

EDITED BY
LARS ENGBERG-PEDERSEN, ADAM FEJERSKOV,
AND SIGNE MARIE COLD-RAVNKILDE

RETHINKING GENDER EQUALITY IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

THE DELUSION OF NORM DIFFUSION



Rethinking Gender Equality in Global Governance

Lars Engberg-Pedersen · Adam Fejerskov ·
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Editors

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The Delusion of Norm Diffusion

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PREFACE

This book originates in a research programme on global norms of gender equality and development organisations. During the past twenty years, numerous international agreements have tried to shape international development cooperation in terms of both its goals and its means. At the same time, new public and private actors from all parts of the world have begun to engage in development cooperation, which is no longer a matter of rich countries in the North providing aid to poor countries in the South. Given these developments, the research programme sought to analyse how seven substantially different aid agencies (the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation, Danida—Denmark’s official development cooperation, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Oxfam GB, South Africa’s Development Cooperation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Bank) engage with global norms of gender equality and how the homogenising effects of global agreements interact with relatively heterogeneous organisations.

In 2016, participants in the research programme organised a conference on global norms of gender equality and the politics of development cooperation. Many contributors to this book took part in the conference where discussions of the transnational dynamics of gender equality norms emerged and where the importance of contexts was highlighted in many different presentations. At an authors’ workshop in 2017, these discussions were developed on the basis of empirical studies and theoretical papers. Although all contributors emphasise different aspects of how actors engage with global norms, they share an interest in actors,

contexts and the volatility of global norms of gender equality. This has produced a volume, which seeks to question the homogenising perspective of norm diffusion and instead outlines a situated approach to the study of global norms.

We, the editors of the book, would like to thank the contributors for strong support and lively interest in the development of the book. It has been a great pleasure and an intellectual enjoyment to develop the ideas in cooperation. In finalising the manuscript, we have received immense help from Thomas Glud Skjødt and Karl Møller whose thorough and effective work enabled us to keep the deadlines. We would also like to thank the Danish Social Sciences Research Council for the grant supporting the research on which this book builds.

Copenhagen, Denmark

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACP	Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific
AfD	Alternative for Germany
AMEXCID	Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation
AMFIU	Association of Microfinance Institutions of Uganda
ANT	Actor-Network Theory
BPfA	Beijing Platform of Action
BWPI	Brooks World Poverty Institute
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CERD	Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CIM	Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres
CSDP	Common Security and Development Policy
CSW UN	Commission on the Status of Women
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
DG	Directorate General
ECJ	European Court of Justice
ECOSOC	UN's Economic and Social Council
EEAS	European External Action Service
ELA	Empowerment for Livelihoods and Adolescents
EPA	European Partnership Agreements
EPLO	European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
EPRC	Economic Policy Research Centre
EU	European Union
EUC	EU Commission
GAD	Gender and Development
GDKS	Gender and Development Knowledge Service

GLONO	Global Norms and Heterogeneous Development Organizations research project
GM	Gender Mainstreaming
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
HRI	Human Rights Initiative
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
IO	International Organization
IR	International Relations
IRW	Islamic Relief Worldwide
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
Mercosur	Mercado Comun del Sur
MISR	Makerere Institute of Social Research
NCM	Nordic Council of Ministers
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OAS	Organization of American States
OSAGI	The Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PRIO	Peace Research Institute Oslo
REM	Reunion Especializada de la Mujer
RISDP	Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan
RMAAM	Mercosur Meeting of Female Ministers and Highest-Level Authorities on Women
SACCO	Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UWESO	The Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans
VAW	Violence Against Women
VOW	Voices of Women

VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WAD	Women and Development
WHO	World Health Organization
WID	Women in Development

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Rethinking the Study of Global Gender Equality Norms: Towards a Situated Approach

*Adam Fejerskov, Lars Engberg-Pedersen
and Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde*

Since World War II, efforts to establish global governance have intensified and increasingly involved all countries in the world. International agreements, organisations and ideas have sought to create widely accepted practices for solving problems in almost all spheres of life. Substantial work has concentrated on the development of collaborative procedures to ensure that states get together partly to solve problems that cannot be addressed individually, but also so that powerful countries can promote their particular interests. Over the years, many actors have also sought to push the

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international community to adopt decisions about long-term goals involving social, political and economic change. These attempts address how societies should be organised, sometimes being grounded in a humanitarian agenda, sometimes in dominant political and economic thinking. In a globalised and diversified world, with multiple close connections between countries and different powerful views on global and local development, the task of establishing international normative priorities has become as contested and conflict-ridden as it has become important. Global governance is by no means obvious, and today has become a source of ambivalence because of the relationship between outdated international institutions established during the Cold War, fortified nation states pursuing particularistic interests and technocratic issue-based attempts to reach international agreement.

The study of how global norms influence policies and practices around the world has emerged as a principal field of scholarship across international studies in recent decades (Checkel 1999; Risse et al. 1999; Acharya 2004; Risse and Sikink 1999). Particularly under the heading of norm diffusion, researchers have analysed how norms travel and the mechanisms facilitate this. A major idea in this approach is that global norms spread relatively unchanged across contexts and that they gradually diffuse across the world once a certain threshold of norm acceptance is achieved (Finnemore and Sikink 1998). In response to this, under the heading of translation, others have argued that norms are continually changed when they travel to new contexts, subjected to interpretation and addressed differently in different places (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996; Acharya 2004; Zwingel 2012). Both traditions have provided significant contributions to analysing how global norms influence social interaction in concrete contexts.

Within the study of global norms, the broad umbrella of 'gender equality' has become a central empirical arena for exploring how such norms are engaged with, potentially move and influence policies and practices, informing broader theoretical and conceptual debates with fresh thinking (see Zwingel 2016; van der Vleuten et al. 2014b; Levitt and Merry 2009). Gender equality is a contested and increasingly challenged issue that is now coming under pressure from numerous sides, from the strong anti-feminist discourses and anti-abortion development policies of the current US administration to similar threats to women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights from religious and conservative groups in Europe, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Its central

place in human relations has made it an important concern in international cooperation, with a large number of conventions and declarations seeking to establish norms for addressing different issues of gender equality and inequality.¹ Despite there being little agreement on its meaning and form, its ideal core is often associated with aims of achieving equal political, economic, personal and social rights for women, as well as improving relations between women and men. The ambition of fundamentally challenging patriarchal social structures and discourses has always evoked different responses in the form of hostility, resistance, indifference or deeply felt support. As obvious and necessary as the norms seem to many, as alarming and destructive do they appear in the eyes of others who see their promotion of radical changes as eroding traditional structures of power, culture and religion in society. Due to the multiple meanings associated with the term, as a norm gender equality has sometimes been described as an ‘empty signifier that takes as many meanings as the variety of visions and debates on the issue allow them to take’ (Verloo and Lombardo 2007: 22). However, it could also be seen as an ‘overloaded signifier’ (Juul Petersen 2018) incorporating a range of different and sometimes even contradictory understandings, implying that they can and should be made meaningful to different audiences. Despite their somewhat diffuse nature, global norms on gender equality are unavoidable in social interaction. Particular actors have to address them whether they like them or not because they have acquired significant legitimacy, sometimes by way of approval in international agreements (Townes 2010). Hence, much policy-making and social change in regional, national and local contexts relates to global norms, sometimes straightforwardly turning them into a negotiated reality, sometimes, though more and more rarely, carefully avoiding them altogether, and sometimes developing initiatives in critical opposition to them. Accordingly, gender equality provides a compelling case for the study of global norms in international politics.

This book analyses the institutional and often highly political processes stemming from engagement with global norms of gender equality by individual and social actors, whether they are local, national, regional or transnational in nature. It brings together scholars who, each in their own way, question and challenge the notion that norms travel or are diffused across and among contexts, organisations or individuals. Instead they accentuate the muddy, multi-actor, multi-level processes of interaction that occur whenever norms are used, manipulated, bent

or betrayed by actors. This is what we call a *situated approach to norm engagement*, which focuses attention on the different situations and contexts, each providing a different set of constraints and opportunities for action. Central issues taken up in the book include: (i) identification of the actors involved in the constitution of, or exclusion from, processes of norm engagement; (ii) the ways in which norms of gender equality are produced, interpreted, debated and transformed; and (iii) the circumstances, positions and power relations influencing the processes and outcome of engagement with gender norms. These issues are explored in a variety of contexts, exhibiting how gender equality provides a vantage point for studying both concrete engagement with norms and, more theoretically, abstract conceptions of their influence in different contexts. The outcome is to pose a significant challenge to some of the taken-for-granted or dominant ideas on how norms incite change and how they matter in both policy and practice.

In this introduction, we outline the situated approach to norm engagement, being inspired by the book's chapters, while at the same time, providing a framework stimulated by and in dialogue with them. The aim of the book is to explore how actors and organisations engage with and ascribe meanings to gender equality norms and what role they play in different situations and contexts. The situated approach underlines how the intersubjective nature of norms means that these are addressed, reproduced or changed in social interaction and cannot be understood as existing outside such processes. Norms do not have any inherent energy that transports them across boundaries. Rather, actors relate to them in different situations, whether intentionally or not, and whether through discourses or practices. In doing so, they may be influenced by the norms, but may also influence them in return and change their meaning. This also suggests that global norms are but one element that actors consider in a given situation when they develop new policies and practices, often 'muddling through' in contingent ways as they seek to derive meaning out of the situations in which they find themselves.

The remainder of this introduction consists of five parts. First, we discuss the conceptualisation of norms, a far from straightforward matter. We seek to redirect attention from regulatory and constitutive norms to prescriptive norms, like gender equality, and proposes a definition of norms which allows for their contested nature. Secondly, we turn to gender equality and how it finds expression in global norms. Here we argue that there is no consistent global set of norms of gender equality,

although we believe that they share certain characteristics and that their prescriptive power lies in a shared ability to reject gender-based discrimination. Thirdly, we confront dominant conceptualisations of norm ‘movement’ as they are found in the bodies of literature on diffusion and translation. Given the contested nature of many prescriptive norms, we find ‘travel’ metaphors of little use in describing the role of global norms in national and local contexts. This also disregards the multi-directional nature of norm engagement where actors seek to promote particular interpretations globally as well as locally. Fourthly, we outline the situated approach to engagement with norms. This approach emphasises actors and their interpretations of the situations in which they engage with global norms. As organisations constitute a primary site of engagement with global gender equality norms, we highlight particular organisational issues that significantly shape the interpretation of norms. Finally, we describe how the different chapters of the book take up central issues related to the situated approach to norm engagement.

THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF NORMS

The basis for the emerging interest in norms in international studies in the 1980s and particularly the 1990s was partly a critique of the material focus in mainstream thinking about the environment of international relations (Katzenstein 1996). It was also partly a matter of the problems in understanding how the international mirrored the national while emphasising the lack of a sovereign, a situation sometimes described as the ‘anarchy’ of international society (Kratochwil 1989). The focus on the material aspects of the domestic and international environment that influences state interests and policies was viewed as insufficient and even inaccurate by scholars emphasising cultural and institutional issues. However, since the latter were developed in response to the former, they were to some extent pressed into identifying tangible elements of the environment if they were to be taken seriously. In this sense, the historical development circumscribed the understanding of institutions and norms and led to a reification of cultural issues. Furthermore, the difficulties of understanding international cooperation using concepts developed to describe domestic politics led to arguments emphasising other aspects of governance than that of the sovereign state. Given the significance of not having a sovereign authority to temper international conflicts, academics were inclined to look for tangible, unchanging factors

that could explain the stability and continuity of international cooperation. This is part of the explanation for theoretical discussions being pulled towards a conceptualisation of norms that emphasised them as relatively fixed, unchanging landmarks in international cooperation.

The historical background also explains some other features of the understanding of norms as they were described in this literature. Rules and norms are very closely related to one another by Kratochwil, who describes them as ‘problem-solving devices for dealing with the recurrent issues of social life: conflict and cooperation’ (Kratochwil 1989: 69). They ‘simplify choices for actors with non-identical preferences facing each other in a world characterised by scarcity’ (ibid.: 14). Inspired by game theory and certain aspects of institutional thinking, here norms were seen as emerging to help actors change situations of social conflict into situation of social cooperation. While there is a certain functional flavour to this argument, since it precludes the existence of norms complicating cooperation, it suggests that repeated social interactions induce stabilising norms that facilitate cooperation. Kratochwil argues that a sovereign authority is not needed to ensure mutual recognition of the interests of contending parties. He does so by distinguishing between first-, second- and third-party modes of reasoning where an actor imposes a norm in the first-party context, actors bargain to satisfy their own interests in second-party contexts, even by ‘breaking the other’s will’ (Kratochwil 1989: 35), while third-party reasoning ‘is characterised by the emergence of a “moral point of view”, i.e., impartiality and equality as to the claims and interests of the contending parties’ (Kratochwil 1989: 13). Where actors have interacted several times, a third-party reasoning may develop, including the norms of equality of standing, mutual recognition of core concerns, the space and time of negotiations, etc. These norms are often separated into regulative and constitutive norms, where the latter establish identities and the fundamental nature of the interaction, while the former shape its concrete practices.

Kratochwil’s approach was helpful in clarifying how norms play a role when sovereign states interact and international conflicts are turned into negotiable issues. However, this approach is less helpful in explaining the role of international norms for human values that are formalised in conventions, declarations and other international agreements. Once sovereign states have reached some sort of common understanding, and a norm for dealing with a particular issue has emerged, how should we describe the process through which this norm achieves its impact?

The issue here is not to understand why or how states cooperate, but the contents and role of such prescriptive norms. In line with Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), we suggest distinguishing between, on the one hand, regulative and constitutive norms, which to some extent can be said to be problem-solving norms in relation to conflicts and cooperation, and on the other hand, prescriptive norms which seek to outline the elements of an ideal society. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is obviously a very important example of the latter that has grown in importance over the years. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, a large number of thematic UN summits sought to establish norms on a wide range of issues, and in the last couple of decades discussions over international development cooperation have begun to spread and set normative standards for all countries across the world. The Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 constitute a quite detailed attempt to lay down universal prescriptive norms, clearly building on international discussions and agreements since World War II regarding ideas about an ideal society. Global norms like gender equality, education for all and freedom of speech seek above all to convey a message about the kind of society that everybody should strive for. They have implications for specific actors, but their primary aim is not to establish appropriate behaviour for particular actors in given situations.

