

Understanding Asia: Transnational Care

Engaging with the World of Waste: Carelessness and Social Mobilization in Java and beyond

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Wednesday, 24. November 2021
16:00 – 18:00 c.t.
Zoom event

Discarding is an increasingly morally charged act, a means through which people articulate an ethics of care as well as their 'modern' orientation. Yet, "they don't care" is an often-made accusation against the garbage behavior of poor sections of the population and people in the Global South. We tend to blame the carelessness of others though the ecological footprint of middle-class people in the Global North is much bigger and in spite of the fact that we co-produce much of the waste in the Global South.

This paper is based on anthropological fieldwork in Java. What counts for individuals there is not an abstract responsibility for nature but their immediate social environment. Therefore, the mobilisation of the local social and moral world is crucial when it comes to engagement with the waste problem. Bottom-up initiatives such as community-based 'waste banks' and 'recycle fashion' street carnivals that address various social, economic, and emotional aspects of waste have proven efficient. They may stimulate us to reflect on local sociocultural entanglements of a planetary problem.

Judith Schlehe is a Professor of Sociocultural Anthropology at the University of Freiburg, Germany. She received her Ph.D. in 1987 and finished her *Habilitation* in 1997. She has published widely on the topics of religious dynamics, cultural politics, globalisation and transcultural issues, gender, the anthropology of disaster, and, lately, on the anthropology of waste related to notions of nature. Her main expertise is on Indonesia and Southeast Asia. Together with colleagues from Gadjah Mada University she developed a teaching model for transnational collaborative and reciprocal research.