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JUDGING THROUGH NARRATIVE: MUSLIM FAMILY LAWS IN NON-MUSLIM COURTS

Israel, India, Greece, and Ghana employ personal status regimes under which Muslim citizens are subject to Muslim family law (MFL), often applied and interpreted by non-Muslim judges. Despite this shared institutional architecture, outcomes vary markedly: in some jurisdictions, judicial engagement fosters reform and trust, while in others it produces alienation and stagnation. This presentation asks why similar legal arrangements generate such divergent outcomes.

Drawing on an original dataset of approximately 3,000 judicial decisions and over 400 interviews across four countries, I argue that the key mechanism is narrational cohesion. In adjudicating MFL, non-Muslim judges rely on recurring master narratives, and the degree to which these are articulated consistently across decisions shapes how law is received beyond the courtroom. When judicial narratives are cohesive and resonate with surrounding communities, they diffuse into broader legal consciousness, facilitating socio-legal reform and strengthening perceptions of procedural justice and legal inclusion. When narratives are incohesive, they send conflicting signals that stall reform, deepen distrust, and reinforce estrangement.

TIME

Monday, April 27, 2026
11:40AM-1:10PM

LOCATION

SSC 125

ZOOM DETAILS

Meeting ID:
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