In this book, we concentrate on prescriptive norms, which we conceptualise as *acknowledged, but not necessarily accepted, understandings of collective ambitions*. These norms are acknowledged in the sense that *all* relevant actors see it as politically necessary to address or relate to them within a given field, but without necessarily accepting or subscribing to them. In this conceptualisation, norms are nearly always contested and in a process of change. Different actors will promote different interpretations of norms and will be in different historical, economic and political positions to do so. Every new international occasion for adopting declarations or developing agreements in the field of a norm will provide opportunities for changing it. This implies that the meaning of a norm can only be identified within a particular context at a given moment in time. There is no one understanding of a norm across the globe and across history, and even in a room with diplomats having just signed an agreement, different interpretations of the document will typically exist. However, this does not mean that any interpretation goes or that prescriptive norms can be used to legitimise any action. As the chapter by *Zwingel* shows, with time, a certain genealogy evolves regarding norms

of gender equality, reflected in the way UN declarations come to represent moments and spaces where such norms are temporarily fixed and which come to serve as reference points for new agendas. Views and practices may be so much off-target that it becomes impossible to sustain an argument of norm compliance, though there is rarely a hard-and-fast boundary between norm compliance and denial. Despite this gradual transition, a major purpose of many prescriptive norms is to delegitimise particular practices and views, rather than to squarely sanction one narrowly defined view. Although gender equality norms can be interpreted in different ways, and although they change over time, they typically share a criticism of specific discriminating practices.

This points to the inherently political nature of prescriptive norms since they address fundamental questions about the distribution of opportunities and resources. Some will gain and others lose if internationally agreed prescriptive norms prevail in a given context. This is another reason why norms are contested and subject to diverse interpretations, both nationally and internationally. In an increasingly interdependent world where states and diverse actors are competing for legitimacy, international prescriptive norms constitute significant points of reference and instruments in struggles for power and influence, in many cases framing the contents of policy discussions. Norms are far from being independent of these struggles, and they may be vigorously contested sometimes due to their contents, but often also because actors can profit from this in other political contexts. Politics is central to understanding the emergence, development and impact of norms.

Other common definitions of norms combine three elements: (1) collective expectations or standards regarding (2) proper or appropriate behaviour for (3) particular actors and identities (Jepperson et al. 1996: 54; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 891). While it may sometimes be possible to identify the two last elements relatively clearly, the first is nearly always contested. Someone will always be outside the collective, and even when what particular actors should do in specific situations has been written into declarations, there is most often room for interpretation and different opinions regarding the standard. With reference to the works cited above, scholars have argued that mainstream International Relations research on norms employs a definition of norms as 'shared understandings' which precludes contestation (Niemann and Schillinger 2016). This criticism is reasonable to the extent that much mainstream work analyses norms as having fixed meanings regardless of time and

space. However, ‘shared understandings’ do not imply that everybody subscribes to a particular understanding; some may be outside the mainstream and ready to criticise it, so the problem with the above definitions is less that they do not allow for contestation and more that they suffer from a lack of clarity concerning collective expectations. These may include a smaller or larger subset of a population, which may change across time, space and issue, and which may be more or less precise. As a result, all sorts of collective expectations are included in the term ‘norm’. Furthermore, the definitions’ focus on appropriate behaviour for particular actors appears to be more relevant for regulative and constitutive norms than for prescriptive norms. While the latter may imply specific actions by designated actors, their central message is to establish an ideal state of being regarding a particular issue.

Internationally agreed norms of gender equality seek to change widespread gender norms marginalising women (Zwingel 2016). This suggests that norms not only have significant political implications, they also address embedded social values, which explains why those who stand to gain from gender equality norms may actually oppose them. Norms may reflect very basic understandings of identity, meaning and belonging, and a change of these risks producing profound anxiety. When taken-for-granted norms are brought into the light of day, they sometimes quickly vanish because times have changed and they seem outdated. Yet, this is far from necessarily the case. Taken-for-granted norms may be so entrenched in social life that even a conscious acceptance of a contradictory global norm may have little impact in reality. Certain fortified norms may, accordingly, inhibit normative change within society. As such, norms come in many shapes in terms of their degree of formality. Some emerge more or less rapidly and are sanctioned by state leaders in international declarations, while others are deeply entrenched practices in specific societies. Both may reflect strong values about how a society should be organised, but they differ in terms of whether they are taken for granted. In the present context, it is useful to note that the former may specifically address the latter.

GLOBAL GENDER EQUALITY NORMS

How should we characterise gender equality norms? Some argue that gender equality has acquired the status of a norm (Zwingel 2016: 16), while others talk about norms pertaining to different aspects of gender

equality. This includes gender mainstreaming (True and Mintrom 2001; Krook and True 2012; True 2010; van Eerdewijk and Davids 2014; van der Vleuten et al. 2014b), gender-balanced decision-making (Krook and True 2012; Swiss and Fallon 2016); women's empowerment (Eyben and Napier-Moore 2009), preventing violence against women (True 2012), women's labour rights (Savery 2007) and sexual and reproductive health and rights (Sen 2014). Different norms of gender equality indicate that gender equality will only (if ever) be accomplished when actors comply with a set of norms that together formulate what it takes to establish equality between the sexes. These norms may again consist of sub-norms that form a normative hierarchy when taken together, which, however, suggests a sort of consistency between the different elements. As Susanne Zwingel (2016) notes, there is no such consistent set of norms in this field or in any other field, and norms regarding, for instance, women's role in the labour market have changed dramatically over the years (Krook and True 2012). As mentioned earlier, some argue that gender equality 'can be seen as an empty signifier that takes on as many meanings as the variety of visions and debates on the issue allow it to take' (Verloo and Lombardo 2007: 22); others see the history of gender and development as one of contradictions, contestations and challenges (Cornwall et al. 2007).

Nevertheless, gender equality norms share certain characteristics. First, they address gender-based marginalisation, discrimination, exploitation and injustice. These are profound causes of grievance, which gender equality norms seek to rectify. However, as these injustices are often deeply embedded in social practices and are therefore taken for granted, they are not easy to change. Moreover, rectifying them sometimes implies that those who have benefitted from them will have to forgo certain benefits and assume burdens they have hitherto been relieved from. Accordingly, gender equality norms share a fundamentally political characteristic, as they deal with the allocation of resources and benefits among people. They are in this sense much more challenging than norms, such as education for all, that almost everybody benefits from. Secondly, gender norms engage with the meanings and practices assigned to 'the construction of sexual difference itself' (Scott 2010: 10), a cultural issue that is fundamental to every human being. Only hermits can avoid relating to gender-based differentiation, making it possibly the most omnipresent issue of social discrimination. Social denunciations relating to gender are impossible to escape on an individual basis,

which only reinforces the injustice of gender-based discrimination and exploitation.

Thirdly, gender equality norms often cut across institutional spheres with substantially different and sometimes contradictory logics. Five such spheres may be distinguished: capitalism and market competition, state and bureaucratic practices, democracy and political participation and representation, religion and transcendental truth, and family and unconditional loyalty (Friedland and Alford 1991). Discrimination based on gender exists in all five spheres and, since they operate according to different institutional logics, gender equality norms face even stronger entrenched challenges. Dealing with discrimination within one institutional sphere may be difficult in itself, but it becomes even more so because it is strengthened by discrimination in other spheres, which have to be dealt with differently, given their different logics and associated material and symbolic properties (see Walby 2005). As *van Eerdewijk, Roggeband and van der Vleuten* demonstrate in their chapter, the different institutional logics of regional organisations also shape the interplay between actors, as well as the processes and outcomes of their engagement with norms.

Fourthly, given that the issue of gender equality is still presented and debated in the area of international politics as involving fundamental binaries between relatively fixed categories of ‘men’ and ‘women’,² as if their meanings ‘were self-evident, free of ambiguity and all possible misinterpretations’ (Scott 2010: 8), men easily acquire the impression that they are personally to blame when issues of gender discrimination are being addressed. Due to the significant difficulties involved in separating structural issues and individual relations when it comes to gender, global norms in this field very easily create lukewarm bystanders and outspoken adversaries. All these characteristics underline the substantial challenges that norms of gender equality confront, and they help explain why so many observers draw attention to the slow progress of norm implementation around the world (Savery 2007).

Despite the common characteristics, norms of gender equality are, as mentioned, constantly being interpreted by specific actors in specific contexts. One very widespread interpretation of formally adopted views on gender equality in UN conventions and declarations is a focus on their positive implications for other issues such as economic growth, family well-being, peace processes, democratisation and technological change. The argument is that the greater involvement of women and girls in all

sorts of processes contributes significantly to social progress. For the technologically concerned Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, a focus on women is justified through the argument that women are more perceptive to innovations than men, thus potentially increasing agricultural productivity (Fejerskov 2018). In the World Bank, women's empowerment has been translated into 'smart economics', underlining the fact that giving economic opportunities to women contributes to economic growth. While this may be true in very many situations, it diverts attention away from practices that marginalise women to often relatively apolitical initiatives supporting women and girls in isolated spheres. Better education, for instance, undoubtedly represents a substantial improvement of many women's living conditions, but it does not address gender-based discrimination within the family, the workplace, public institutions, etc. Education can undoubtedly help women confront discrimination in many situations, but it is hard to describe it as an initiative that in itself rectifies the injustices of marginalisation and exploitation. However, in many situations, such as the Women Deliver conferences, norms of gender equality seem to have gone full circle, returning to the Women in Development (WID) approach of the 1970s basically by focusing on the 'usefulness' of integrating women into existing social, political and economic processes.

A reason for the uncertain nature of many gender equality norms is the existence of more or less productive tensions between theory and practice (Walby 2005). One issue has to do with the relationship between gender inequality and other forms of inequality. In a world of dire needs and many forms of social exclusion, it is difficult to be concerned about Imelda Marcos, who may occasionally have suffered gender-based discrimination despite her staggering wealth. Another issue concerns the strong disagreements among proponents of gender equality. For instance, post-colonial feminists have criticised Western feminist scholars for imposing their own normative universal categories of gender oppression onto non-Western societies. In this view, Western feminism has only added new stereotypes of the oppressed 'Third World woman', thereby maintaining and reinforcing the privilege of Western values, knowledge and power (Ong 1988). However, differentiated positions do not just exist between Western countries and countries in the Global South. As *Narayanaswamy* shows later, spaces of dialogue and contestation from which gender norms are perceived to emerge are increasingly being occupied by professional elites in the Global South.

This has implications for who achieves representation and how, and the ways in which gender norms are articulated in mainstream development to the detriment of the voices of the most marginalised, who suffer most from gender-blind development practices. Yet another issue relates to the common distinctions between gender equality as ‘sameness’ (equal opportunities for women and men), ‘difference’ (recognition of gender-specific needs) and ‘transformation’ (deconstructing gender stereotypes), how these categories relate to different domains or institutional spheres, and whether they play a role in relation to both ends and means (Verloo and Lombardo 2007; Walby 2005). While much can be said in favour of a pragmatic use of these categories in a context-dependent manner, this simply enlarges the scope for different interpretations and further tensions.

All this indicates that gender equality norms are elusive, practically often being determined by specific actors according to their particular preferences. However, this is hardly accurate. We suggest that global gender equality norms as expressed in UN declarations and conventions share a common criticism of gender-based discrimination despite internal inconsistencies and contradictions. Regardless of the considerable room for interpretation, there are practices that are unjustifiable in the context of global gender equality norms. Less defined in positive terms, the shared characteristic of gender equality norms is that they are defined by a rejection of gender-based discriminatory practices. In between, there are many beliefs and practices that some perceive to be justified with reference to the norms, while others would challenge such a perception. *Zwingel’s* chapter and analysis of some of the central global gender equality norms articulated in UN declarations shows how diverse the meanings and representations of such norms that are prominent in different organs of the UN have become. In this conceptualisation, the core of gender equality norms has not changed, although norms regarding women’s political participation have moved from addressing the issue of women’s rights to vote and participate to the issue of the equal distribution of politically powerful positions between women and men. In both cases, gender-based discrimination is central. Likewise, the tension between gender mainstreaming as a norm based on expert policy analysis and the norm of equal political participation (Krook and True 2012) takes place in the context of the same normative idea of rejecting gender-based discrimination. This seemingly obvious point is key, as global norms on gender equality should not be perceived as unrelated norms

that develop independently and change in whatever directions strong actors prefer. On the contrary, they are united in their attempt to address practices of gender-based discrimination in different fields, and it is quite understandable that tensions may occur between them, given that they address this issue across various institutional spheres with various logics. It is therefore useful to conceptualise global gender equality norms as a normative regime that addresses gender-based discrimination while adapting to and changing in relation to varying circumstances in different institutional spheres.

THE LIMITS OF NORM-MOVEMENT

Do norms travel? If norms do not constitute easily identifiable standards of behaviour or stable social facts with well-defined boundaries, then the processes through which actors engage with them must be anything but straightforward. One of our central arguments here pertains to the inadequacy of theorising the role of global norms through travel metaphors that portray them as either *diffusing* or being *translated* across contexts. The questioning of the conceptual relevance and applicability of diffusion spans much research, as academics have competed over challenging this notion, suggesting alternative conceptions. Across the disciplines of institutional theory, international relations, anthropology and policy studies, competing concepts such as translation (Callon and Latour 1981; Czarniawska and Joerges 1996; Zwingel 2012), adaptation (Ansari et al. 2010), vernacularisation (Levitt and Merry 2009) and localisation (Acharya 2004) have offered different convictions. All of them bring much-needed challenges to established ways of conceiving the movement of ideas and practices by recalibrating the understanding of such processes from a structuralist or behaviouralist understanding, sometimes presenting relatively sophisticated appreciations of agency and complexity. Yet they also display fundamental flaws that make them unable, individually, to provide an adequate account of how actors engage with global norms. Instead of theorising the movement of norms, which has been the major focus of these approaches, we suggest that to analyse and account theoretically for the open-ended nature of engagement with norms, we need to adopt a *situated approach*.

Traditionally, diffusion studies have explored how ideas or practices find their way across and into organisations by employing an input/output research strategy in which attention is mainly paid to the sources

of inspiration for change and the subsequent identification of what has changed (see Klingler-Vidra and Schleifer 2014). This assumes a binary dichotomy between acceptance and rejection by holding that new ideas and practices are either adopted or not adopted into the organisation (Ansari et al. 2010; see Rogers, 1962; March 1999). Such approaches largely see the movement of new ideas and practices as a mechanical process of information transfer from one context to the next. This may be true for some ideas or practices, but it often risks neglecting the fundamental issue of how ideas and practices may be remade and contextualised when actors address them.

