

Departmental Colloquium Series – Winter Semester 2024/25

Wednesday 06.11.2024 - 16:00-18:00

The Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology Münster

Stadtstraße 21, Room STU 2.10

How “Trauma” Entered the Indonesian Imagination: The May 1998 Riots and After

Critics of western psychiatry, the DSM, and the global mental health movement have argued that Western psychiatry continuously imposes Western diagnostic categories on the rest of the world, irrespective of whether they are suitable to capture ever diverse and local expressions of mental illness or idioms of distress. In this presentation I will primarily focus on trauma and less on PTSD—its codification in psychiatric diagnosis.

I focus on the May riots in 1998, which preceded President Suharto’s abdication. At this time, human rights activists and feminist psychologists actively adopted and transformed ideas about trauma to criticize the police and military for being complicit in the riots. Their activism resulted in the establishment of KOMNAS Perempuan (the National Commission on Violence Against Women) and, later, interest among mental health professionals in trauma and PTSD.

Hans Pols is Professor at the School of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Sydney. He is interested in the history of colonial medicine in the Dutch East Indies and the transformations medical research and practice underwent after Indonesia’s independence. Over the past ten years, he became interested in mental health in Indonesia today and in the near future. He has also conducted research on the history of Australian community mental health.

