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Significance of the Presentation

My paper entitled “Action Heroines and Corporeal Utopia: Trans-Urban Women’s Cinema in Islamizing Pakistan,” delivered at the International Workshop on *Urban Utopias: Memory, Rights, and Speculation* convened by the Department of Comparative Literature at Utrecht University, was the only one to represent research on Pakistan in an event focusing on Asia and Europe. The paper’s particular significance was that it presented new knowledge about a traveling culture of Urdu Action Heroine film directed by a woman that blossomed against the grain of Islamist censorship in 1980’s Pakistan. Exploring rare archival research, the paper argued that star-director Shamim Ara’s familial collaborations with small-scale film entrepreneurs spread across South and Southeast Asian cities engendered a corporeal aesthetic resistant to religious and ethnic divisiveness. My work demonstrated the recent turn to Cultural Studies in Pakistan scholarship among international scholars and cultural comparativists who rarely attend to innovations in this field.

My analysis of Shamim Ara’s Action Heroine films provoked a comparative discussion on the gendered specificity of commercial cinema in Pakistan, revolving around the fact that this cinematic tradition differs from Indian Hindi Cinema by giving more screen time and agency to women. Moreover, my case study of Action Heroines in the context of Zia Ul Haq’s Islamization policies fostered critical dialogue on why “Islamic Cinema” never emerged in Pakistan by contrast to Post-Revolution Iran.