and Prof. Dr. Monika Arnez.

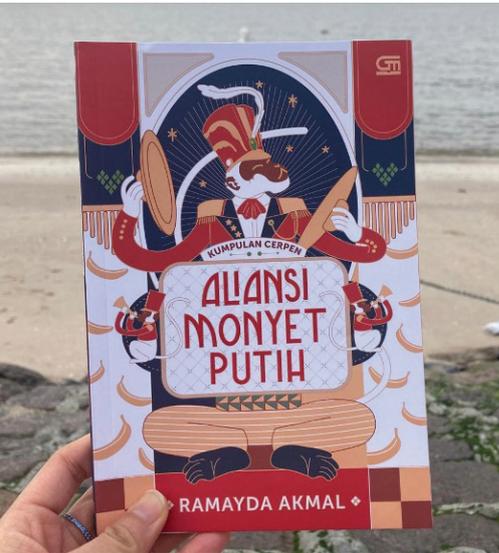
After accomplishing her study in Hamburg, Ramayda secured a position as an assistant professor in the Language and Culture Department, at Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) Yogyakarta, Indonesia. In this capacity, she started teaching undergraduate and postgraduate classes in the field of narratology and travel literature, the expertise she developed during her study in Hamburg. Recently, she has become part of a humanities research laboratory on "Digital technology and gender dynamics in the workplace in Southeast Asia" initiated by Prof. Monika Arnez, which involves scholars from around the world, some of whom, including Ramayda will participate in the EUROSEAS conference organised in Amsterdam 23-25 July 2024.

>>>

SEA-NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia

MAY 2024



>>>

Equally worth mentioning is that Ramayda is an Indonesian novelist who has published several academic books and literary works in Bahasa Indonesia. Her latest publication in Indonesian literature is a short story anthology called *Aliansi Monyet Putih*, "The White Monkey-Alliance," which was published in 2022. She told us that the writing of the anthology was largely inspired by her experience being an international student in Germany. In this regard, she believes that studying abroad should not merely mean reading, carrying out research, and writing a dissertation. Rather, it does have much to do with understanding different languages, societies, and worldviews, and being critical and reflective of them at the same time.

Thank you Ramayda! We wish you all the best in your career and hope to be able to read new novels by you and that students can listen to your presentations and read your papers and many other publications! ●

ALUMNI COLUMN

Would you like to share your story as ex-student in our Department? Contact us and join our **Alumni Group on LinkedIn**

 Students and Alumni of the Southeast Asian Studies Department- Hamburg University.

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/9016077/>



Lecture

Perspectives and current processes of decolonization issues and repatriation of collections from the Netherlands to Indonesia

Thursday, 30. 05. 2024
18:15 - 19:45
ESA O, Room 221

Speaker:
Dr. Lydia Kieven
University of Bonn, Southeast Asian Studies

Dealing with the colonial past and particularly the period of "revolusi" between 1945 and 1949, debates and negotiations on restitution of collections in Dutch museums to the Republic of Indonesia - for long time being "forgotten" - have during the last years become hot topics. Eventually *restitusi/repatriasi/pemulangan* has been conducted, for example the kris of Diponegoro in 2020, or the beautiful statues from Candi Singosari in 2023.

This happens in the wake of worldwide decolonization processes. While in the German academic, culture and museum world Benin and more recently Kamerun have been in the focus, the relations between Indonesia and Netherlands, however, have only attracted little attention so far. This talk wants to shed light on the ongoing processes.



Dr. Lydia Kieven is an art historian with expertise on ancient Javanese art and Javanese cultural traditions.

One of her major works was on the so called Panji stories depicted in narrative reliefs at Majapahit temples. During recent years her interest shifted to the issue of returning ancient Indonesian artifacts from the Netherlands to Indonesia and on the ongoing processes.

