



Centre for

**Global
Cooperation
Research**

50th Käte Hamburger Lecture

Maintaining the frontstage-backstage distinction as religious practice: The case of national parliaments

Lecturer: Pertti Alasuutari

Tuesday, 25^h April 2023 (18:00-19:30)

Hybrid Lecture: MERCATOR-Saal, „Gerhard-Mercator-Haus“ (Building LR), Lotharstraße 57, 47057 Duisburg, and ONLINE

Drawing on Durkheim’s theory of religion, Goffman’s dramaturgical sociology, and sociological institutionalism, Pertti Alasuutari suggests that the frontstage-backstage division can be paralleled with the division into sacred and profane. Frontstage performances always entail a ceremonial aspect in that they show respect for members of society by acting in accordance with sacred values and conceptions of appropriate behavior. Hence, frontstage ritual practices sustain and strengthen key values of society by associating them with sacred symbols and bodily experience of the stylized rules of action followed by participants. Frontstage performances conceal the secrets of backstage, profane behavior driven by less altruistic motives.

On the other hand, the backstage is considered more authentic and honest, revealing true selves and real life. These two aspects of the social world are intertwined, forming society’s institutional setup that members reproduce by maintaining the boundary between the two. The global isomorphism of the basic institutional organization of national parliaments is a case in point. In the frontstage public debates, politicians justify their views by appealing to the common good, the interest of the entire nation or even the humankind, and to globally shared sacred values such as human rights principles endorsed by the United Nations. Bargaining between different parties and interest groups takes place backstage. This does not mean that political actors or citizens are oblivious of backstage agreements. There are constant references made to what happens behind the scenes, and not always disapprovingly. Parliamentarians want to maintain the prestige of the institution by keeping such things behind closed doors that would compromise the alleged sovereignty of national parliament.

Pertti Alasuutari is professor of sociology and research director of the Tampere Centre for Knowledge, Science, Technology and Innovation Studies ([TaSTI](#)). Within TaSTI, he leads the Tampere Research Group for Cultural and Political Sociology ([TCuPS](#)), a group of interested in world society, national policymaking, global circulation of ideas, epistemic governance, and sociology of knowledge. His areas of specialization are global studies, social and cultural theory, and methodology of social research.

18:00-18:05 **WELCOME & INTRODUCTION**
Sigrid Quack (tbc)

18:05-19:00 50TH KÄTE HAMBURGER LECTURE
**MAINTAINING THE FRONTSTAGE-BACKSTAGE DISTINCTION
AS RELIGIOUS PRACTICE: THE CASE OF NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS** LECTURER: Prof. Dr.
Pertti Alasuutari
DISCUSSANT: Anja Weiß

19:00-19:30 Q & A WITH THE AUDIENCE