

Competing conceptions of democracy among religious leaders: West Sumatra after the fall of the Suharto Regime

Speaker

Prof. Keebet von Benda-Beckmann

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Venue

Bankstown Campus
Building 3, Room G.55

RSVP

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Abstract

Discussions about the globalization of democracy often suffer from a one-sided emphasis on the spread of western (liberal) democracy towards the east and the south. The focus of attention usually concerns an assessment of the degree to which a state lives up to the ideals of democracy, to which the answer is usually negative. This approach tends to neglect the possibility of other notions of democracy.

This paper will discuss the existence of competing conceptions of democracy as they have evolved over the past century in Indonesia, in response to transnational and local flows of thought. These include debates about democracy to which Indonesian religious leaders were exposed in Jeddah during the early 20th century. Current debates and appropriations stand in a long history of appropriations of various interpretations of conceptions of democracy.

Focusing on West Sumatra in relation to the Indonesian national state serves to understand how debates among Indonesian elites over the past century have become intertwined with Minangkabau notions of democracy. Together they have shaped not

only the political and legal debates but also democratic practices within the region since the fall of the Suharto Regime opened the possibilities for liberalization and the decentralization policies began.

Biography

Keebet von Benda-Beckmann is professor emeritus and was until 2012 head of the Project Group Legal Pluralism at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany. She is also an honorary professor at the Universities of Leipzig and Halle.

Before coming to Halle in 2000 she held a personal professorship in the anthropology of law at Erasmus University Rotterdam, where she was also Vice-Director of the Sanders Research Institute and Dean of PhD students of the Faculty of Law. She has done field research in Indonesia (West Sumatra and the Moluccas) and in the Netherlands. She has published widely on legal pluralism, exploring its temporal and spatial dimensions. Her publications address issues of dispute management, property, social (in)security, law and religion, natural resource management, and decentralisation in Indonesia.

In 2013 the book covering ten years of research on processes of constitutional change and decentralisation in West Sumatra, *Political and Legal Transformations of an Indonesian Polity*, which she wrote together with F von Benda-Beckmann, was published by Cambridge University Press. She served on the Dutch Advisory Council of International Affairs and its Commission on Human Rights. She is a former president and current member of the executive body of the Commission on Legal Pluralism. She is an editor of the Journal of Legal Pluralism and serves on the editorial board of *Focaal*, *Sociologus*, *Zeitschrift für empirische Ethnosoziologie und Ethnopsychologie/ Journal for Empirical Social Anthropology*, and the *Australian Journal of Asian Law*.