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Book Review:

Islamic Law in Circulation: Shāfi'ī Texts Across the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, by Mahmood Kooria, Cambridge University Press, 2021. 240 pp. ISBN: 9781108481461

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Abstract:

This article reviews *Islamic Law in Circulation: Shāfi'ī Texts Across the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean* by Mahmood Kooria, which explores the transmission of Islamic legal texts within maritime networks across the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. Kooria introduces the concept of "maritime intellectuals" to explain scholar-merchants' dual role in disseminating Islamic legal knowledge. Employing an interdisciplinary approach that integrates philological studies, maritime history, and social network analysis, the book offers new insights into the dynamics of Islamic legal circulation. While the book excels in manuscript analysis and the use of multilingual sources, its limitations lie in the lack of engagement with oral traditions and the under-representation of women's roles in Islamic scholarly networks. Overall, this work significantly contributes to studying Islamic legal history and the global circulation of knowledge.

Keywords:

Islamic law; maritime networks; philology; Islamic history; text circulation

Author correspondence email: syuhood.bkooria@vub.be

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Abstrak:

Artikel ini mengulas buku *Islamic Law in Circulation: Shāfi'ī Texts Across the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean* karya Mahmood Kooria, yang membahas penyebaran teks-teks hukum Islam dalam jaringan maritim di Samudra Hindia dan Mediterania. Kooria memperkenalkan konsep "maritime intellectuals" untuk menjelaskan peran ulama-pedagang dalam transmisi ilmu hukum Islam. Dengan pendekatan interdisipliner yang menggabungkan studi filologis, sejarah maritim, dan analisis jaringan sosial, buku ini memberikan wawasan baru mengenai dinamika sirkulasi hukum Islam. Meskipun memiliki keunggulan dalam analisis manuskrip dan penggunaan sumber multibahasa, keterbatasannya terletak pada kurangnya eksplorasi terhadap tradisi lisan dan peran perempuan dalam jaringan keilmuan Islam. Secara keseluruhan, buku ini memberikan kontribusi penting dalam studi sejarah hukum Islam dan globalisasi keilmuan Islam.

Kata Kunci:

Hukum Islam; jaringan maritim; filologi; sejarah Islam; sirkulasi teks

In his profound work, "Islamic Law in Circulation," Mahmood Kooria presents a comprehensive analysis of the circulation of Shāfi'ī legal texts across the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean regions. As an Assistant Professor at the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (LIAS), Netherlands, Kooria has established a solid reputation in Islamic maritime history studies. His strong educational background from Jawaharlal Nehru University and Leiden University, coupled with his publications in prestigious journals such as the *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* and *Islamic Law and Society*, has established him as an authority in this field. His expertise in analyzing Arabic and Malay manuscripts, along with his mastery of various regional languages, provides a robust foundation for this research.

The book explores the complex networks that facilitated the dissemination of Islamic legal texts through maritime routes. Through six well-structured chapters, Kooria builds a convincing argument about the vital role of ports and trade networks in the transmission of Islamic legal knowledge. Beginning with a discussion of textual mobility and maritime networks, he develops the innovative concept of "maritime intellectuals" to explain the dual role of scholar-merchants in knowledge circulation. His analysis continues with an in-depth exploration of port cities as centers of learning, the process of textual adaptation in local contexts, and its impact on communal identity formation.

Kooria's methodology demonstrates the depth and breadth of his research. He integrates philological analysis of manuscripts from various libraries in Leiden, Istanbul, Cairo, Hyderabad, and Jakarta with extensive archival research. His interdisciplinary approach combines maritime history, legal studies, and social network analysis, creating a rich understanding of knowledge circulation dynamics in the pre-modern era. The use of sources in various languages, including Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Malay, adds an extra dimension to his analysis. (Kooria 2022)

Kooria's interdisciplinary approach is undoubtedly one of the book's strongest aspects. However, there are certain limitations in how he integrates these various disciplines. While his philological analysis of manuscripts from multiple libraries is thorough, some of his interpretations are not sufficiently contextualized with broader socio-economic evidence. Additionally, his reliance on written sources in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Malay overlooks oral traditions and local community narratives that could provide a more nuanced perspective. This methodological gap may limit the book's ability to fully capture the complexities of Islamic legal interactions within their broader social contexts

These methodological weaknesses not only affect the completeness of the book's historical analysis but also influence how we understand the dynamics of Islamic legal transmission in the maritime world. With limited exploration of oral sources and local community perspectives, there is a possibility that the book's portrayal leans more towards the experiences of the intellectual elite rather than the broader society's adaptation of Islamic law. Additionally, the tendency to focus more on certain regions results in an imbalanced global perspective on the spread of Islamic law. Therefore, while this book makes a valuable contribution to understanding the intellectual networks of Islam in maritime regions, readers should remain aware of its limitations in scope and perspective.