Thus, when conceptualising the spread of ideas, practices and norms across space and time, research has often focused on diffusion, a concept Rogers (1962) borrowed from Tarde (1890). Denoting movement or motion as a physicalist term, diffusion has often been coupled with rational perspectives that treat ideas and practices as static entities spreading through osmosis (see Strang and Meyer 1994). Some argue that diffusion is especially likely to occur in the wake of crisis or failure (Ikenberry 1989), others that it is basically a spatial process, meaning that the probability of diffusion taking place is dependent upon geographical proximity (Land et al. 1991). Research into this concept is traditionally built around assumptions regarding modernity in which the spread of innovations like drinking water, new drugs or agricultural technologies is traced (Marsh and Coleman 1956). As such, institutional conditions in wider social systems are thought to influence the rate and form of diffusion.

Diffusion studies in International Relations sometimes similarly theorise norm diffusion in terms of sequential or linear stage models, often treating norms as static entities that spread without much adaptation, frequently by coupling international pressure with national activists. The ‘norm life cycle’ (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998), the ‘spiral model’ (Risse and Sikkink 1999) and the world polity approach (Boli and Thomas 1999), three of the dominant constructivist approaches to norm diffusion, all to some degree labour under these problematic conceptions. Risse et al.’s (1999) model explores the domestic impact of international norms by theorising a five-stage process of socialisation, identifying the conditions under which international norms are internalised domestically. In the same vein, the literature on ‘norm cascades’ analyses how norms evolve in a patterned life cycle in which they emerge, gain widespread recognition, diffuse across the international community without transformations across space and time and finally

become a taken-for-granted feature of international and domestic politics (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Moreover, some perceive norms as an aspect of an increasingly dominant and homogenising world culture or polity (Boli and Thomas 1999), leaving little room for organisational self-interests and active agency, and embracing a relatively linear process of norm socialisation and alignment where states readily spread norms or ‘scripts’ around the world. Norms may produce forms of organisational and behavioural similarities across the globe, but their interpretations by organisations are nevertheless very much shaped by local histories and circumstances, as they are negotiated and contested through their institutionalisation in these. For the most part, the general literature on diffusion assumes a unidirectional view on the travelling of ideas, based on the suggestion that an idea is developed somewhere, travels as a relatively clearly defined entity somewhere else and is received and addressed by actors in a particular context. There is a point of departure, a travelling idea and a point of arrival, all of which can be clearly separated. The perception of unidirectionality comes out clearly when Jacob et al.’s (2014) argue, *inter alia*, that a norm (in their case a norm of gender-based decision-making) ‘diffuses through the world polity via multiple mechanisms. Actors upload it into international conventions. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), translational advocacy networks, and domestic actors reinterpret and transport it to regional and local audiences’. Furthermore, International Relations theory on socialisation too often assumes that states either adopt norms or resist them. Concrete situations often evince a much more muddled picture with varying degrees of adherence and resistance. As Zwingel (2012) notes, all states have different value systems, some of which may overlap with certain international norms, while others oppose them. Studies also document that norms are not diffused through a linear process starting with Western liberal democracies to the Global South as is sometimes assumed. Rather, there is a notable interaction in which non-Western countries have pushed for norms regarding human rights and indigenous people (Steinhilper 2015; Jensen 2016).³

The theorisation of norm diffusion as a linear or staged process has made current approaches unable to account for the dynamism, continuous change and agency that occurs when actors conform with, resist or transform international norms.⁴ Krook and True (2012: 104) argue that the literature on international norms has been characterised by a key tension: ‘a relatively static depiction of norm content, juxtaposed against a

comparatively dynamic account of norm creation, diffusion and socialization'. However, transnational advocacy networks do more than just promote the international diffusion of norms as 'things' or 'finished products'. Predetermined stages of norm diffusion entail a mechanical and unidirectional perception of how norms spread, but norms are only one factor influencing organisational and political life, and they are heavily shaped by the contexts in which they are addressed, easily being transformed or undermined by changes in ideas or practices. Thus, these models tend to neglect the iterative processes of norm interpretation, resistance and change.

Diffusion studies have contributed to our understanding of the conditions facilitating the influence of ideas and norms on individuals, organisations and societies, but the dominant approaches in such research cannot fully account for the dynamic processes that take place when actors engage with norms. Simultaneous with the prominence of diffusion, then, other researchers have looked for ways to argue against the rational-materialist straightjacket of diffusion. The greatest conceptual challenge has come from diverse literatures that turn to the notion of *translation*, arguing that travelling norms are addressed by actors in a nonlinear, open-ended, continuous and indeterminate process affected by multiple factors. In organisational institutionalism, numerous studies in recent decades have explored the translation or adaptation of practices and ideas (Zilber 2002, 2006; Czarniawska and Joerges 1996; Boxenbaum and Battilana 2005; Best and Walters 2013). Translation found its way into organisational institutionalism through interpretively informed Scandinavian institutionalism (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996; Boxenbaum 2006), which drew on Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Latour's (1986) and Callon and Latours' (1981) use of the concept. For Latour (1986), the pitfalls of basing social research on a natural science metaphor like diffusion include the points that: (i) it presumes the existence of an original energy emanating out of an unknown source that pushes the idea or practice along; (ii) it implies inertia, i.e. resistance to change; and (iii) the medium being diffused may eventually cease to do so. While this is a somewhat simplified reading of diffusion research, the critique of the realist-objectivist ontology that characterises some diffusion studies is still valid. In suggesting translation as an alternative metaphor, Latour thus aimed to identify the movement of ideas as a process of social interpretation, which emphasises human agency in the continuous process of producing and constructing society.

Inspired by Latour's thinking, Czarniawska underlines how translation in essence implies that to '*set something in a new place is to construct it anew*' (Czarniawska 2012: 27). As such, one cannot take it for granted that ideas or norms possess meaning a priori. It is actors involved in the process of adopting, appropriating and localising an idea or a practice that mostly drive the process of construction. This perspective underlines the importance of understanding how individuals engage in the processes of rearranging institutional principles and practices by blending new and old elements to construct a distinctive interpretation of norms (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). Thus, in criticising rational approaches to the transfer of ideas and practices, the concept of translation acknowledges how such processes take place in and are shaped by institutional and organisational contexts and cannot be understood outside of them. This suggests essentially that the movement of norms is a continuous micro-process of adaptation and sense-making. Analytically, this also means that it centres focus on construction-as-process, that is, how ideas are reconstructed in different contexts.

While surely improving some of the weaknesses of diffusion studies, the concept of translation also has its drawbacks. First, it builds on a 'radical constructivism' that argues for an almost free-floating and completely unpredictable process of translation. Instead of haphazard construction, we argue that there are certain conditions and constraints that will shape engagement with norms. Though processes of norm translation are contested, contingent and highly political, they are not completely unpredictable, but shaped and influenced by the structuring effects of the social fields in which they are situated. For instance, in their chapter *Scheiker, Jenichen and Joachim* compare the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in the EU and the OSCE. They show how, due to differing institutional contexts shaping how networks of norm entrepreneurs both within and outside these organisations engage with the resolution, the EU and the OSCE have highly different interpretations of the norms, as well as different commitments to implement them. Secondly, the concept of translation too often denotes a unidirectional process in which actors receive and interpret norms or ideas in their own contexts, without attending to the effects of this on the role of norms elsewhere (see Niemann and Schillinger 2016). Accordingly, the concept of translation tends to undermine the multidirectionality of change where actors simultaneously localise and develop norms or ideas. Many organisations are not merely norm receivers subject to

the normative pressures of global governance: they are often eager to be norm entrepreneurs seeking to influence these standards by actively engaging in the interpretation and construction of norms, or perhaps letting their specific reconfigurations function as forms of resistance to other interpretations. This kind of thinking may lead to the view that there is a symmetric interaction between local and global engagement with norms. However, international agreements, notably at the United Nations, can have a broader formalised legitimacy, which is not the case in other situations in which actors may agree on norms. Likewise, many diverse actors are devoted to framing global norms and to influencing how others should adopt them. For instance, regional organisations and international NGOs may be very active in seeking to influence international agreements and to convince national governments and organisations about the right way of interpreting norms. As *Lang* shows later on, in an attempt to increase public outreach and go beyond distinct spheres of stakeholders, the EU propagates gender norms through public consultations. Despite limitations on who gets to define issues and variation in respect of the actors who respond, contest and reframe them, the role of regional alliances, for instance, is crucial to the EU's attempt to promote gender equality norms. This means that global norms established in international agreements do not 'travel' from the global to local levels, but are subject to constant reinterpretation in different local, national and international contexts, as actors seek to frame global norms in light of their concerns, interests and ideological world views and to make others accept their interpretation. Accordingly, we cannot understand the international without understanding the transnational, national and local dynamics (Zwingel 2012; van der Vleuten et al. 2014a).

TOWARDS A SITUATED APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF NORMS

Ambitions to confront rationalist–materialist conceptions of power, influence and agency were central in bringing norms to the forefront of international studies. Providing alternative explanations of state power and decision-making, the structuring influence of institutions and cultural elements, such as legitimacy, identity or practice, represented a radical turn in modes of explanation. For some, the sheer weight of norms and normative frameworks has led to almost norm-determinist lines of thought in which norms and how actors engage with them are

cut loose from both the constraining and facilitating effects of institutions. These perspectives are what Archer (1995) refers to as ‘downward conflationist’, in that they see action simply as an epiphenomenon of deep structures. Gender equality norms, like any idea, are not cultural super-structures followed blindly by actors, free floating and released from important political, organisational or cultural factors.

A *situated approach* underlines the wider social processes of norm engagement and the complex, non-linear and (dis)continuous transformation that they imply. It takes its point of departure in the continuous assertion and contestation of norms in particular localities. It sees action neither as an epiphenomenon of structures nor as completely cut loose from them. The latter would mean denying the existence of norms in the first place, but by focusing on the relation between the two, norms are seen to condition, but not determine, social interaction. The situated approach is thus, at its core, relational, seeing relations as dynamic and unfolding. Norm interaction becomes a social process that is inseparable from situations, occurring in constant dialogue with the past, the future and the present. Norms, we argue, are inhabited by actors: to paraphrase Donati (2014), norms ‘are relations’, they do not ‘have relations’. Individuals cannot juggle norms in their social interactions as if they were things, just as norms cannot travel ‘between’ places, diffusing across the globe. Rather, norms are in themselves social interactions and relations. To see norms as things is what might be deemed ‘process-reduction’, that is, making static in substantialist ways what, by its very nature, is dynamic and unfolding.

As part of a *situated* approach, we argue that norms need to be considered as only one among a number of factors that shape or drive change, factors that in themselves influence norms and constrain or facilitate their interpretation. They thus redirect attention to those moments and situations in which norms are addressed in particular sites of contestation and friction. Norms should not be considered to be agents in themselves, a substantialist claim that would challenge our situated approach, but as factors shaped and given meaning through interaction, which in turn influences forms of interaction. The unit of analysis continues to be the interaction itself, not the factors as independent entities. In the following sub-sections, we outline the central analytical elements, which, we suggest, help us understand the role of norms and how they change when actors engage with them: actors, space, time, certain organisational issues and organisational environments.

Actors

Engagement with norms varies greatly across actors, just as it does from situation to situation, and is readily shaped by social positions, as well as by specific preferences, motivations and particular forms of embeddedness in different social environments. Social positions are significant in mediating the relations of actors to the environments in which they are embedded (Emirbayer 1997) and in defining certain constraints (but also facilitative measures) on the actor. Positions may define whether actors will address norms at all, and whether their interpretations of a norm will influence other actors, including in organisational contexts (Battilana et al. 2009). This is imperative, as social positions also define webs of social relations, meaning that certain interpretations of norms may establish visions that others in an actor's formal and informal networks are eventually shaped by. This type of brokering is crucial for norms to draw the attention of a critical mass of people or organisations. In addition to social positions, the individual preferences, motivations and histories of actors influence how they address norms of gender equality. A significant example is 'femocrats', feminist normative entrepreneurs seeking to change bureaucracies from within (Eyben and Turquet 2013). When actors become engaged in change projects that they consider highly meaningful, their motivation is likely to increase, and their involvement in shaping translation and institutionalisation becomes greater. Zeitz et al. (1999) point to the importance of self-identity formation in engagement with norms where the ideas or practices that are being translated share a similarity with an actor's distinctive identity or character. Boxenbaum and Battilana (2005) likewise trace key translation actors' histories of involvement in the women's movements of the 1970s as stimulating them to participate actively in bringing diversity management to a particular social context. Moreover, actors are submerged in not just one but several institutional or normative environments (or *webs of meaning*): a workplace, a family, a gender, etc. This is vital because these environments may simultaneously influence or contest each other in relation to norms, and because actors with higher levels of inter-organisational mobility may be more aware of heterogeneous institutional arrangements and thus be able to identify windows of opportunities for action leading to specific forms of norm engagement. Having witnessed or addressed certain forms of norms in one social environment makes individuals increasingly reflective as they engage with norms in other

contexts, possibly stimulating them to contest prevailing normative structures, provided that they are in the right place at the right time to do so.

Norms are made, sustained and changed intersubjectively, in the hands and heads of individuals, and they are the object of conflicts of interpretation more often than of continued homogenisation. Actors are entangled in webs of meaning (Emirbayer and Mische 1998), continually making sense of their intersubjective experiences and (social) actions in different situations, and they interpret norms accordingly. While global political agreements may very well capture elements of a norm and for a while constitute a fixed point for discussions in particular fields, they cannot provide more than a snapshot interpretation of a collective ambition. Moreover, actors do not respond passively to such norms through a logic of appropriateness, they continuously interpret and influence norms as they address them, though often in contingent ways. If we fully adopt notions of appropriateness, we wrongfully assume that a standard of appropriate behaviour exists prior to action, resulting in an almost purely structural explanation (Sending 2002; Hofferberth and Weber 2014). The appropriateness of an action cannot be perceived as determined prior to the action itself if we are to take the multiple interpretations of a norm seriously. Appropriate action and compliance with norms will always be shaped by situations, identities and so forth. As such, every reference to a norm (whether in action, discourse, etc.) simultaneously works to strengthen it and to adjust or change it, perhaps also function as a form of resistance to it. Wide acknowledgement of a norm's content may very well lead to practices changing in line with the norm, but a strong norm may also generate a heightened sense of resistance, producing recoil effects leading to non-adoption and norm weakening. Krook (2006) for one shows how increasing international pressures for gender quotas heightened perceptions of threat among male party elites, leading to increased opposition to the norm. Norm entrepreneurs are accordingly not always productive and may indeed be anti-entrepreneurs, radically transforming or converting norms rather than transmitting them as messages (see Hughes et al. 2015; Bloomfield and Scott 2016).

