



WORKSHOP TITLE

Transnational Circuits: 'Muslim Women' in Asia

WORKSHOP DIRECTOR

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The central question of this workshop is how women's subjectivities and identities are formed and transformed in new transnational circuits of people and things. More specifically, what do transnational circuits of labor and consumption mean for women's sense of self in terms of class position, national belonging, ethnic and religious identities? What new forms of distinction are produced and highlighted and which alliances are forged?

The last decades have witnessed the emergence of new and the transformation of older circuits through which people and things move in Asia, taken in a broad sense. The focus of this workshop is on how Muslim women are involved in such circuits, be it as mobile people or as producers, propagators and consumers of travelling things, ideas and images. One of the central issues to be discussed in this workshop is how notions about being a Muslim woman are produced and transformed through such transnational women-centered circuits. In this way we hope to gain a better understanding of the intersections of gender and Islam in an Inter-Asian context.

There are three circuits that we are particularly interested in. First, the feminisation of migration has not only drawn women from the Philippines or Sri Lanka, but also from Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in Asia, into the field of transnational migration. Many of these female migrants are employed as domestic workers in Muslim majority countries, such as Malaysia, the Gulf States, and countries in the central Middle East. People who may well hold quite divergent notions of religious and cultural propriety are engaged in relatively long-term interactions in the intimacy of the private sphere.

Second, another field is that of marriage migration. Here we are interesting in transformations in transnational 'Muslim or Islamic marriages', which may, at times, be irregular in the eyes of state authorities, yet valid according to Islamic law. Men from wealthier backgrounds look for wives in poorer countries. Women themselves – both amongst the wealthy and the poor - have also become active agents in the field of such transnational marriages, sometimes going against local notions of propriety.

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Third, the field of bodily appearances. With the turn of the Islamic revival movement towards a more cultural orientation, fashionable styles of Islamic dress have become a growth sector and materials, designs and items of dress have entered transnational circuits of consumption in many settings in Asia. 'Islamic fashion shows' have become mainstream, from Indonesia and Malaysia to Turkey and Iran. We would like to explore whether and how women relate these new fashionable styles of dress to particular forms of religiosity, consumption, and notions of the self. In a different way wearing gold jewelry is a quintessential transnational commodity that is part and parcel of many Muslim marriages through dower arrangements. How have new transnational circuits impacted on the evaluation of gold jewelry?

We are looking for contributions from anthropology, cultural studies, gender studies, and cultural history that focus on *Muslim women's engagements in transnational circuits in Asia*, which combine a theoretical focus on transnational connections and gender with well-grounded empirical research. Themes we are interested in include:

- The cultural politics of migrant domestic labour, including consumption practices (such as dress/fashion and gold) and transnational marriages (e.g. Saudi Arabia/Indonesia, Dubai/India)
- New (meanings of) transnational Muslim marriages (e.g. temporary, misyar, informal, summer marriages)
- Circuits of Islamic fashion (design, display and/or consumption) and circuits of women's gold (design, qarat quality): economic value and cultural meanings