



women. He portrays the new Islamic courts as ‘relatively “female-friendly”’, without denying punitive components and structural inequalities. In family law, women form the majority of Muslims requesting the courts’ services to support them in resolving domestic problems. The issue at stake is not equality before the law, but that in ‘law in action’ (as opposed to law in the books) women may be getting ‘more justice’ than before. The concluding chapter connects the various streams again and adds insights from Indonesia and Egypt.

Peletz convincingly delivers his book’s main declared objectives, namely to describe multi-directional, sometimes contradictory complexities in the micro-politics and discourses of Malaysia’s ‘rebranded’ Sharia judiciary, to problematise reductionist explanations of ‘Islamisation’ and de-exoticise Sharia courts, and to illustrate why Malaysia’s Sharia judiciary is beneficially theorised as a global assemblage, notwithstanding emic essentialisations. The courts he portrays are dialectically informed by the pastoral and punitive, the national and the cosmopolitan, the Islamic and the secular, and the ‘exceedingly high-tech’ and the down-to-earth human. They de-stabilise some legal-cultural distinctions between Islamic judiciaries and their counterparts, both within Malaysia’s dual legal system and in the broader global picture.

*Sharia transformations* is a groundbreaking study. It should for many years to come be essential reading for anyone interested in the cultural politics of Islamic courts, in and beyond Malaysia. The book is more than a convincingly theorised empirical study of courts, it also elucidates the contemporary global condition, where cultural forms of the market, the magnetism of standardisation, formalisation and bureaucratisation are omnipresent forces in the remaking of social institutions— notwithstanding the ambivalences, critiques and resistances they characteristically bring with them. The book is destined to become another foundational classic, like several of Peletz’s earlier writings. Its potential impact far transcends Southeast Asian Studies, and unsurprisingly, scholars interested in Islamic courts elsewhere are already enthusiastically engaging with its findings.

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## Myanmar

*Everyday justice in Myanmar: Informal resolutions and state evasion in a time of contested transition*

Edited by HELENE MARIA KYED

Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2020. Map, Figures, Notes, Bibliography, Index.  
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Before Myanmar’s 2021 coup, there was an all-too-brief moment when multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary and multi-national teams could work collaboratively on ambitious research projects informed by deep field research and careful attention to local conditions. Helene Maria Kyed, a senior researcher at the Danish Institute

for International Studies, led such a team under the banner of 'Everyday Justice and Security in the Myanmar Transition'. For short, they called it 'Everjust'.

This edited book draws its great strength from the combined efforts of Myanmar and Danish scholars who share a deep commitment to better appreciating the local dynamics of peace-building, dispute resolution, law reform, policing and religious dialogue in many different corners of Myanmar: Yangon, Mon State, the Pa-O and Naga Self-Administered Zones, and field sites across the diverse terrain of Karen society. The substantial contributions by researchers from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Yangon are notable in this regard. Such international collaborations have helped to highlight the talent, ambition, technique and adaptability of Myanmar's social scientists as they have published high-quality research outputs, often related to cultures, histories and places defined by their own family and personal stories.

Everjust brought together the skills of an impressive team and has now made an enduring contribution to understanding justice and politics during what Yangon University's Professor Mya Mya Khin described, quite appropriately in her Foreword, as 'an exciting, but also an unpredictable, time of transition to democracy' (p. vii). The book then begins with Helene Maria Kyed's contextual introduction, which sets out Everjust's conceptual and empirical foundations and each chapter's specific contributions. 'Legal pluralism' is invoked as the primary organising framework, while Kyed also spends time explaining the shared themes of local and informal dispute resolution; state evasion (drawing inspiration from James Scott, *The art of not being governed*, 2009); the roles of cultural norms and religious-spiritual beliefs; and the dynamics of identity politics in their specific Myanmar forms.

Chapter 1 by Mi Thang Sorn Poine and Kyed describes 'forum shopping' where victims and/or perpetrators of crimes in southern Mon State seek to use different dispute resolution options to their advantage. This chapter offers a rich ethnographic discussion of the ways that 'justice provision is often driven more by politics and power than by efforts to ensure that ordinary villagers get the kinds of justice they seek' (p. 67). The next chapter, by Mi Thang Sorn Poine and Nan Tin Nilar Win, builds on this assessment in a rural area of the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone in southern Shan State. Through detailed case studies, they make the critical point that any further development of the local justice system would benefit from an emphasis on ensuring 'the voices of the people are heard in public and the misuse of power by armed actors is avoided' (p. 98).

The volume includes another chapter on social and political issues in a Self-Administered Zone, in this case, controlled by the Naga, who live along the border with India in Myanmar's far northwest. One of the authors, Lue Htar, is Naga Goga, and the study benefits much from her language skills and local knowledge, with interviews conducted with around 100 local informants. This chapter offers unique insights into the function and future of customary law in Naga society. Chapter 4 by Marie Knakkegaard Richthammer then considers the role of Buddhist and animist non-state mechanisms for dispute resolution and access to justice in the Karen State. In the next chapter, Lwin Lwin Mon also considers Karen cultural and religious issues, based on 150 qualitative interviews, in a Karen-dominated area of Yangon where Christian faith is a vital component of the justice repertoire.

Than Pale's chapter 6, which again is based on extensive field research and scores of in-depth interviews, examines the situation for Buddhists and Muslims in Hpa-an, the capital of Karen State. The four case studies highlight the types of issues requiring careful interreligious and cross-cultural dispute management: a farming dispute, the theft of a chicken, a public disturbance, and threats of violence. Than Pale's positive appraisal of the interreligious conflict resolution landscape ends with the assessment that 'ethno-religious conflict is politically constructed from the outside, rather than being the result of identity differences in everyday life, where Muslims and Buddhists share more similarities than differences' (p. 213). Religious issues are also at the heart of the chapter by Mikael Gravers and Anders Baltzer Jorgensen, who draw on decades of experience researching Karen issues.

In chapter 8, Annika Pohl Harrison explores the challenging justice landscape in a 'marginal neighbourhood' of Mawlamyine in Mon State. This chapter offers conceptual insights about state avoidance and what she calls 'inherently inauthentic authority' (p. 274). It is a fascinating study of the tragedies of everyday injustice in Myanmar, where a 'long life under authoritarian rule leaves its mark on communities' (p. 277). The final two chapters, by Elizabeth Rhoads and Kirsten McConnachie, respectively, deal with important aspects of everyday justice in Yangon and in Karen refugee camps in Thailand. These chapters help to situate the broad themes of legal pluralism in contexts of significant state (and international) involvement.

Taken together, the chapters of *Everyday justice in Myanmar* capture the complexities and contradictions of the country's recent moves towards more democratic and inclusive governance. With the February 2021 coup, Myanmar's legal and political order has been re-defined to match the narrow priorities of the military leadership. Injustices—including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, state-sanctioned murder—are used to eliminate the army's opponents and terrorise the population-at-large. The lesson of this book is that, with its interlocking traditions of cultural, religious and legal pluralism, Myanmar has vast resources on which a more inclusive and fairer system may eventually be built. Tragically, the Myanmar people now face a future where, too often, the outcomes of disputes and conflicts will be determined based on armed force alone.

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## Myanmar

### *Painting Myanmar's transition*

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For many months after February 2021, Myanmar often featured in international media headlines and attracted the attention of millions of social media users attempting to capture daily life in the country after the military coup. One question that has arisen