Earlier we highlighted the political nature of norms, as well as their links with deeply held values. This indicates that actors relate to norms in ambivalent ways. Many are likely to take well-established norms for granted, while individual actors engaged in norm entrepreneurship may consider them carefully. Certain situations, including crises, profound changes and the emergence of new actors, may also stimulate a deliberate

approach, while others do not invite normative reflections. The importance of politics and values also suggests that neither a rational perspective nor a reference to appropriateness adequately accounts for how actors deal with norms. Instead, we suggest that actors, depending on their roles and situations, may oscillate between an indifferent attitude that takes norms for granted and an evaluative attitude that assesses norms in a broad political and social context. The evaluative attitude is not exclusively one of considering costs and benefits in narrow terms for the specific actor, whether an individual or an organisation. Rather, it is an assessment of how a particular norm fits and develops the actor's political world view and values. Accordingly, we adopt a position underlining the significance of actors and their evaluative capacities within a broad political and normative framework. Actors are not just carriers of norms but are competent and reflexive (Boltanski and Thevenot 1999), actively helping to reproduce, transform or neglect norms in many situations. They are neither cultural nor material dopes, but, in their reflective moments, seek to interpret and shape norms and their meanings within a given context.

Spaces

Spaces are populated by institutions and norms, helping us understand how the physical, social or economic affordances of any space shape the social interactions that take place within its boundaries. They thus become significant because of their link to human activity and legitimate conceptions of it. In particular, organisations are central spaces for the promotion of normative change and political goals, whether for good and for bad. However, as *Fejerskov* and *Cold-Ravnkilde* argue, the incremental and stable nature of many organisations means that, more often than not, they are not prone to change, and even less prone to the disruptive qualities of a set of norms and ideas such as those of gender equality. Its inherent pursuit of an ideal state of equality means that this set of norms is not a passive set of scripts and rules, but profoundly normative and political. Meanwhile, a kaleidoscope of factors potentially influences norm engagement and institutionalisation, which is why we often witness ceremonial approaches to gender equality in organisations sometimes facilitating and sometimes constraining change. All spaces may produce shared understandings that help present and interpret action, but such understandings may also be heterogeneous given the

diversity of individuals who are there with different purposes, different experiences and different expectations about legitimate action and discourse. A diplomat in the UN and an aid-worker in a local NGO, or anyone outside of these professional circles, engage differently with norms.

The boundaries of space do not refer so much to the physicality of being in an office or in the General Assembly Hall of the UN, but to the identities that are linked to the space, whether defined by organisations or institutions. Later in this book, *Jones* shows how the close alliance between NGOs, donors, government officials and economists produces a particular set of technical claims around microfinance in which gender is central to their work, albeit in a way that is largely depoliticised. At the same time, microfinance occupies a more ambivalent position in Ugandan society with people expressing a growing concern with fraud, trickery and thievery that shapes the associations around microfinance and the empowerment of women. Therefore space can just as well refer to interactions in the family, or among people of the same age or sex, whose borders or boundaries are only determined by those who practice or reinforce them. This is where we engage in social experiences, the complex effects of which shape what we are becoming, our world views and our actions (Dépelteau 2015). The book in its entirety emphasises the importance of context and of the normative environment in shaping the processes of engagement with norms.

Processes of how norms move from one space to another are better understood in terms of the relationship between the social situations in which norms are produced and those into which they are absorbed. Norms do not remain fixed in this process, since they are embedded in social relationships, identities and subjectivities, and are transformed by the social contexts within which they move. The contextual system of meanings shapes all norms, since they are always enacted in particular ways depending on their surrounding set of social relationships, ideologies and power structures. Different situations in different social or spatial contexts accordingly trigger different social identities and provide different constraints and opportunities guiding action and choice. Hence, meaning and norm interpretation become a product of situated interactions.

Time

The same importance that is given to space can be credited to temporality or time (Bourdieu 1980). Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue that

the agentic dimension of social action can only be captured in its full complexity if it is situated within the flow of time. Agency is informed by the past (habitual aspects), the present (contextualising past habits and future projects within the moment) and the future (capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). When engaging with norms in social interaction, actors thus simultaneously reactivate past patterns of thought and action, routines or other stable conceptions about themselves and the social world, try to imagine future trajectories or imageries and do so whilst confronted with the dilemmas, demands or ambiguities of the present moment. These different temporalities can come into play at various strengths, just as they may not always easily co-form but push against each other, given that each person has her or his own relationship to the three temporalities, shaping their actions. Prescriptive norms in particular are about imaginations of the past, present and, most importantly, the future. They are constructed as ideal states of what should be, reflecting intersubjective hopes and desires. As actors engage with norms, they distance themselves from the routines and habits that characterise the past or the present (i.e. a retrospective engagement with what Schutz (1967) would call ‘stocks of knowledge’) to use the projective dimension of agency and imagine, desire or establish purposive objectives about the future. Regardless of the pragmatic realism or naivety of whether such ideal states can come true, all individuals to lesser or greater degree hypothesise about where they want themselves or the world to move, and how that is going to happen. Of course there are differences with respect to the degree of creative imaginaries of different actors, and not everyone believes in revolutions or a world in which there is equality between genders.

Organisational Issues

The immensely strong organising qualities of modern society mean that many ways of engagement with norms are shaped by a number of organisational issues. Organisations are particular sites of encounter between actors and ideas that create, contest and reinvent norms, but organisational actors often deal with many different concerns, pressures and priorities at the same time, and global norms constitute only one of these. Actors face various organisational issues, from informal cultures and formal structures to questions of staffing. First, global gender norms do not fall on to an empty plate inside organisations. Although far from unchangeable,

uncontested and coherent, over time organisations develop particular organisational cultures that become institutionalised in the mandate, history and procedures of these institutions. They shape the ways in which external demands, changes and contexts are interpreted (Barnett and Finnemore 2004), and they make certain interpretations of norms more feasible than others, depending on how they resonate with existing ideas and principles. Secondly, once norms enter into organisations, not all actors and departments necessarily pick up, embrace or oppose the norms in the same way, at the same time. Departmental structures that are set up to distribute roles, tasks and activities and govern relations within an organisation respond differently to normative frameworks and agreements. As organisational structures to a large degree shape formal and informal positions of authority, as well as how the coordination between actors and units occurs, they also shape how intra-organisational processes of norm engagement unfold—that is, how norms and ideas are addressed within an organisation—by sometimes integrating and at other times compartmentalising and separating the interaction with global norms. While the purpose of adopting gender equality norms may be to influence the organisation's culture and practices, engagement with norms, whether intended or unintended, may just as well remain contained within some departments and units without interaction with others. Often, specific gender units are tasked with ensuring gender mainstreaming, and the authority of the staff of the gender unit, and how they relate to other staff and departments, will influence the unit's ability to change and influence practices in the organisation. Thirdly, staff actively engage in the interpretation of norms, as there is no one-to-one relationship between staff and organisational culture. Due to specific circumstances, hiring practices and the like, staff may collectively demonstrate particular features (gender, ethnicity, age, etc.) or possess specific capacities that lead them towards certain interpretations of norms. Moreover, and especially in larger organisations, staff may constitute a set of different groups where loyalties cut across departments due to, for example, similar levels of education, which may influence engagement with norms. This highlights the importance of staff and the strategies they develop to enhance, alter or oppose norms of gender equality.

Normative Environment

Extra-organisational factors are just as relevant for how norms are addressed as are the organisational issues mentioned above. More often

than not, organisations frame gender issues in ways that resonate with the particular normative environment they are part of (Campbell 2004), with actors sharing values and social spheres with the organisation in question. Actors in the normative environment may be part of a similar institutional or organisational field, but they may also include other stakeholders perceived as legitimate, such as the media or expert environments. Normative actors often encourage particular forms of action, logics and goals and hence aim to influence how norms of gender equality are addressed. Organisations can often be part of several normative environments with different stakeholders that at times confront organisational actors with conflicting expectations and priorities that they have to manoeuvre between in order to maintain legitimacy and access to resources (money, knowledge, prestige). Some environments may be highly institutionalised, while others may be fragmented. In the first case, this may prompt certain forms of norm interpretation to be considered strongly illegitimate, while in fragmented environments (i.e. fragmented forms of discourse, power centres or coalitions) the room for manoeuvre or the range of legitimate interpretations of norms is much wider because of the absence of clear centres and peripheries in the environment (determining essentially what is legitimate and what is not). States in which legislation gave women the right to vote a hundred years ago, for example, provide vastly less room for resistance to such highly institutionalised norms compared to societies in which the participation of women in shaping democratic institutions is less taken for granted and perhaps not even legally guaranteed. Furthermore, the normative environment may change either rather quickly through crises and jolts (e.g. social upheavals, radical breaks with dominant normative frameworks, changes of political leadership following elections) or through much more incremental processes of change, occurring over longer periods of time (technological change, legal institutionalisation). The last form of change is *inter alia* reflected in the creation of UN Women, perceived as the culmination of international feminist activism by some (Cağlar 2013), yet still only materialising 35 years after the first UN International Women's Year in 1975, and following extended political discussion among proponents and opponents of this type of institutional invention.

An important part of the normative environment is the potential opening of opportunity structures. These are field-level conditions that can take on different political, cultural or social forms, and that greatly

shape the room for certain types of engagement with norms, while closing others. As such, they may be both constraining and facilitative. They can support actors' mobilisation of resources, intellectual attention and organisational or political support for their particular interpretations of norms, and may do so through formal institutional and legal structures or informal structures of power relations (McAdam et al. 1996). Political opportunity structures are by far the best explored of the three mentioned, often focusing on how different social movements draw attention to a cause or facilitate different forms of action. Fejerskov (2018), for example, describes how the Gates Foundation's decision to venture into issues of global development and form a new division to handle them provided an opportunity for internal proponents of gender issues to vastly increase the organisation's focus on gender equality and women's empowerment, underlining the importance of their abilities to frame this priority within the existing strong logics of impact effectiveness. These opportunity structures can change the way a problem is conceived and open up new avenues for mobilising influence and resources (Cağlar et al. 2013; Eyben and Turquet 2013), but they can also pose threats to organisational survival. Nevertheless, cultural or social opportunity structures, beyond those that are formal-political, may also arise and push the possibilities and forms of norm interpretation in distinct directions. McCammon and Campbell (2001) specify some distinctively 'gendered' opportunity structures, showing how they facilitated the success of women's suffrage movements in the USA, eventually securing women's right to vote in 1920 (see also Joachim 2007).

Together, these different issues cast light on how actors' engagement with global gender equality norms is highly situated, sometimes leading to relatively unchallenged interpretations of norms, sometimes creating a deliberate initiative shaped by local circumstances and fitting particular organisational purposes and interests. Presented here as analytical dimensions for studying concrete engagement with norms, the dimensions are not to be understood as fixed or hierarchical. More often than not they overlap, intersect and sometimes mutually constitute and reinforce each other. As such, and as the subsequent chapters in the book will show, situations regarding engagement with norms are influenced by histories, power and resource concerns in very different and context-specific ways. Ultimately, to explain the role of global norms using a situated approach is to explain change or stasis in organisations, value systems and actions. Regardless of the outcome—change or stasis—it will serve the interests

of some actors and not of others. Hence, the deeply political nature of engaging with norms reflects the fact that the intersubjective nature of such processes relates to the ability of states and actors to exercise control over the actions of others. Norms, rules and institutions are not just expressions of apolitical routines, but '*frozen configurations of privilege and bias*' (Barnett and Duvall 2005) that shape the actions of others. This is also why a substantial focus in the chapters of the book is on the political nature of how norms are contested, rejected and transformed to serve certain purposes.

CONTENT OF THE BOOK

The book is organised in four parts and a conclusion. The parts each address a significant aspect of global gender equality norms and their roles, but they are closely related and complement each other in outlining the situated approach to the understanding of norm engagement. As the chapters of the book are not written with an exclusive focus on the theme of the part where they are located, most of them speak to several themes, thereby integrating the different parts in the substantive discussions. Nevertheless, each part highlights a theme of particular importance when analysing global norms of gender equality.

Part I discusses the nature of global norms of gender equality and emphasises that these are anything but stable. In her chapter, Susanne Zwingel adopts a historical view of the development of gender equality norms within the United Nations and suggests that the period since 1945 can be divided into three distinct phases. She discusses five different norms in relation to the three phases and describes how they evolve over time in response to a number of factors. In addition to highlighting the importance of norm entrepreneurs for putting particular normative ideas on the table, Zwingel makes an interesting distinction between the normative environment and factors in the broader global context. The evolution of a particular norm is dependent on how it relates both to other contemporary norms and broader global issues such as decolonisation and neoliberalism. All in all, the chapter strongly argues in favour of paying attention to the changing nature of global norms, influenced as they are by ever-changing contextual factors.

Part II turns to the interplay between actors and institutions. In concrete organisational settings, internal and external actors navigate within institutional constraints and opportunities. This is explored in regional

organisations in two chapters and in large aid bureaucracies in one chapter. Analysing four different regional organisations (the European Union, the Organization of American States, Mercosur in South America and the Southern African Development Community), *Conny Roggeband*, *Anna van der Vleuten* and *Anouka van Eerdewijk* document how two norms of gender equality (gender mainstreaming in trade and development, and the elimination of violence against women) have come onto the agenda in quite different ways. Using the terms ‘governance landscapes’ and ‘logics’, they explain how the interplay between regional systems of rule and particular constellations of actors influences norm engagement. The history of organisations, their mandate, identity and formal institutional mechanisms not only constrain and provide specific opportunities for actors to address global gender equality norms, they also point out which actors may legitimately take part in norm engagement. *Roggeband*, *van der Vleuten* and *van Eerdewijk* interestingly conclude that, over time, norms of gender equality may also affect the interplay between actors and governance logics, making norm engagement a changing and unpredictable process.

While maintaining a focus on regional organisations (the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), *Andrea Schneiker*, *Anne Jenichen* and *Jutta Joachim* explore gender mainstreaming in security policies based on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on ‘Women, Peace and Security’. As military and security apparatuses are among the institutions that are most heavily dominated by male norms and practices, Resolution 1325 faces particularly challenging organisational settings, which may explain why it was a long time before it gained foothold within the two organisations. This happened, however, in substantially different ways, which *Schneiker*, *Jenichen* and *Joachim* mainly ascribe to institutional differences between the organisations. In both cases, norm entrepreneurs both within and outside the organisations exerted pressure to create normative and structural changes, but the results of this were different due to their membership base, different degrees of openness to external actors and diverse concepts of security.

