

Beyond Safety and Statehood: Resistance in Myanmar and the Limits of Global Norms

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Abstract

In Myanmar, the actors who are resisting military coup from the frontline do not think safety as something produced by neutrality. They do not think risk as something that an individual should manage for one's own sake through formality and procedures. They have to make decisions whether to resist, stay, flee or negotiate in conditions where risks are shared and unevenly distributed, as well as in morally unsure conditions. This article is trying to look into how these ground insights complicate with dominant norms on humanitarian aids, peacebuilding and transitional justice. Especially, the author looks into where these norms assume the nation-state as primary guarantor of protection and treat political harm through individualistic, state-centric, or bureaucratic categories. Based on qualitative meaning mapping research with resistance-linked actors, civil society workers, intermediaries, and international practitioners, the article explores an interpretive gap between global institutional logic and local survival realities. The evidence cannot suggest that global norms are inherently harmful or that local resistance actors are automatically more ethical. Rather, it suggests that global norms such as transparency, neutrality, accountability, and localization may cause political harm when translated through compliance systems that not adequately take account of surveillance risk, contested legitimacy, unequal vulnerability, and limited local power to contest donor interpretations. The study observed recurring patterns of friction. Some of them are transparency requirements that may expose vulnerable networks, neutral engagement that may be interpreted locally as legitimizing the military junta, localization practices that may transfer risk without expanding agency, and aid categories that may erode dignity, trust, and political agency. The argument is not against global norms, but against norms being imposed without interpretive accountability, shared risk, and local power to contest meaning.