

American Institute for Pakistan Studies
AIPS Domestic Conference Travel Award
Mishal Khan
PhD Candidate
University of Chicago

Significance of Presentation

My presentation at the Social Science History Association (December 8th 2018) was an important milestone in terms of introducing my work to a larger sociological audience. This panel, “Imperial Constructs” was a unique opportunity for myself and other members of the next generation of sociologists, to discuss the future of global historical sociology, and postcolonial sociology more generally. Members on this panel were working on projects as diverse and important as citizenship and belonging to the metropole among Jamaicans, the birth of pan-Africanism in South Africa, international regimes of medicine and health regulation, and connections between American and Indian cotton plantation regimes. Being on this panel and part of this nascent but growing conversation in this exciting area, I was able to place colonial Sindh and its role in the larger structures of empire squarely at the forefront.

My presentation analyzed how labour regimes are shaped by the abolition moment in late nineteenth century colonial India, and demonstrated this through the case of Sindh. The research presented aimed not only to give us analytical purchase on some key questions within Pakistani Studies, but also to use the case of Pakistan and its deeper colonial history to generate theories about the historical roots of labour and servitude regimes into the twentieth century. For instance, what is the specific relationship between global legal regimes in the colonial era and the postcolonial labour regime in the contemporary Pakistani state? What is unique about Pakistan in terms of its inherited legacies from the colonial era, compared to India? How important was India as a site of “free labour” to obfuscating various forms of “unfree” labour that remain embedded in our contemporary definitions of “slavery” today? Maintaining a cross-regional and global frame to answer these complex questions is imperative. Therefore forums such as the Social Science History Association are a vital space for challenging and advancing the debates taking place in Pakistan studies and South Asian studies more generally.