In their chapter, *Adam Fejerskov* and *Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde* further unpack the intricacies of situated norm engagement in organisations. They focus attention on organisations engaged in global development, a group deeply shaped by, as well as involved in, the furthering of global norms such as the SDGs. Drawing on findings from a

collaborative research programme, *Fejerskov* and *Cold-Ravnkilde* provide a set of key analytical factors that shape how norms are engaged with in different situations inside organisations, specifically guiding our attention towards organisational histories and cultures, actor strategies, organisational pressures and priorities, and the normative context and its stakeholders. They bring these different dimensions into play to stress the significance of agency, foregrounding issues of contestation and struggle in norm engagement, but also to highlight the structural influence of institutional, material and ideational concerns. Different situations in different organisational contexts will trigger different social identities and thus provide shifting constraints and opportunities for engagement with norms.

Part III addresses normative environments and political change. While norm entrepreneurs negotiate the organisational constraints and opportunities they face, their engagement with norms is also heavily influenced by broader normative environments, changing political priorities among powerful actors and the everyday concerns of those who stand to benefit from the norms. In their chapter, *Sally Engle Merry* and *Peggy Levitt* study in detail how four women's human rights organisations, two in Baroda, India and two in New York City, USA, engaged with global norms about women's human rights and how they need to 'vernacularise' them to make them relevant to the particular normative environment. The different approaches of these organisations depend on various factors, including issues of staffing and funding, but the main point is that the resonance of actors' norm engagement with specific normative environments shapes their influence. If actors adapt norms strongly to the environment, they may be recognised more easily, but they are also likely to lose their transformative potential. If, on the other hand, actors seek to promote global norms in concrete situations with little modification and adaptation to the normative environment, they are much less likely to prompt social change. Normative environments resist rapid radical change.

Yulia Gradskova discusses gender equality norms in the context of cooperation between organisations from the Nordic countries and northwest Russia. She situates the cooperation both historically and within a changing political environment and describes how the cooperation was welcomed in Russia in the 1990s, though not necessarily for its focus on gender equality, as this terminology reminded Russians of Soviet discourses. Moreover, the ideas of the Nordic organisations

did not necessarily match the concerns of most women in Russia. Nevertheless, this cooperation succeeded in stimulating some local legislation on gender equality in the early 2000s, though *Gradszkova* also describes how some of the main actors pushing through this legislation actually abandoned it during the later political turnaround, with its focus on the defence of the nation, population growth, religion and family values. The turnaround has led to global norms of gender equality being forcefully contested, thus silencing the organisations that had taken them up.

In his analysis of microfinance in Uganda, *Ben Jones* discusses the concerns and practices of a very large microfinance NGO, BRAC, and its clients, ordinary Ugandans. BRAC's microfinance activities are framed in a very strong gender rhetoric, with an explicit focus on women and girls. However, the official rhetoric emphasises women as producers and social entrepreneurs more than it promotes an emancipatory, empowering perspective on gender-based discrimination. *Jones* takes the reader into the offices of BRAC and notes that concerns about gender equality seem absent, staff being very preoccupied instead about issues like measurement, efficiency, results, upscaling, impact evaluations and randomised control trials. Likewise, Ugandans do not relate microfinance to gender equality, but put it in the context of NGOs and development projects, which, for many Ugandans, are fraught with trickery, corruption, fraud and scams used to cheat money out of the poor. *Jones* concludes that global gender equality norms have been crowded out by other concerns in situations where they supposedly should make a difference.

Part IV concentrates on those whose voices are not heard in norm engagement. Not all actors are welcome in discussions of norms, and even those who are expected to benefit from such norms may be marginalised through bureaucratic and cultural practices. Returning to the European Union, *Sabine Lang* analyses the public consultations that the EU Commission organises. She situates the consultations in the Commission's efforts to legitimise its promotion of norms and focuses on a 2015 public consultation on equality between women and men in the EU. Distinguishing between communicative and substantial dimensions of the consultation, *Lang* concludes that the formal architecture of the consultation prevents it from being an inclusive and representative undertaking. Moreover, it does not allow for deviating voices,

while country-specific situations are disregarded in the report summarising the consultation. The result is that the consultation produces a reification of the Commission's existing normative views, and whatever other views European citizens may have are left out of the policy-making process.

Based on a study of information exchange between a gender information intermediary located in the North and a number of women's organisations in New Delhi, *Lata Narayanaswamy* explores how professionalisation influences engagement with norms. She focuses particularly on the privileging of information exchange in the form of books, reports, conferences and policy round tables and on the use of the English language. One point is that these practices marginalise non-English and non-academic voices from the interpretation of and engagement with global gender equality norms. Another is that whatever ideas professional norm entrepreneurs pick up from the excluded environments are alienated when translated into English and into professional codification. This is not a wilful act on the part of the professionals, as global norms of gender equality constitute a significant platform for engaging with gender discrimination, but the professional norms and practices of development workers tend to marginalise views that do not easily fit with global norms of gender equality.

In this introductory chapter, we have outlined *a situated approach to norm engagement* that attempts to address some of the shortcomings of the current theorising of norms. The approach underlines how the intersubjective nature of norms means that they are addressed, reproduced or changed in social interaction, and cannot be understood as existing outside such processes. Throughout the book, we will see empirical and conceptual explorations of how gender equality norms are engaged with in different situations, across organisations and contexts. Each in their own way, the contributing scholars challenge common understandings of global norms with reference to questions of how they move, are addressed, by whom and with what powers to define, deny or transform them. As such, the book contributes to the understanding of the interfaces between global norms, governance and gender equality, which have grown markedly in importance in recent decades, but whose very nature, both each on their own and taken together, are increasingly being questioned and challenged from many sides.

NOTES

1. These include most notably the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993), the Cairo Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (2000), the General Assembly Resolution (64/289) creating UN Women (2010) and the General Assembly Resolution (70/1) establishing the SDG5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (2015).
2. For a critique of how the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda conceptualises gender in a way that falsely attaches bodies to biologically determined sexual differences, see Schott (2013).
3. See also Hunt (2016) for a discussion of how norms cannot be understood as just the product of the decisions of powerful states.
4. See Bucher (2014) for a discussion of the continued difficulties constructivist norm-scholarship faces in explaining agency.

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CHAPTER 2

Gender Equality Norms in International Governance: Actors, Contexts, Meanings

Susanne Zwingel

INTRODUCTION

At least since the 1970s, the idea to overcome gender hierarchies has influenced policy developments in the realm of international governance. Analysts have come to an ambivalent assessment of this innovation: While gender equality norms have clearly changed the agendas and bureaucracies of previously gender un-aware international organisations (IOs), they are nonetheless often co-opted, subordinated or even ignored (Charlesworth 2005; True and Parisi 2013). In this contribution, IOs are conceptualised as sites where gender norms are introduced, developed, contested and partially practiced, or in other words, not only as spaces of norm creation but also as arenas of norm engagement and implementation (see also Park 2006). I draw on my earlier work on norm translation

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L. Engberg-Pedersen et al. (eds.),
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to develop this perspective: This framework of norm translation pays particular attention to agency that makes connections *between* different contexts because this is a necessary requirement to translate a norm from one context to another. It further maps actor constellations *within* each context that enhance or inhibit social or institutional change in reaction to the norms. Based on this understanding, norms can be translated both towards and within global governance institutions and towards and within domestic contexts (Zwingel 2016).

In the following, I give an overview of global gender norm development within the United Nations (UN) as a crucial intergovernmental arena for this debate.¹ As the next section shows, the context in which this debate unfolded has changed dramatically over time, both in terms of actor constellations within the UN, as new institutions were created and old ones merged, and in regards to systemic changes such as decolonisation and the end of block confrontation. In order to make visible these changing context factors, the time span since the foundation of the UN is divided into three phases that have provided qualitatively distinct conditions for the development of gender equality norms—1945–1975; 1975–1995; and 1995–present. I then trace the formation of five norms over time: gender equality in political participation and in socio-economic development, women’s rights, elimination of violence against women (VAW) and reproductive health and rights. These processes show patterns of normative broadening, deepening, flattening, bending, as well as confrontation with competing norms; they also show that none of these norms have simply stayed unchanged. To conclude, I discuss factors that influence these normative dynamics.

GLOBAL DISCOURSES ON GENDER EQUALITY: ACTOR CONSTELLATIONS AND CONTEXT FACTORS OVER TIME

While the historical overview provided here starts with the foundation of the United Nations, it should be noted that several international women’s organisations directed their work towards IOs² long before the UN came into being. In the late nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth century, women organised across borders, engaging in anti-war activism, fighting for women’s suffrage and national self-determination, and lobbying for equal labour rights, women’s legal status and girls’ and women’s education (Garner 2010; Rupp 1997; Tripp 2006). These organisations contributed significantly to the early

engendering efforts within the UN, however, they were confronted with an organisation that did not place much emphasis on the subordination of women within its overall mandate to work for world peace. Departing from this institutional exclusion, the evolution of gendered discourses within the UN can be divided into three phases: The first phase (1945–1975) enabled awareness raising and incremental knowledge formation. In the second phase (1975–1995), the various expressions of gender inequality around the world were more substantially framed as global structures in need of transformation. The last phase from 1995 to the present has somewhat paradoxically seen both a consolidation of this problem understanding as well as its dilution (Antrobus 2004; Tables I and II). This section presents relevant actors and broader context factors across the three phases. In order to conceptualise actors and their influence in this development adequately, I follow Thomas Weiss’ understanding of the UN as a three-dimensional creature consisting of an arena for state decision-making, a semi-dependent executive agency with some room to manoeuvre, and a space for NGOs and external experts with some degree of influence over the intergovernmental agenda (Weiss 2012). Hence, the presentation sheds light on the position and influence of state representatives, international bureaucrats and civil society actors.

International Knowledge Formation (1945–1975)

In the first two decades of its existence, the UN established itself as the first comprehensive multilateral organisation to work for world peace, which included both conflict aversion and socio-economic development. While the Cold War polarisation made constructive work on conflict prevention difficult, the UN’s influence on decolonisation and development was significant. Partly due to the wave of independence during the 1960s and early 1970s, the number of member states of the UN rose steeply (from 51 founding members in 1945 to 144 in 1975), and many of the newly independent states displayed a high level of allegiance to the UN. Despite disagreements over the most effective development and poverty eradication strategies, the UN became a space where state representatives and experts from the West, the East and the South learned to communicate with each other. This multilateral and increasingly inclusive structure later influenced transformative debates on gender issues.

The UN started its work without any infrastructure related to women's issues, despite the fact that the UN Charter actually contains several references to women's rights and gender equality.³ This changed in 1946 with the formation of the UN Sub-Commission on the Status of Women. This body quickly transformed from a subsidiary body to the Commission of Human Rights to a stand-alone Commission (CSW), in 1947 (Morsink 1991; Reanda 1992). Once established, its mandate was to prepare recommendations for the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on the promotion of women's rights and on problems related to the status of women that required immediate action (United Nations 1996: 13). Observers described the CSW as 'a kind of lobby for the women of the world' and as the most 'independent body in the UN' (Humphrey 1983: 405). Many early CSW members were not only government appointees but also played active roles in women's organisations in their countries (Connors 1996). Hence, state interests dominated the CSW less than other UN bodies, but the Commission had a limited mandate, was scrutinised tightly by ECOSOC and lacked sufficient administrative support (Berkovitch 1999: 106). With the influx of newly independent states into the UN in the 1960s, delegates from the Global South became vocal within the CSW. This led to an expansion of the CSW's work which had originally focused on data gathering on women's political, legal and educational status to include women's socio-economic needs and contributions to development (Boserup 1970; Snyder 2006).

In this first phase, the UN is an institution that does not consider gender equality as a substantial part of its mandate or bureaucratic structure. One internal actor—the CSW—manages to formulate a range of gender-related concerns as relevant for the organisation. This results in several women-focused Conventions adopted by the General Assembly (see below). However, the CSW's impact both within the UN and in relation to member states' policies remains limited, because most governments do not frame gender equality as international (or national) priority. The CSW is a hybrid space for governmental and non-governmental positions represented by its delegates. Apart from this unusual opening for civil society interests through CSW membership, not many NGOs are involved with this body. However, this is a general trend of the time: in its early decades, the UN did not favour NGO involvement. It took until the 1990s for the UN to fully recognise the value of NGO input and integrate it systematically (Donini 1996; Haney 2005).

Global Transformation (1975–1995)

In the second phase, international awareness regarding gender hierarchies deepened. Based on the knowledge created in the first phase, and in response to NGO lobbying efforts, the UN declared 1975 the International Year of Women, followed by the UN Decade for Women (1976–1985).⁴ Three conferences framed the decade—Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, and Nairobi in 1985—and a follow-up conference took place in Beijing in 1995.⁵ This string of conferences enabled encounters of and dialogues between thousands of government officials and women’s organisations, and they created unprecedented public attention for the diverse problems women worldwide were facing (Friedman 1995). At the same time, these meetings fostered optimism that the problems, once identified, could be solved through collective effort. However, during this phase of high sensitisation regarding global gender inequalities, the living conditions of many women did not only not get better, but they also deteriorated. This was the result of a shift from state-oriented towards market-driven development policies in the 1980s. For countries of the Global South, these so-called ‘Washington consensus’ policies stressed structural adjustment programmes with a particularly negative impact on poor women (Ewelukwa 2005). The end of the Cold War and with it, the disappearance of non-capitalist development models exacerbated this trend of market orientation (Antrobus 2004: 54). This affected all world regions—the former Socialist states most drastically through entire system transformation, but the Western world also experienced deregulation and privatisation of public goods and services. While the end of the bloc confrontation in the late 1980s and early 1990s fostered hopes for more substantive multilateral debates and problem solving, the discursive spaces for such debates also narrowed, as end-of-history and no-alternative-to-capitalism/liberalism narratives of the time illustrate.

In this time period between 1975 and 1995, many governments became more supportive of and proactive in regards to women’s issues. They used the world women’s conferences as well as other UN conferences to showcase their own views and policies on gender relations and tried to make their priorities part of the global women’s agenda. Beyond the global level, states responded to the women’s decade by creating or upgrading domestic gender equality policies and institutions (True and

Mintrom 2001). At the same time, non-governmental organisations attended the conferences in growing numbers and significantly influenced the outcome documents, in particular at the Nairobi and Beijing conferences. This is remarkable because their claims often went far beyond what governments were ready to commit to, and in striving for compromise, NGOs managed to include some far-reaching goals. Within the UN itself, institutional representation of women's issues increased: On the one hand, new entities with a particular focus on women's issues were created, in particular, the *United Nations Development Fund for Women* (UNIFEM) in 1976 and the *International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women* (INSTRAW) in 1979. In this phase also falls the adoption of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), the first comprehensive international framework for women's rights. On the other hand, existing UN agencies were tasked to integrate a gender perspective into their mandates, and the Secretariat supporting work on women's issues was expanded. Notwithstanding the significance of these innovations, they were often poorly funded, not supported on the highest level, and hence not sufficiently influential to make the concern for gender equality an institutional priority (Skard 2009; Sandler and Rao 2012).

