



Defining Ethnic Boundaries: Comparing "Malayness" in Peninsula Malaysia, to "Fijianness" in Fiji and "Whiteness" in South Africa."

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Speaker's Profile



Dr. Kiran Sagoo is a Liaison Officer with the East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, for the Brunei-US Project on ASEAN Integration. Kiran was previously a postdoctoral fellow with the University of Hawaii Cancer Center and an instructor at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She received her Ph.D in Sociology from the University of Hawaii at Manoa in 2011. She also holds an MA in Asian Studies from the University of Hawaii at Manoa and a MSc in Comparative Development and International Social Policy from the University of Bristol. Her Ph.D dissertation entitled "Ethnic Social Cohesion and Population Health, Case-Studies: Malaysia, Fiji and South Africa" examined ethnic relations in postcolonial plural societies and its impact on social cohesion, measured through population health.

Abstract

Research focusing on ethnic relations in plural societies often take the ethnic groups being discussed as natural categories. While ethnic categories appear clear and fixed at a given point, a closer examination of these categories over time demonstrate that ethnic boundaries are often fluid and can be based on a variety of criteria. This presentation focuses on the formation of ethnic identities in Malaysia with comparisons made to Fiji and South Africa. Through an examination of censuses, this presentation will address the following research questions, "What are the current ethnic categories in Malaysia, Fiji and South Africa?" and "How have the boundaries between them developed over time?" This presentation addresses the issue of saliency in ethnic boundary formation.