



Customizing the Sharia: Matrilineal Muslims and Islamic Law in the Indian Ocean Littoral

International Conference

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University of Exeter (United Kingdom), Leiden University (the Netherlands),
Gottingen University (Germany), and Bergen University (Norway)

Call for Papers

Islamic law has been a realm of patriarchal conceptualizations in which not only the Muslim patriarchal practices but also the patriarchal backgrounds of Western scholars spilled over to the studies about Muslims and Islam. Although some scholars have tried to overcome these projections onto the non-Western societies, such preconceptions have dominated the academia, particularly the Islamic (legal) historiography. The ways of understanding matrilineal Muslim communities have suffered the most. Both in the past and in the present, Muslims in different parts of Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka, Mozambique, and Comoros follow different forms of this women-centered social system. The existing literature mainly construed up by anthropologists and historians *also* has not studied these communities in a connected and comparative perspective and has ignored the centrality of Islam and Indian Ocean networks to the matrilineal system.

In the matrilineal societies women have more status, power and property than men who were considered to be outsiders or visitors without any ownership in the family possessions. Millions of Muslims across the Indian Ocean littoral have been following matrilineal system for several centuries as it has been one of the most convenient ways for the maritime trade: the men could come and go on voyage as traders, sailors and itinerants while the women stayed on land with the property and controlled the household and social spheres. This economic and social stability for women gave them the upper hand in economic and personal choices and within the marriages they could and did move freely.

The matrilineal system raised serious questions against the Islamic legal traditions evolved in the Middle East through its peculiar practices of property ownership, kinship relations and marital norms. It rejected several patriarchal interpretations of Islam and replaced them with more gender equalitarian regulations. By the late eighteenth century onward, many Arab, African, Indian and Malay male Muslim religious scholars came up with harsh criticisms against the system. Their oppositions were especially targeted at its inheritance laws where *men got little to no share in the property*. Some of these criticisms

surmounted to bloody massacres and violent movements against clan matriarchs and hereditary power centers. The colonial empires of the Dutch, British, French and Portuguese contributed to this entanglement through different scholarly, juridical and political pursuits.

Against this background, this international conference aims to address these lacunae with theoretical engagements on the basis of empirical researches. It also aims to *explore the ways in which the followers of the matrilineal Islamic praxis defended the system within the Islamic legal epistemologies and within the maritime social systems*. This in turn helps to understand how the matrilineal Muslims of the Indian Ocean constructed their own versions of Islam and its laws, often in conflict and by compromise with the dominant patriarchal perceptions and narratives.

We invite papers that would unravel the nuances of their negotiations with Islam in a connected and comparative perspective through disciplinary and interdisciplinary frameworks of anthropology, history, gender studies, area studies, legal studies and Islamic studies. We particularly encourage papers that would suggest innovative ways to understand the past and the present of the matrilineal Muslim communities on the basis of multi-cited ethnographies and/or multi-linguistic archival materials. If your research crosses any of these nodal points and if you are interested in the conference, please send an abstract of 400 words along with a short bio to Dr. Mahmood Kooria (mahmoodpana@gmail.com) by **May 25, 2019**. The selected submissions will be notified by June 5.

The conference has no registration fee. We have some funds to support the travel and accommodation expenses of the doctoral candidates and early career scholars. If you would like to be considered for this financial support, please indicate that along with your submission. We encourage senior scholars to seek funding at their home institutions. In the case if its absence, we will try to cover your expenses, at least partially.

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