The increased recognition of women's interests as a global concern among all three actors—states, the UN and NGOs—led to both cross-cultural controversies and collaboration. During the UN decade, 'Third World' women often collaborated with women's organisations from Socialist countries as their positions overlapped significantly, for example, in respect to establishing a new international economic order (Ghodsee 2012). Women's organisations from Western countries sometimes stood against this coalition: They criticised women from Southern and Eastern countries to harness the conferences for political purposes rather than deal with what they considered 'real' women's concerns, such as sexual and reproductive self-determination. In exchange, Southern and Eastern women accused Western feminists of imperialism and ignorance of poor women's problems (Olcott 2010). However, beginning at the Nairobi conference and increasingly during the UN conferences of the early 1990s leading up to the Beijing conference, these tensions also created learning processes, transnational collaboration and increasingly comprehensive claims (Moghadam 2005).

In sum, the second phase represents a fundamental transformation for the conditions of a global discourse on gender equality norms: State actors frame gender equality as an important goal to work for, both internationally and domestically. The UN expands its work on women's issues, both through the foundation of gender-focused institutions and through integrating gender norms into the work of existing agencies. The resources made available for these innovations are nevertheless rather limited. Women's organisations enter UN spaces in unprecedented numbers and force, especially at the world women's conferences and other UN-sponsored conferences of the early 1990s (Haney 2005). They do not only influence intergovernmental agendas but also create cross-cultural networks and dialogues. This phase concludes on a high note, with the Beijing Platform of Action (BPfA) representing a sound global commitment to gender equality articulated by governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental actors.

Consolidation and Dilution (1995–Present)

The last phase from 1995 onwards shows contradictory tendencies in the evolution of global gender discourses and policies. For many who had worked hard for the transformative vision of the BPfA, it was disappointing that this global statement ultimately produced very limited policy implementation and improvements for the women around the world. The UN's subsequent development framework, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), contained gender equality as a core element of global well-being, but avoided some of the hard fought for core dimensions of the BPfA, such as reproductive health and rights, due to rising opposition to these norms. At the same time, this phase also saw promising developments, in particular, the expansion of gender awareness into new policy fields, institutional consolidation of the UN's mandate for gender equality through the creation of UN Women, and most recently, the UN's new development framework, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs differ significantly from the MDGs, both in the much more participatory way they were produced, in their comprehensive vision based on respect for human rights and the need for structural economic reforms, and in their articulation of specific development targets (Razavi 2016).

Two context dimensions in the third phase have proven to influence the global discourse on gender equality norms, and mostly in constraining ways: The first is the economic paradigm of neoliberal restructuring, a framework favoured by International Financial Institutions. After a decade of privatisation and marketisation, the state was rediscovered as important agent to enhance economic growth. Accordingly, the task of states was to increase their economy's global competitiveness, a goal to which social welfare concerns such as non-discriminatory working conditions and living wages were subordinated (Razavi 2013). Further, the trend towards deregulation in both developing and developed states led to a crisis-prone concentration of capital—and indeed, several economic crises with devastating effects on the most vulnerable parts of the world's population have occurred in this phase. The second feature is the growth of fundamentalist ideologies in many parts of the world, often in response to economic hardships caused by neoliberalism (Moghadam 2005; Sen 2005). These ideologies stress group cohesion based on religion, nationalism or race; internally, that cohesion often draws on gender complementarity, with men being responsible for leadership and protection and women for mothering and caretaking. Group cohesion also implies the construction of the other—those not belonging and symbolising a potential threat to the group. This kind of 'us vs them' thinking has become more dominant since the September 11 attacks and has drastically diminished the hope in multilateralism so prevalent in the 1990s. In addition, the post 9/11 shift towards militarisation and securitisation has further contributed to a global climate in which gender equality claims are de-prioritised, attacked, and constructed as illegitimate markers of Western dominance (Sen 2005). In Devaki Jain's words, the 'convergence of militarisation, globalisation, and conservatism has dealt a blow to the progress that was made at the UN on the social justice front' (Jain 2005: 135).

These context factors have made global collaboration on gender issues more controversial and complex than in the second phase. On the one hand, many more governments and NGOs have articulated disagreement with the consensus reached in Beijing; they question several components of the concept of gender equality, most forcefully the idea of women's reproductive self-determination (Chappell 2006). As these actors became better organised, gender equality advocates within the UN had to focus on defending gender equality norms already agreed on rather than

further developing them (Hannan 2013; Sen 2005). UN femocrats and transnational women's rights networks worked successfully together in this endeavour, but nonetheless, the UN as an arena for progressive gender equality policies lost some of its appeals. Many organisations turned to arenas they considered less constrained, such as the World Social Forums (Eschle and Maignushca 2010). The space that the UN could still provide was transformed—debates on gender issues had become more contested, with stronger resistance to gender equality claims, and with new rising challenges receiving much more institutional attention. According to many gender experts, the MDGs embodied this vanishing importance, because they conceptualised gender equality narrowly rather than comprehensively (Antrobus 2005; Kabeer 2015).

However, this phase also saw a thematic expansion of gender equality norms as well as institutional consolidation and upgrading. Networks of activists successfully mainstreamed a gender perspective into the policy field of peace and security, in the form of Security Council Resolution 1325 of October 2000 and several 'successor resolutions' (Cohn 2008).⁶ Likewise, based on the intense lobbying of women's organisations around the drafting of the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court, gender justice concerns have taken a hold in the ICC's jurisdiction and practices, such as the prosecution of systemic wartime rape (Chappell 2016). Existing institutions within the UN gained traction—one prominent example is the increasing visibility and authority of the CEDAW Committee and the expansion of its mandate based on the Optional Protocol to the Convention (Zwingel 2016). A massive institutional reorganisation led to the creation of UN Women—the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women—in 2011. UN Women was the result of lobbying efforts of a broad network of women's organisations, femocrats within the UN and delegates of supportive states. It has merged all previous gender-related agencies within the UN into one, is headed by an Under-Secretary-General, and operates on a higher budget⁷ than its four institutional predecessors together (UNIFEM, INSTRAW, DAW—the Division for the Advancement of Women, and OSAGI—the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women). While UN Women can be interpreted as an adequate if belated institutional representation of the United Nations'

Table 2.1 Context and actor constellations (states, NGOs, UN) for evolution of global gender norms

	1945–1975	1975–1995	1995–present
Context	Creation of UN to work for world peace; Cold War stalemate; cooperation in decolonisation and development	‘Three worlds’ structure; market-oriented development paradigm/rising inequalities; end of block confrontation	‘Post-Washington consensus’; increasing economic disparities; rise of fundamentalisms; new militarisation and securitisation
Actor constellations	Limited: CSW as hybrid state-movement space; UN and member states not responsive to gender equality issues; limited administrative support	Broadened: UN women’s decade and conferences; governmental support for gender equality; increased NGO input; institutional strengthening within UN (UNIFEM, INSTRAW)	Contested/institutionalized: States and NGOs support <i>and</i> oppose gender equality claims; narrowing of gender perspective within UN (MDGs) <i>and</i> consolidation/creation of new institutions (CEDAW, UN Women)

commitment to gender equality (Sandler and Rao 2012), it has also been criticised for lack of transformative vision (Charlesworth and Chinkin 2013).

In sum, this last phase is shaped by global context factors that are more constraining than enabling for a deep appreciation of gender equality norms. Actor constellations have again changed: More state and non-state actors have joined the global discourse that either oppose the concept of gender equality or prefer to subordinate it to other goals. These positions, however, find themselves confronted with gender equality advocates among member states, non-governmental networks and UN femocrats. The result is that both ‘camps’ succeed *and* lose: We see processes that have led to silencing and narrowing down of gender equality concepts as well as institutional consolidation and expansion.

Table 2.1 provides a summary of these developments. Across the three phases, we see an interplay between factors that have enhanced and inhibited the global institutionalisation of gender equality norms. Looking at the actors involved, we see institutional strengthening at the UN level, as well as more actors engaging in international gender equality politics. With this increased representation also comes more disagreement as to the ‘right content’ of gender equality norms.

GENDER EQUALITY NORMS IN MOTION

This section presents the development of five global gender equality norms that are fundamentally co-dependent (see Table 2.2).⁸ I present them in two clusters, partly based on their proximity as norms, partly based on their ‘age’: The first cluster consists of gender equality in political participation and socio-economic development. These two norms received attention within the UN from very early on. They share a concern with women’s public status and do not radically question the public–private divide and its implication for gender hierarchies. The ‘younger’ norms in the second cluster—women’s rights as a comprehensive concept, elimination of gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence and reproductive rights and health—do precisely that: They see the subordination of women rooted in both public and intimate social constellations and aim at transforming them.

Table 2.2 Evolution of selected global gender norms

	1945–1975	1975–1995	1995–present
Gender equality in political participation	Demand for women’s equal access to political participation	Women’s empowerment beyond formal politics	Gender-balanced decision-making/Gender Mainstreaming; resistance of androcentric institutions
Gender equality in development	Role of women in socio-economic development; equal access to education and employment	Equal employment; connection of macroeconomic structures and gender; women’s empowerment; from WID to GAD	Women as contributors to economic growth; employability; gender budgeting
Women’s rights	‘Discrimination against women’ as a concept	Women’s rights as overcoming discrimination and achieving equality with men	Expanding interpretations: Intersectional discrimination; state responsibility for de facto equality
Elimination of violence against women	–	Domestic violence as global structure; broad understanding of VAW as human rights violation	Further expansion of scope; notion of gender-based violence; focus on female victimisation and protection
Reproductive health and rights	Birth control in context of population policies	Reproductive health and self-determination	Full reproductive autonomy of women; “pro-life” positions; maternal health and mortality prevention

Early and Continuing Concerns: Gender Equality in Political Participation and Development

One of the first initiatives of the CSW in the 1940s and 1950s was to gather information on women's political and legal status. It identified widespread patterns of exclusion and discrimination across many UN member states. In order to enhance women's representation in formal arenas of political decision-making, the CSW initiated the Convention on the Political Rights of Women. This Convention was generally supported by member states and adopted in 1952, however, it received reservations from 40 states that were not prepared to open *all* public leadership functions to women (United Nations 1996: 18). Two other Conventions of this early phase addressed legal inequalities, namely the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (1957), and the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (1962). In the 1960s, the focus of the CSW shifted towards the socio-economic advancement of women as well as to their undervalued role in economic development (Boserup 1970). This change of perspective had a lot to do with the rising influence of female UN delegates from newly independent countries (Prashad 2007). They shared with the Socialist countries a concern for economic and educational equality, and supported a vision of adequate de facto living conditions for women beyond political and legal representation.

Both of these norms remained important and gained substance in the 1970s. At the Mexico conference, governments set priorities in the areas of women's political participation, equal employment, education and healthcare. However, these were not necessarily static claims—for example, during the 1970s, the International Labour Organisation fundamentally changed its views on women-friendly labour market policies: it abandoned its previous protectionist approach based on the assumption that women were physically weaker than men because this had reinforced discrimination against women in the workplace. Now, the ILO endorsed comprehensive equal employment policies (McKean 1983).

In addition to promoting equal access for women to politics and employment, some governments and many NGOs had a more profound transformation in mind. 'Third World' women and women from Socialist countries articulated opposition to the existing global economic order (Ghodsee 2012), and the 1985 Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies identified macroeconomic structures as the most persistent obstacle to

gender equality. The network *Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era* (DAWN), delivered ground-breaking analyses on female poverty and alternative development strategies with a focus on women from the Global South. It coined the term ‘women’s empowerment’ which meant to increase women’s ability to act autonomously and transform oppressive gender relations and economic structures collectively⁹ (Sen and Grown 1988). This concept focused on bottom-up organising and did not simply advocate to ‘add women’ to existing structures of decision-making. These types of radically transformative visions also influenced intergovernmental gender and development policies: the Women in Development (WID) and the subsequent Women and Development (WAD) approaches established in the 1970s and 1980s were followed by the Gender and Development (GAD) approach adopted by some UN development agencies beginning in the 1980s. The WID approach promoted women’s participation in the formal economy with education and other initiatives to facilitate their transition to paid work opportunities. The WAD approach treated women’s contribution to development separately from men’s, and supported ‘women only’ development projects, based on women’s self-defined development goals with small-scale funding. GAD analyses considered women’s lack of ‘power’ and resources in society as a consequence of patriarchal gender power relations in the private as well as the public spheres, and as a consequence of women’s position within specific power structures defined by race, class, sexuality and so forth. GAD strategies promoted gender equality through ‘women’s empowerment’ strategies that addressed women’s practical and strategic needs, specific to their particular societies (Moser 1993; Parpart et al. 2000).

Since the mid-1990s, the area of gender-equal decision-making has attracted new attention and gained more substance, due in particular to two strategies: The first one is Gender Mainstreaming (GM), that is, the integration of a gender analysis into all fields of policy-making, aiming at gender equal outcomes of said policies. The UN adopted GM as a system-wide organisational framework in the aftermath of the Beijing Conference (United Nations 1997). The second is the increase of descriptive representation of women in elected office—so-called gender quotas—in order to better represent substantive interests of women (Krook and True 2012; Tripp 2006). Both of these strategies go beyond including women into male-dominated realms. They are based on the understanding that a marginalised group cannot *enjoy* a right by merely

getting *access* to it (Ackerly 2016). Rather, such de facto enjoyment requires the active dismantling of structural barriers and the intentional creation of support structures.

In the area of gender and development, the widespread discussion of the conceptually transformative GAD approach could not prevent the co-optation of gender equality norms into the broader project of neoliberal restructuring (see above). International Financial Institutions appropriated the WID approach focusing on increasing the economic participation of women in the formal, productive economy as a tool to achieve economic growth and poverty reduction. However, this view focuses more on female reliability and employability and less on the concrete improvement of livelihoods of these women and their families (Razavi 2013). State functions related to development have gotten more gendered due to GM efforts and the tool of gender budgeting which the UN has promoted widely (UNIFEM 2008). At the same time, macro-economic structures have, even after the crisis of 2008/2009 and the devastating effects on the most vulnerable parts of the world's population, remained unchanged and immune to any concerns of gender equality (Young 2013).

