



# Seeing Beauty, Sensing Race in Transnational Indonesia (Southeast Asia: Politics, Meaning, and Memory)

*L. Ayu Saraswati*

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In Indonesia, light skin color has been desirable throughout recorded history. *Seeing Beauty, Sensing Race* explores Indonesia's changing beauty ideals and traces them to a number of influences: first to ninth-century India and some of the oldest surviving Indonesian literary works; then, a thousand years later, to the impact of Dutch colonialism and the wartime occupation of Japan; and finally, in the post-colonial period, to the popularity of American culture. The book shows how the transnational circulation of people, images, and ideas have shaped and shifted discourses and hierarchies of race, gender, skin color, and beauty in Indonesia. The author employs "affect" theories and feminist cultural studies as a lens through which to analyze a vast range of materials, including the Old Javanese epic poem *Ramayana*, archival materials, magazine advertisements, commercial products, and numerous interviews with Indonesian women.

The book offers a rich repertoire of analytical and theoretical tools that allow readers to rethink issues of race and gender in a global context and understand how feelings and emotions--Western constructs as well as Indian, Javanese, and Indonesian notions such as *rasa* and *malu*—contribute to and are constitutive of transnational and gendered processes of racialization. Saraswati argues that it is how emotions come to be attached to certain objects and how they circulate that shape the "emotionscape" of white beauty in Indonesia. Her ground-breaking work is a nuanced theoretical exploration of the ways in which representations of beauty and the emotions they embody travel geographically and help shape attitudes and beliefs toward race and gender in a transnational world.

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