The main strength of this work lies in Kooria's ability to integrate various types of primary sources with a sophisticated theoretical framework. His analysis of marginalia and annotations in legal manuscripts provides valuable insights into how these texts were received and interpreted in different local contexts. While Kooria constructs a strong argument regarding the role of 'maritime intellectuals' in the dissemination of Islamic law, his analysis provides little space for the role of women within these scholarly networks. Research has shown that women played a significant role in the transmission of Islamic law—as recorders, educators, and participants in legal discussions. The lack of exploration into their contributions makes the book's narrative appear male-centric, potentially narrowing our understanding of intellectual dynamics in maritime Islamic history. Furthermore, despite the book's claim to cover extensive Islamic legal networks, there is a noticeable geographical imbalance. Regions such as East Africa and Southeast Asia receive considerably less attention compared to the Middle East and India. As a result, the portrayal of Islamic legal circulation feels somewhat skewed, favoring certain regions over others.

In the broader context of scholarship, "Islamic Law in Circulation" makes significant contributions to several important previous works. This book complements Engseng Ho's "The Graves of Tarim" (Ho 2010) with its specific focus on legal aspects while expanding the perspectives proposed by Sebastian Prange in "Monsoon Islam" (Prange 2018) into the textual dimension. The dialogue established with Wael Hallaq's works on Islamic legal thought enriches our understanding of legal adaptation dynamics in cross-cultural contexts. (Hallaq 2004)

The book's theoretical contributions are substantial. Kooria not only offers a new model for understanding maritime knowledge circulation but also reconceptualizes the "center-periphery" relationship in Islamic studies. His theory on cross-cultural legal adaptation opens new perspectives in understanding how Islamic legal systems evolve and adapt in diverse local contexts. His research implications open new pathways for gender studies in knowledge transmission and encourage comparative research across Islamic legal schools.

Kooria's writing style deserves special appreciation. His clear and engaging prose makes complex material more accessible without sacrificing academic depth. His logical argument structure helps readers follow complex ideas more easily, while the balance between technical detail and accessibility makes this book valuable for various audiences.

"Islamic Law in Circulation" is a groundbreaking work that transforms our understanding of Islamic law dissemination. This book is highly recommended for academics in Islamic history, comparative law, and maritime history researchers. Graduate students in Islamic studies and Asian history will gain valuable insights, while contemporary Islamic law practitioners and manuscript specialists will find new perspectives that enrich their understanding. The significance of this work will be felt for a long time, not only in global history and legal studies but also in our understanding of the dynamics of religious globalization and cross-cultural knowledge transmission.

In the context of contemporary Islamic legal discourse, this work offers invaluable insights into how legal traditions adapt and evolve across different cultural and geographical contexts. Kooria's analysis of historical legal circulation patterns provides crucial perspectives for understanding current debates about Islamic law's adaptability and universality. His demonstration of how legal texts were historically contextualized and reinterpreted in different regions offers important lessons for contemporary efforts to reconcile Islamic legal principles with modern challenges. This historical perspective on legal transmission and adaptation contributes significantly to ongoing discussions about Islamic legal reform, cultural authenticity, and the balance between universal principles and local applications in Islamic jurisprudence.

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Muhammad Fauzinudin Faiz

UIN Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, Indonesia.

Muhammad Fauzinudin Faiz is a doctoral scholar at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University (UIN-SUKA) Yogyakarta and currently a lecturer at Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq State Islamic

University (UIN-KHAS) Jember. His research interests focus mainly on Islamic Economics and Islamic Law, including Islamic Family Law, Islamic Law and Society, Islamic Law and Gender, Islamic Law and Politics, Islamic Law and Jurisprudence, and Islamic Law and Legal Theory. He serves as the Editor-in-Chief of the Indonesian Journal of Islamic Law (IJIL) under the Department of Islamic Family Law, Postgraduate Programme, and The Journal of Islamic Economic Perspectives (JIEP), Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business, State Islamic University of Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, Indonesia. He can be contacted via email at mufaddin@uinkhas.ac.id.

Syuhod B Kooria

Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Belgium.

Syuhod B Kooria completed his undergraduate studies at Utrecht University, followed by his Master's and Doctoral degrees from Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) in Brussels, Belgium. His research interests encompass Islamic History, Maritime Studies, and Legal History, with particular focus on the circulation of Islamic texts and knowledge across the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean regions. He has published extensively in reputable journals including the Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient and Islamic Law and Society. His work bridges multiple disciplines, combining historical, legal, and maritime perspectives to understand the transmission of Islamic knowledge across different cultural contexts. His doctoral research at VUB focused on Islamic legal traditions and their transmission through maritime networks. He currently serves as a researcher and lecturer at VUB, where he continues to contribute to the field of Islamic and Maritime Studies. He can be contacted via email at syuhod.bkooria@vub.be.