Tracing this first cluster of norms, we have seen a pattern of content transformation in three steps: concept creation, broadening and narrowing or reframing. Table 2.2 summarises these patterns.

The factors that limit the norms lie both in competing, sometimes non-compatible concepts, such as neoliberal restructuring, and in institutional practice. While it is not possible within the limits of this chapter to elaborate adequately on the entirety of implementation efforts of gender equality norms within the UN, it is insightful to look at some of these attempts. Recall that the UN started as an institution that did not concern itself with gender issues and was overwhelmingly male-dominated. The few women in the organisation had to learn how to adjust to these structures, including 'walking on eggshells' when it came to dealing with some deeply problematic dimensions of male organisational leadership, such as sexual harassment (Timothy 2004).¹⁰ Parallel to integrating gender equality into its overarching goal of working for world peace, it became clear that the UN tolerated and certainly did not forcefully combat institutional sexism. The tip of the iceberg were revelations about involvement of UN personnel in sex trafficking (Bolkovac and Lynn 2011) and sexual violence and abuse (Ndulo 2009), often in the context of peacekeeping operations.¹¹ While these criminal acts do not represent

the UN as a whole, they make painfully clear that IOs are not ‘gender neutral’ spaces, and the human beings working in them have not necessarily internalised gender equality norms and act accordingly. Recent accounts of a ‘bystander culture’ within the UN when dealing with allegations of sexual harassment confirm this point (*The Guardian* 2018).

Within this gendered organisational space, the UN has not only pledged to be a champion for gender equality, but also made institutional changes to carry out this goal. This started during the women’s decade in the 1970s and 1980s and intensified through the system-wide integration of GM in the 1990s. How has this organisational transformation looked like? A few observations can be made: First, institutional changes did happen. In its effort to mainstream gender into all its areas of work, the UN has relied on gender analyses, the creation of gender units/desks to carry out these analyses, training programmes for UN staff members and input from gender experts (Moser and Moser 2005; Prügl 2013). Secondly, these changes did often not have high-level support, lacked necessary resources and personnel and were not coherently implemented (True and Parisi 2013; Roberts 2011). Third, the improvement of women’s descriptive representation within the UN has been a slow process. In 1996, the UN General Assembly set the goal to reach gender parity on all staff levels by the year 2000 (GA resolution 50/164), but this goal has thus far not been reached (Haack 2014). According to the Secretary General’s last biannual *Report on the Improvement in the Status of Women in the United Nations System* (2017), as of 2015, women comprised 43.6% of all UN staff, but were overrepresented in the lower ranks (approx. 60% on P1 and P2 levels) and underrepresented in the highest ranks (26.8% for all grades higher than D2). Since 2005, there has been an average increase in female representation of 5.6% (or 0.6% annually), but at this pace, it will still take 38 years to reach parity in the highest category.¹² Fourth, UN agencies with the mandate of working for gender equality have created specific types of knowledge—or expertise—about gender that is passed on to external and internal actors through training materials (Prügl 2013). For example, in an online training module for UN staff members (‘I know Gender: An Introduction to Gender Equality for UN staff’, accessible at <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/>) UN Women brings together core principles of the UN such as respect for distinct cultures and traditions with the understanding of gender relations as socially constructed. It then shows how the application of GM can reach more gender equality in a context-sensitive

manner. In the examples provided, the striving for gender equality is presented as ‘the right thing to do’ and free from conflicts of interests and power struggles.

These snapshots of gender equality practice within the UN create a mixed picture of purposeful initiatives stifled by mostly implicit institutional resistance. While one would expect such dynamics in organisations that explicitly oppose gender equality, they are more surprising in the UN with its decade-long commitment to this set of norms. However, scholars have increasingly paid attention to this phenomenon of implicit vs. explicit resistance (Mergaert and Lombardo 2014; Pincus 2009) and inertia (Ahrens 2018) vis-à-vis GM interventions, especially in ‘friendly’ institutions such as the UN or the European Union. What they find more often than open resistance (and also consider more obstructive to change) is unarticulated rejection, indifference or negligence, both on individual and institutional levels. The integration of gender sensitivity into organisational processes does often clash with an organisational attitude of gender neutrality which is considered unbiased and hence, morally superior. Chappell (2016) provides an insightful example of this pattern in her analysis of the International Criminal Court. While gender justice norms play a prominent role in the court’s mandate as laid out in the Rome Statute, in its practice, the court did not deviate from a competing and long institutionalised tradition of international law that construct legitimacy as gender-neutral objectivity.

Transforming Gender Relations: Women’s Self-Determination and Elimination of Gender-Based Discrimination and Violence

The second cluster of norms departs from a more comprehensive vision of gender equality encompassing public and private dimensions of female subordination. The overall framework in which this vision could flourish was that of women’s rights. A time of gestation, so to speak, was necessary to give birth to this concept: In the 1960s, the CSW had identified multiple forms of discrimination women experienced and produced the 1967 *Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* (GA Resolution 1921 [XVIII]). This document did not trigger much intergovernmental and even less domestic repercussions. However, in the time of heightened awareness of the women’s decade, the UN produced, again based on the initiative of the CSW, a comprehensive Convention on the rights of women (the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of*

Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW). This treaty laid down three basic principles in order to realise women's rights: Eliminate discrimination against women in all its forms, including in private life; achieve de jure and de facto equality of men and women; and make states responsible for achieving these goals.¹³ Due to the work of the CEDAW Committee of experts and women's organisations, the meaning of women's rights has deepened and expanded, especially since the 1990s (Zwingel 2016). This process of expanding the women's rights framework has had many dimensions. For example, the Committee has framed discrimination against women as an intersectional phenomenon—hence, any dimension of discrimination that women experience *on top of* gender-based discrimination (such as class-, race-, disability- or sexual identity-based discrimination) needs to be addressed by States parties to the Convention. Further, CEDAW experts have stressed states' responsibility to achieve not only de jure but also de facto equality for all women *in their diversity*. Important factors impeding this enjoyment of rights are persistent androcentric structures and prevalent stereotypes that assume gender-based inferiority and superiority. According to CEDAW, states have the responsibility to actively reduce these barriers, within public institutions and in society as a whole.

The second norm described in this section, VAW, became a focus of global concern in the 1980s. Many women's organisations were already dealing with a variety of phenomena on the domestic level, ranging from intra-family to state-sponsored violence against women. In particular at the 1985 Nairobi conference, it became clear that women's experience of physical, mental and sexual violence was nothing less than a global pattern. The first approach to VAW at the UN level was to identify structural causes of domestic violence—this expanded the rather common focus on individual-level factors (e.g. alcoholism), but it did also leave out many facets of the problem, for example, communal VAW or violence committed by state actors (Chinkin 2012). In the early 1990s, VAW was reframed as an expression of structural discrimination against women and as a human rights violation. This implied, on the one hand, the recognition of many different forms of violence, perpetrated and condoned by a variety of actors and supported by sexist societal structures, and on the other hand, a direct responsibility of states to prevent and combat VAW in all its forms. The CEDAW Committee was the first international body to spell out this framework in its general recommendation 19 of 1992. Shortly thereafter, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* (GA Resolution 48/104

of December 1993). In the decades since these documents were issued, VAW has figured as a prominent (maybe the most prominent) field of intergovernmental gender equality work. Research to fully grasp causes, the scope, different forms, consequences of and adequate responses to VAW intensified in the 1990s (Chinkin 2012; United Nations Secretary-General 2006). In the effort to bring out structural dimensions of VAW, including patriarchal, cultural and economic factors, the concept itself broadened towards the notion of gender-based violence (True 2012). This term recognises that gender *roles* and *relations* lead to a structure of violence and that men play a role in it, not only as perpetrators but also as bystanders, victims and agents for change. The continued prominence of this norm has led to heightened awareness of the problem and to significant policy developments globally, regionally and domestically. Perhaps the anti-violence norm has diffused more than others because it resonates with cross-culturally prevalent gender norms, in particular concerning women's weakness and need for protection.¹⁴ This resonance sometimes undermines the transformative core of overcoming gender-based violence with a view to creating social structures that foster substantive gender equality. Hence, the VAW norm may be an example of a trade-off between broad resonance and diminished transformative depth.

The third norm in this cluster, reproductive health and rights, was, similarly to the norm on eliminating VAW, a theme that found global traction within the context of the broader women's rights framework. Women's access to and education about family planning methods became understood as an effective tool to curb population growth already in the 1960s (Hussein 2004), but it was only much later, namely in the 1979 CEDAW Convention, that a right to reproductive health was formulated. It included adequate medical facilities for women's reproductive needs, as well as information about and access to birth control measures so that women could determine if and how they wanted to have children (Cook 1995). From early on, this norm has been fiercely contested, by some as a tool to suppress population growth in poor countries, by others as a strategy to destruct family harmony and provide cover for the killing of unborn life through abortions (Buss 2004). Reproductive rights proponents indeed promote a broad framework that includes access to abortion, but they also insist on adequate pre- and post-natal maternal health care and shared parental responsibilities in regards to birth control (Cook 1995). Between these fronts, actors within IOs often try to carve out a moderate position: For example,

the CEDAW Committee focuses on less controversial dimensions of reproductive self-determination of women, such as sex education and a more empowered position of women within the family and with a view to decision-making in family planning. It has also urged governments to decriminalise abortion to prevent maternal mortality caused by illegally and unsafely performed abortions (Zwingel 2016). As all norms, the field of reproductive rights is in flux. For example, the CEDAW Committee has recently expanded in a new direction by framing *preventable* maternal mortality as a human rights violation.¹⁵ This view implies a new level of state responsibility for structural maternal health care (Cook 2013). However, the norm of reproductive rights is one where strategies of compromising or persuasion are less available than in the other fields discussed. It shares this status of contestation with other norms, for example, the recognition of gender diversity and the debate on the regulation of prostitution or sex work.

CONCLUSION

Since the foundation of the UN in 1945, a number of dynamics in the development of global gender equality norms can be identified (see Table 2.2). First, all norms discussed had to be made globally relevant, as they were not already recognised. Most of the actors doing this work are non-governmental actors, typically building coalitions with each other, actors within the UN bureaucracy or like-minded member states. All of these interventions constitute norm translation because they create connections between differently situated struggles and ideas, identify cross-cultural patterns and frame them in ways most prone to receiving recognition as matters of global governance. The CSW did this type of work in its early survey identifying women's marginalisation in political office, and so did transnational NGOs in respect to targeting feminised poverty, VAW and many more issues. Of the three groups of actors the UN brings together—state representatives, international bureaucrats and civil society actors—the last one is by far the most influential one in this global agenda-setting effort, while states in general display a less transformative attitude and often even resist gender equality norms.

Second, norms 'enter' this realm of intergovernmental relevance at different points in time, which means that norm entrepreneurs are differently constrained and different paths for discourse and action are available to them. The socio-economic role of women in development

initiatives, for example, was recognised much earlier than the fact that women should enjoy rights and live their lives free from discrimination and violence. This suggests dependency of norm development on at least three factors: first, on well-organised norm entrepreneurs, prepared to work for norm recognition; second, on other norms that enhance the framing and understanding of a new norm, as the women's rights framework did for the elimination of VAW; and third, on institutional and broader global context factors. The UN bureaucracy working on gender equality issues is now much better equipped than it used to be, and hence, able to work on many more issues much more efficiently. Global context factors have framed gender norm development in more distant but sometimes quite straightforward ways. For example, decolonisation helped in bringing socio-economic concerns of women of the 'Third World' to the forefront, and neoliberal restructuring has weakened the idea of women's empowerment and right to live in dignity and strengthened the focus on their contribution to economic growth.

Third, all norms change over time, some towards more comprehensiveness (e.g. in political participation and women's rights), others towards de-radicalisation (as in economic development and partly in the field of VAW). Again, these developments depend on sustained activism—sometimes referred to as 'agenda keeping' (Çağlar et al. 2013)—as well as on the institutional response to these norms. Institutional integration seems to work towards de-radicalisation one way or another. One factor contributing to this is the need of multilateral institutions to find a common denominator among vastly different normative and political points of view. The UN is equipped to respect the world's cultural diversity, but this often means to reconcile incompatible values and makes it almost impossible to reach a coherent, let alone transformative, gender equality framework. Another factor leading to de-radicalisation is the necessity to integrate gender equality norms with already established norms that shape institutional practice. 'Practice' means that practitioners who are not inherently convinced of the surplus value of integrating gender equality norms into organisational procedures are tasked to carry out this complex process. Their resistance may not be explicit, but is often profound. Those who genuinely work to implement gender equality norms have to find a way of dealing with this reality of institutional inertia (Ahrens 2018).

Fourth and finally, there are gender equality norms that are deeply contested, such as the concept of reproductive rights. In such cases,

we see norm entrepreneurs that fight for the recognition of competing norms within IOs, in this case, the rights of women to decide over their body vs the right of the unborn child to live. Such controversies usually lead to non-adoption of an overarching position within an intergovernmental context—the UN does not generally support abortion, but it has also not embraced the protection of the life of the unborn child. What happens instead is a refocusing on those dimensions of the norm that are at least somewhat consensual. In the case of reproductive rights, this has led to increased attention for maternal health and sex education.

If there is one takeaway from this analysis, it is that there is no linearity in the power of norms. They do not follow a clear path of increased recognition, acceptance and internalisation, as early norm diffusion models suggested (if only to study the deviation from this ideal process). Rather, norms are ‘in motion’ in terms of content as well as in terms of impact, and this movement takes place within ever-changing context factors. This is true for norm diffusion both in domestic settings and in IOs. We need to pay continuing attention to the factors that create these seemingly haphazard dynamics. Further research is in order, but this contribution identified an interplay of concrete activism aiming at translating and strengthening gender equality norms, institutional constraints and broader context factors.

NOTES

1. The UN characterises itself as ‘a catalyst of change, ... a global standard setter for the eradication of gender discrimination; ... a forum for debate; and ... an unparalleled source of balanced, comprehensive data on the status of women worldwide’ (United Nations 1996: 3). It is important to note that this contribution brings out processes that are characteristics to the UN and some of its agencies, not to other IOs which may differ in origin, scope and mandate.
2. For example, the League of Nations or the Organization of American States (Garner 2010; Meyer 1999). The latter was the first international organisation with a special section for women’s concerns, the Inter-American Commission on the Status of Women (CIM) established in 1928.
3. A concerted effort of international women’s organisations, the OAS’ Inter-American Commission on the Status of Women (CIM) and a small number of women delegates at the UN founding conference in San Francisco produced this inclusion (Galey 1995: 7).
4. Several factors led to this prioritisation: First, in the early 1970s, women’s movements became vocal in many parts of the world, and it was

the non-governmental *Women's International Democratic Federation* that first proposed the idea of a world women's conference to the UN (de Haan 2010). Second, advocates of women's concerns within the UN who had long worked for institutional attention were disappointed with the results and supported a higher level of publicity for their cause. Third, some gender equality advocates had entered the centre of decision-making within the UN, such as Helvi Sipilä, the first woman appointed to the rank of Assistant Secretary-General in 1972, who also served as a Secretary-General for the 1975 conference (Zwingel 2016). However, the UN was far from unanimously supporting this focus on women, and the Mexico conference was prepared in record time and with a very limited budget (Antrobus 2004).