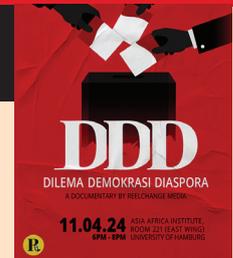
SEA-NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia

MAY 2024

Dilema Demokrasi Diaspora (DDD)

Between Trust and Suspicion Towards Indonesian Election Organizers



On April 11, the documentary “*Dilema Demokrasi Diaspora*”, produced by Real Change Media, was screened for a public audience at the Asia-Africa Institute. The movie portrays the challenges the Indonesian diaspora has dealt with, as a consequence of their participation in the Indonesian election on February 10 2024.



It discloses the ambivalent attitude of Indonesians who, on one hand, were eager to keep a strong attachment to their nation’s political situation by taking part in this election, but on the other, doubted the integrity of the so-called *Panitia Pemilihan Luar Negeri* (PPLN), the election committee abroad.

The documentary focuses especially on describing what was experienced by a certain group of Indonesians who, despite having already embraced German citizenship, still received their ballots at home to vote for the presidential election. The German audience expressed a huge surprise towards the movie’s honest portrayal of this complicated matter.

The movie editor, Adrian, said that the idea to produce the documentary was inspired by the release of another documentary in Indonesia, entitled “*Dirty Vote*”. The latter was uploaded on YouTube on the eve of the election day and sparked ambivalent attitudes among Indonesian electors due to its brave unravelling of what allegedly functioned unconstitutionally ‘behind the closed door’.

This Indonesian documentary spurred Adrian and his team to speed up the production of their documentary to target its screening before the Constitutional Court of Indonesia will read the verdict on the presidential election dispute, which was scheduled on Monday, April 22, 2024. However, the relevance of the movie is confined to the Hamburg context, where they gathered the data about the above-mentioned phenomenon.

The project was supported by the Indonesian Consulate in Hamburg, however, Adrian lamented the reserved attitude of the PPLN workers he interviewed, who could not provide satisfying information. Adrian expressed that the intended message of the movie is not merely to bring to the surface the technical error by the election committee, but also to facilitate a healthy and safe discussion on Indonesian politics among the Indonesian diaspora in Hamburg. For Adrian, Indonesian politics must not become taboo but should be critically approached and discussed. In this, the diaspora communities have a “safer” space for such discussion, being not completely tied with the Indonesia National State.



Adrian and his team affirm that for the moment producing movies is still a hobby, but they are expecting to be able to do it more professionally. And especially for the DDP movie, they hope it can reach a wide range of viewership when uploaded on YouTube very soon. •

SEA-NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia

MAY 2024

Students' Participation at the International Conference in Berlin

"Garden in Transmission"

Three students of our department, Eman, Ragil and Roberta, participated as invited speakers in the international conference held at SAVVY Contemporary: The Laboratory of Form-Ideas on 26-27 April 2024. The conference, entitled *"Gardens in Transition: Commitments, Obligations and Practices"* invited the participants to engage in discussions focused on colonial heritage and decolonisation as facts and points towards practices of transition.

Eman, Ragil, and Roberta participated in the conference with a 10-minute presentation, which was followed by a group discussion with fellow students and the attending audience. As selected students, their insights and contributions were expected to enrich a collective understanding of the conference's themes.

Eman's presentation adopted a transitional perspective to examine Climate Change on Pura Island, Alor Archipelago, (Eastern Indonesia), and it aimed to suggest an alternative environmental paradigm. He argues that island communities offer valuable insights into the complex interplay between human societies and their environments (non-human). How this society



perceives the ontological understanding (the question of existence) of human-nature relationships is still today enormously affected by the superstructure of power brought by external agents such as colonial officials or missionaries. Local communities define the traditional values and practices as "darkness" and modernity as "enlightenment". Modernity rhetoric is one package with Christianity coming from Eurocentric (Western Europe and America) ideology and practice in the distribution of coloniality of power (see Mignolo:2007). This guides a reflection to challenge the transition of knowledge and paradigm of locals to mitigate the climate crisis.

Ragil presented "Tropical Spells", a collaborative research endeavour initiated by Sarnt Utamachote, Thao Ho, Dr. Ferdiansyah Thajib, Nam Nguyen, and Ragil Huda.

