

Dr Laurens de Rooij

Digital Crossings: Navigating Muslim Identity Negotiations in Transnational Marriages Initiated Online

In the contemporary landscape of Muslim Societal Engagement with Gender and Sexuality, this presentation explores the intricate dynamics of Muslim identity negotiation within transnational marriages that originated online. Focusing on the experiences of individuals who emigrated to be with their spouses after establishing connections through digital platforms, the study delves into the multifaceted ways partners navigate their Muslim identities in the aftermath of this significant life transition.

The research employs a sociological lens to investigate the complexities arising from the intersection of online matchmaking, migration, and the negotiation of religious identities. Through qualitative interviews with individuals who have undergone this journey, the study aims to unravel the diverse narratives that emerge when partners from distinct cultural and geographical backgrounds come together, drawing attention to the nuanced negotiations of Islamic practices, beliefs, and cultural norms.

Central themes to be explored include the impact of the online environment on the formation of initial connections, the negotiation of religious and cultural expectations within the context of transnational marriages, and the role of digital platforms in shaping the construction of Muslim identities in new geographical settings.

By shedding light on these narratives, this presentation contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving dynamics of Muslim identity in the context of transnational relationships initiated online. It seeks to uncover the challenges faced, adaptive strategies employed, and the broader implications for notions of Muslim identity and societal engagement in an increasingly interconnected world. The research refrains from theological or jurisprudential discussions, aligning with the sociological focus of the workshop while exploring the lived experiences of individuals navigating the intricate intersection of online matchmaking and transnational migration.



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Laurens de Rooij gained his doctorate at Durham University in England. He is currently an Associate Lecturer in the Sociology of Islam, at the Al Mahdi Institute. His research examines how non-Muslim people in Britain interact with news reports about Islam and Muslims and how that affects their interpretation and conceptualization of Islam and Muslims. Laurens has spent time at a number of institutions across the globe, including The Graduate School of the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta, Indonesia (spring 2013), the Religion Department at Duke University in Durham North Carolina, USA (Autumn 2013), The Centre for Religion, Media and Culture in the Journalism & Mass Communication Department at the University of Colorado in Boulder, Colorado, USA (spring 2014), and at Brazil's Fundação Joaquim Nabuco (summer 2016). In 2017 he was a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Cape Town for a year, where his research analyses how the media discourse on minorities (particularly Muslims and Islam) affects how they are conceptualized, understood, and treated in South Africa. This work was supported in part by the National Research Foundation of South Africa. He was also a lecturer at the University of Chester (2018), and a researcher at London Metropolitan University (2018-2020), Toulouse School of Management (2021-2022) in France, and Mahidol University in Bangkok, Thailand (2022-2023).