

Elizabeth Lhost
AIPS Conference Travel Grant
Ocean of Law II (Leiden, December 2016)

Mapping Legal Authority in the Indian Ocean: The Geography of 19th and 20th Century Fatwa Literature from South Asia

Summary:

With AIPS conference travel funding, I was able to attend “Ocean of Law II: Ocean of Law II: Islamic Legal Crossings in the Indian Ocean World.” This conference, which focused on the circulation of Islamic law and Islamic legal ideas in and around the Indian Ocean littoral brought together several scholars based at American and European institutions for the purposes of sharing and presenting our scholarship. At the conference, I presented a paper “Mapping Legal Authority in the Indian Ocean: The Geography of 19th- and 20th-century Fatwa Literature from South Asia,” which is based on the fifth chapter from my dissertation. In this paper, I examine Urdu- and Persian-language fatwa-literature written and published from Lucknow, Delhi, and Lahore in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Using digital tools for data analysis, I concentrated on the identities and origins of the people who sought fatwas (the *mustaftīs*) during this time to consider changes in the way fatwas in particular and vernacular iterations of Islamic legal discourse more generally circulated. The maps I created after analyzing data collected from these sources revealed the presence of trans-regional and transnational networks of circulation from Southeast Asia, Africa, the UK, and America. These patterns and modes of circulation, I suggest, represent a pre-cursor to some of the international networks that exist through use of the internet today. In addition to my own presentation, I also listened to other scholars present their work. From these presentations, I learned about current research in the anthropology of Islam in Southeast Asia and the history of Islamic legal circulations in the pre-modern and early modern periods. This information will be useful for situating my current work within the wider context of Islamic studies and Islamic history.