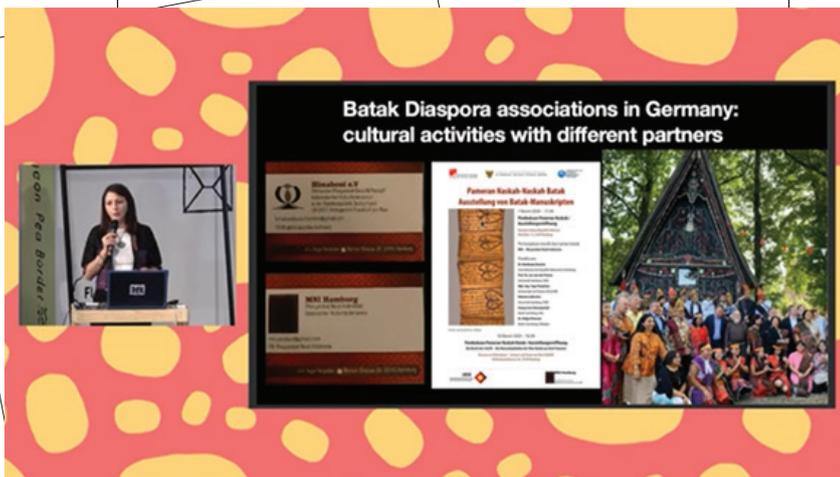
The project seeks to examine the concept of queer anti-colonial liberation within the context of Berlin/Germany, exploring the intersectionality of migrant experiences, queer activism, and knowledge production in postcolonial Europe. Specifically, it investigates the role of art, research, and curation in establishing connections between queer Southeast Asian culture

SEA-NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia

MAY 2024

>>>



and migrant communities, while also addressing issues of racial and gender inequality in Germany.

These inquiries will be further explored through an upcoming exhibition and associated events to be held at the Gay Museum Berlin. This platform will convene artists, activists, and scholars from Southeast Asia and its diaspora in Berlin, fostering discussions around sexual diversity and queerness from global, migrant, and postcolonial perspectives. Additionally, the project will serve as a foundation for Ragil's MA thesis.

The title "Tropical Spells" derives from Eng-Ben Lim's scholarship in "Brown Boys and Rice Queens," symbolizing a commitment to community empowerment. It symbolically references historical narratives of Dutch-German colonial sexual desires intertwined with queer mythologies in Southeast Asia, illustrating the complex intersections of race, sexuality, and power on a global scale.

Roberta's presentation discussed the effect of German coloniality on the Batak Manuscript culture. For her, German missionaries' part of the Rheinische Mission were the main agents of coloniality in the Batak territories. Not only these dismantled the main pillars of Batak cultures, forbidding the Batak to play traditional music, to perform any traditional ritual, but also demonised their manuscript production, which was

associated with traditional beliefs and ancestor cults, obviously incompatible with the Christian doctrine. At the same time, however, some of these missionaries engaged in the production and publication of several books and articles discussing – and actually defining – what was "Batak culture" from their perspective. Roberta highlighted that in this way knowledge was basically colonised, and Western categories of thought were imposed on the locals, transforming in a very drastic way the Batak Weltanschauung. Roberta concluded her presentation by discussing how the "transitions" framework proposed by the conference seems to be particularly appropriate to describe the actual situation she is witnessing. Obligation, commitment, and practices are three key words that summarise quite adequately the present days' efforts played by various agents – researchers, diaspora communities and artistic groups – to revitalise the study of the manuscripts and to push forward a renewed appreciation of these objects for the Batak themselves. ●

The SEA-Newsletter Team:

Board:
 Prof. Dr. Jörg Thomas Engelbert
 Prof. Dr. Volker Grabowsky
 Prof. Dr. Jan van der Putten
 JP Dr. Elsa Clavé
 Dr. Silpsupa Jaengsawang

Vietnam studies:
 Thanh Ha Nguyen
 Quang Minh To

Thai studies:
 Kornkanok Khetnongbua

Austronesian studies:
 Roberta Zollo
 Tiara Ulfa
 Syukri Rizki
 M. Dian Saputra
Layout: E. Hellen Kustanti

