

Understanding Asia: Gender and Power

Gender, Power and Systemic Silencing: the history and activism of Indonesian „comfort women“ of the Japanese occupation



(Scan for registration)

Kate McGregor
(University of
Melbourne)

12. November 2024
10:15 – 11:45
Zoom event

In this talk I will draw up the findings of my recent book "Systemic Silencing: Activism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in Indonesia" to examine the many ways in which the experiences of Indonesian women were silenced from the period of the Japanese occupation, when they were abused by the Japanese army and civilians, through to their engagement with activism from the 1990s. I will reflect first upon the methods of history writing and processes of silencing in records and archive formation and then consider how we might understand the experiences of women exploited by the Japanese army during World War Two in the so called "comfort women" system. Here I turn to examining how the system was connected with Japanese imperialism and how local patriarchal values in Korea and Indonesia also contributed to the potential exploitation of women. I reflect on what testimonies from Indonesia and Dutch women tell us about their experiences both during and after the war. In the final section of the paper I will draw upon some comparative analysis to examine how the conditions under which activism emerged in Korea and Japan differed compared to Indonesia and some of the further modes of silencing women experienced throughout their activism.

Kate McGregor is a historian of Indonesia based in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne. She is currently Associate Dean International for the Faculty of Arts. Her research interests include Indonesian historiography, memories of violence, the Indonesian military, Islam and identity in Indonesia and historical international links between Indonesia and the world. She teaches in the areas of Southeast Asian history, the history of violence and Asian thematic history. Kate's latest monograph *Systemic Silencing: Activism, Memory and Sexual Violence in Indonesia* (August 2023) published by the Critical Human Rights Series of the University of Wisconsin Press focuses on transnational activism for the Indonesian so called "comfort women" and is an outcome of a four year Australian Research Council Future Fellowship on the project: "Confronting Historical Injustice in Indonesia: Memory and Transnational Human Rights Activism". This work won the 2024 NSW Premier's General History Prize. Kate is currently working on a ARC Discovery project with Associate Professor Ana Eclair called *Submerged Histories: Collaborative Memory Activism between Indonesia and the Netherlands* and on an edited book called *Rethinking Colonial History in Indonesia* in collaboration with Dr Ken Setiawan, Dr Sadiyah Boonstra, Dr Abdul Wahid and Bronwyn Beech Jones. In 2024 she also commenced work as a research lead with Associate Professor Ana Éclair on the Faculty of Arts sponsored research collective called: "The History, Memory and Decolonial Futures Collective".

The colloquium series is a joint cooperation between four working groups (**WG Missbach; WG Nguyen; WG Winkel** and **WG Vasilache**) of the Faculty of Sociology, Bielefeld University.

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