SUBSCRIBE: suedostasien.unihh@outlook.de

FOLLOW US:

 [@seastudies_hamburg](https://www.instagram.com/seastudies_hamburg)

 <https://www.aai.uni-hamburg.de/soa.html>

SEA-NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia

MAY 2024



Thaiistik Student as National Exhibition Expert to Her Royal Highness Princess of Thailand

Co-organized by the Fine Arts Department and the Ministry of Culture, a special exhibition entitled “Priceless Documents of Siam” is accessible for visitors in Bangkok from 28 March to 30 June 2024. The exhibition has been opened on the occasion of the Thai Heritage Conservation Day 2024 which is an annual observance that has been celebrated since 1985.

At the opening ceremony on 27 March 2024, Sutteera Satayaphan, a PhD candidate of our Thai Studies section in Hamburg and a specialist at the Office of Literature and History, Fine Arts Department, was one of the leading experts who accompanied Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, who officially opened the event, providing her with historical and textual information on manuscripts and inscriptions displayed in the exhibition throughout Her Royal Highness’s visit.

The exhibition is displayed at the Siwamokkhaphiman Throne Hall, The National Museum, Bangkok, and comprises over two-hundred written artefacts that are at present kept at the National Library and the National Archives of Thailand. The displayed written artefacts are divided in the following six divisions: (1) *Can Carük Banthük Siam* (Inscribing texts and memorizing Siam), (2) *Phaen Phum Khòng Phaendin* (Maps of the country), (3) *Nitisan Múa Phreng Kan Lao Khan Prawattisat Thai* (Antique journals of Thai history), (4) *Múa Raek Mi Kan*



>>>

SEA-NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia

MAY 2024

>>>

Phim (On early printing), (5) *Ton Rang Sang Müang Rüang Ròng Sinlapakam* (Documents on building the city and glorious arts), and (6) *Duai Khwam Songcam An Ngotngam Lae Khwam Khit Thüng* (On delightful memories and nostalgia).

On behalf of the Thai Studies section, Asia-Africa Institute, Universität Hamburg, we proudly congratulate Sutheera on her substantial task and her participation as an expert in an event that cherishes memorable written artefacts which are considered as precious primary sources for in-depth research in the field of Thai Studies. ●

Photo credits: Sutheera Satayaphan



Online Lecture

Art, Diplomacy, and the Projection of Power: The Thai Elephant Statues in Singapore, Jakarta, and Ho Chi Minh City



In Singapore, Jakarta (Indonesia) and Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) stand bronze elephant statues gifted by Thai Kings in 1872 and 1934, respectively. The monuments were designed to commemorate the kings' visits to these cities and to provide a visual record of Siamese royal power. The lecture will contextualise these statues in diplomatic practice and contemporary politics, in terms of both cultural setting and symbolism, and the history of secular bronze sculpture in Thailand. A focus will be on the statue in Ho Chi Minh City, which is identified as the first major bronze statue to be cast at the foundry of the Fine Arts Department in Bangkok in 1932.

Friday, 14. 6. 2024
14:00–16:00 CEST

via Zoom and in English

Meeting-ID: 645 6352 1222
Passcode: hgtleecture



Speaker:

Dr. Stefan Hell
Chulalongkorn University

Dr. Stefan Hell is a historian and a visiting research fellow at Chulalongkorn University's Department of History. He holds an MA in History and Philosophy from Tübingen University (Germany) and a PhD in History from Leiden University (Netherlands). Stefan is the author of three books: *The Manchurian Conflict: Japan, China, and the League of Nations, 1931-1933 (in German)*, *Siam and the League of Nations: Modernisation, Sovereignty and Multilateral Diplomacy, 1920-1940*; and *Siam and World War I: An International History* (both in English and Thai). Stefan has also co-edited books, authored articles, and contributes to the *Bangkok Post*. His current research projects focus on the history of Franco-Thai relations during the Holocaust and on the confluence of architecture, religion, and politics in modern Vietnamese history.