5. In addition to these four world women's conferences, women's activists and organisations also participated in other significant UN conferences in the early 1990s where they addressed gender equality issues in relation to the environment (UN Conference on the Environment and Development, 1992), human rights (UN World Conference on Human Rights), reproductive health and rights (International Conference on Population and Development, 1994) and social and economic development (World Social Summit, 1995).
6. This innovation is a huge achievement that has received ample scholarly attention. Most feminist analyses detect a process of normative de-radicalisation, as the element of women's participation in conflict management has become weaker and the focus on protection of women from sexual violence in warfare has become stronger (von Braunmühl 2013).
7. While the UN General Assembly resolution no. 64/289 (2010) establishing UN Women only speaks of 'adequate funding' and avoids concrete amounts, member states at the time recognised that the new entity would require a budget twice as high as its predecessor organisations, that is, \$500 million annually (United Nations 2010; United Nations General Assembly 2010). However, UN Women's budget has never reached that level and much of its work is contingent on voluntary contributions (see financial statements in UN Women's annual reports, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/annual-report>).
8. These norms represent a selection of a much broader array. Also, in analysing norms that have developed traction over time, I am contributing to the selection bias identified by Carpenter (2007) which excludes norms for which no significant support could be created.
9. The term 'empowerment' deserves its own process tracing; it is excessively used, but its meaning varies widely. In particular, the initial emphasis on collective action and social transformation has often given way to a depoliticised, individualised idea of 'choice' (see Batliwala 2007).

10. In her account, Timothy describes the UN prior to the 1990s, when sexual harassment was not yet a term and no institutional mechanisms were in place to deal with it.
11. The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations has reacted to the systemic problem of sexual abuse by its personnel and provides comprehensive data online starting in 2007 on allegations, alleged perpetrators, victims, investigations and action undertaken (<https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-data-introduction>, last accessed December 21, 2017). This transparency is commendable. What is surprising, however, is that there is no specification of the gender of either alleged perpetrators or victims; the only distinction made is between children and adults. This seems to have the effect of making a crime committed predominantly *by* men and predominantly *against* women, girls and boys unacceptably gender neutral.
12. For the year 2015 specifically, Landgren (2015) detects a *decrease* in appointments of women in the highest posts of Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General. Hence, depending on the window selected, the number of women on top of the organisation is not only *growing very slowly*; it may even be *shrinking*.
13. The Convention contains prescriptions that aim at equality, e.g. in education, employment, political participation, before the law and in the family, others that address women's specific needs, as in regards to reproductive health and those that envision societal transformation to overcome gender stereotypes and female subordination.
14. The development of the Women, Peace and Security framework has been affected by this power of a protectionist VAW norm: The discourse in the Security Council, initiated by SC Resolution 1325 in 2000, diminished its focus on women's participation in conflict management and increased attention to women's need of protection from sexual violence in warfare (von Braunmühl 2013).
15. It did so in a decision under the Optional Protocol concerning Brazil: In this case, the death of a poor Brazilian woman of Afro-descent in the course of her pregnancy could be attributed to the failure of the Brazilian state to provide sufficient reproductive health services across all sectors of society (CEDAW 2008; Zwingel 2016).

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Feminist Engagement with Gender Equality in Regional Governance

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at gender equality norms in regional governance. It shows how the regional level has a particular significance in transnational diffusion processes of gender equality norms, in the sense of complementing international norm diffusion processes, and contextualising and amplifying gender equality norms. We compare two types of gender equality norms, i.e. gender mainstreaming and violence against women, in four different regional organisations. These norms are expressions

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of and the result of feminist engagement with regional governance; in particular feminist activists and networks seeking to influence regional organisations, and feminist politicians and bureaucrats working within these organisations. We call these norms gender equality norms, in order to distinguish them from gender norms, where the latter refer to taken-for-granted understandings of gender relations and routinised practices. Gender norms are embedded in institutional relations, that is gender regimes (Walby 2011: 103–107), rather than isolated single standards. Gender equality norms instead point to feminist engagements with the status quo aiming to challenge and transform inequalities embedded and reproduced in existing gender norms.

In the first part of this chapter, we explore regional norm diffusion processes in four different regional organisations: the European Union (EU), the Organization of American States (OAS), the *Mercado Común del Sur* (Mercosur) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). We compare how norms on gender mainstreaming in trade and development and on violence against women have come on the agenda and have taken shape in these different regional organisations. Our comparative analysis reveals considerable diversity in the ways these two gender equality norms have diffused across these organisations. In the second part of the chapter, we attempt to understand and explain this unevenness in gender equality norm diffusion. We draw from international relations and social movements thinking to situate the contestations around these gender equality norms in a combination of (predominantly) intergovernmental and transnational dynamics. We situate the unevenness in gender equality norms by highlighting regional governance landscapes as the ‘places’ of norm engagement. Two aspects of these regional governance landscapes critically affect the way gender mainstreaming and violence against women have diffused across these four regional organisations: firstly, regional governance logics and secondly, transnational actor constellations.

REGIONAL GOVERNANCE AND GENDER EQUALITY

The level of regional governance has developed between the global and the national levels of governance, mostly in reaction to an increase in cross border interactions of economic, societal and state actors. Since the 1950s these so-called regionalisation processes have been institutionalised in almost all parts of the world. Regional organisations have been

established in order to manage regionalisation and deal with a broad array of economic, societal and security challenges (Hänggi et al. 2006). Much literature on gender equality norms focuses on global-local interactions (Krook and True 2012; Zwingel 2012), but there is something peculiar about regional governance which justifies distinguishing it from the global. Territoriality, identity and scope are defining features of regional organisations: member states are located in the same region, have some geographical coherence, and as such include certain states and exclude others. In addition, member states of regional organisations share some sense of collective identity, often grounded in a combination of cultural, economic, linguistic and political ties. Finally, regional organisations can have a potentially broad mission, in contrast to international functional organisations that focus on a specific policy domain (van der Vleuten and van Eerdedijk 2014: 19). Regional governance has become a new arena for political contestation and for the diffusion of gender equality norms. Women's rights organisations have mobilised to create and benefit from new entries at the regional governance level, which then offered new possibilities for boomerang actions (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Also for advocacy, this regional arena has its specific characteristics, because the geographical coherence and identity of the region makes that, compared to global networks, regional advocacy networks 'are more attuned to local constraints' (Adams and Kang 2007), as is for instance exemplified by the SADC Gender Alliance. Also, regional organisations are better equipped to engage in capacity-building of regional and domestic advocacy networks (Montoya 2013). Regional women's policy agencies that have played a role in providing access for advocacy networks to regional organisations include the *Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres* (CIM) of the OAS, the Mercosur Meeting of Female Ministers and Highest-Level Authorities on Women (RMAAM) and the SADC Gender Unit.

We compare gender mainstreaming in trade and development, and violence against women across these different regional organisations. Both gender equality norms have a transformative potential, but in different ways. Gender mainstreaming can be understood as a transformative *strategy* that has been broadly adopted as a policy strategy by gender experts, academics and policy makers across a wide range of (development) organisations and institutions since the mid-1990s. Violence against women is a transformative *issue* that emerged at the grassroots level and has taken a long and contested trajectory towards institutionalisation and politicisation (van der Vleuten et al. 2014: 4–9). These two

types of gender equality norms, each having faced progress and backlash, allow for gaining a better understanding of the continued contestations, the unevenness in and non-linearity of gender equality norm diffusion. In the next section we show how gender mainstreaming took shape differently in four regional organisations, and subsequently how violence against women developed in these regional organisations. For each regional organisation we assess the extent to which the norms are binding and the extent to which their framing is gendered (van Eerdewijk and Roggeband 2014: 60–61). By comparing their trajectories across different regional organisations, we are able to grasp the situatedness of gender equality norm diffusion.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING OF DEVELOPMENT AND TRADE POLICIES

Gender mainstreaming as a strategy for the achievement of gender equality was launched worldwide in Beijing at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in 1995. It started its way through the institutions already during the decade preceding ‘Beijing’, when Scandinavian gender experts and policy makers at the UN Headquarters started developing the strategy as an alternative to the previous Women-in-Development (WID) approach. They argued that women should be brought ‘into the mainstream of the development process on the same basis as men’ (UN 1986). A gendered framing would require a focus on structural gender biases, but, in practice, gender mainstreaming has often been vulnerable to technocratisation, depoliticisation and evaporation (Cornwall et al. 2004). In regional organisations norms on gender mainstreaming can be found which differ as to their gendered character and their trajectories.

The EU and Gender Mainstreaming of Trade and Development Policies

The concept of gender mainstreaming first appeared in European Commission documents in 1989, in a working paper by a Danish expert on equal opportunities, but was referred to only inconsistently in seminars organised by the Commission (van der Vleuten 2007). Only after ‘Beijing 1995’, gender mainstreaming was turned from a vague concept into a formal EU strategy. In 1997, it was enshrined in the Treaty of

Amsterdam as the aim to ‘eliminate inequalities, and promote equality, between men and women’ (Article 8 TFEU). Interestingly, the strategy has played out differently in the domains of development and trade respectively.

In the field of development policies, in the 1990s femocrats in the European Commission were already part of the global debate that saw the transition from the WID to a Gender-and-Development approach, of which gender mainstreaming was part (Kantola 2010). Immediately after the conclusion of the Amsterdam Treaty, the Council adopted a Regulation on Integrating Gender Issues in Development Cooperation. It required the EU to mainstream gender in the Country Strategy Reports of partner countries and the concomitant National Indicative Programmes, which outline the projects and budget for reaching the objectives set out in the strategy reports. Interestingly, the diagnosis of gender equality problems in these programming documents often is sophisticated and reflects transformative aims, while the solutions continue to focus on traditional WID measures (Debusscher 2017). Also, development aid in areas other than health and education remains largely gender-blind. The EU fails to offer structural support for transnational women’s movements in partner countries and fails to include feminist experts in the process of policy development (Debusscher 2017). Yet, in June 2017 the Council of the EU has adopted a document of which the wording is slightly more in line with its mainstreaming ambitions, although still lacking a transformative aim. In this so-called ‘Renewed Impetus for the Africa-EU Partnership’, the representatives of the EU member states emphasise ‘the importance of increasing investments in *inclusive* quality education and training at all levels’ and ‘the investment in and the modernisation of African agriculture and agro-business, including small-scale food producers, in particular *female and family farmers*’ (Council of the EU 2017; emphasis added). The document bears the imprint of the European External Action Service (EEAS), a relatively new institution which is still trying to carve out its turf. Federica Mogherini, since 2015 the head of the EEAS, has often expressed her commitment to gender equality. Although the institution and its staff are reported not to be gender-sensitive (Horst 2016), the creation of the post of Gender Advisor to the EEAS in 2015, with a staff of two and a seconded expert, was a first step to create a new entry point for feminist actors (Guerrina and Wright 2016).

Trade policies constitute core business for the EU, which has ‘exclusive competence’ in this domain. In comparison with development aid, however, EU trade policies have been impermeable to gender mainstreaming. The European Commission plays a crucial role in the negotiations, more specifically Directorate General (DG) Trade. It has been noted that DG Trade holds the opinion that a trade agreement is not an appropriate instrument to address gender concerns (Aprodev 2007). The Trade Committee of the European Parliament does not promote gender issues either, and the Women’s Committee of the European Parliament is not a rapporteur for trade agreements (van der Vleuten 2017). The European Women’s Lobby and the European Institute for Gender Equality have not devoted attention to trade either. The feminist network WIDE+ is the exception to the rule. It has demanded that gender assessments are done at the beginning of the negotiations, but until now its demands have not met with success. The EU has concluded dozens of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements,¹ but gender equality assessments are not part of the adoption process of trade agreements. Even the European Partnership Agreements (EPAs) which the EU has concluded with former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (the so-called ACP-countries) are not gender mainstreamed, even though they could have constituted a good case for gender mainstreaming as they aim at promoting trade-driven development and are not limited to eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers. However, assessing three EPAs with African countries,² the results are quite disappointing. The trade chapters do not mention gender equality or gender mainstreaming, and they do not propose measures to ensure that trade liberalisation contributes to gender equality (van der Vleuten 2017). The European Parliament brought up the position of women only in its discussion of the SADC-Interim EPA, when it asked for ‘special provisions for the most vulnerable groups such as local farmers and women’ (European Parliament 2009).

Mercosur, OAS and Gender Mainstreaming of Trade and Development Policies

In 2000, the General Assembly of the OAS adopted a Resolution in which it urged ‘the OAS General Secretariat to see that the gender perspective is incorporated into all work, projects, and programmes of the organs, agencies, and entities of the OAS in fulfilment of the Program’

(OAS 2000). The Inter-American Commission on Women (known by its Spanish acronym CIM, *Comisión Inter-Americana de Mujeres*) had successfully put this resolution on the agenda during the preparations for Beijing +5. CIM is an autonomous organisation within the OAS that is made up of 33 delegates from OAS member states. Crucially, and differing from the other organisations analysed in this chapter, OAS does not have a mandate to conclude trade agreements. As a result, in the domain of trade, gender mainstreaming is limited to collecting and distributing information on gender and trade (OAS 2017). In the field of development, the OAS mainly provides financial support and training. In 2010 CIM published a Handbook which outlines how to include a gender focus in each phase of the project cycle (OAS 2010).

Mercosur, the acronym of the Southern Common Market, was created in 1991 by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay with the central aim to create a common market. Women's groups targeted Mercosur since its creation but had access only via trade unions who participated in the regional tripartite structures (Ribeiro Hoffmann 2014). These structures limited transnational activism because they only admitted national interest groups (Sanchez 2007). Also, radical feminist groups refrained from engaging in Mercosur because of its neoliberal leaning (Alvarez 2009). Still, in 1998 pressure from regional feminist networks contributed to the creation of the *Reunion Especializada de la Mujer* (REM—Specialised Meeting on Women) which was composed of government delegations that could be advised by regional women's organisations. It was the first Mercosur body that directly addressed gender matters. In 2000, preparing for Beijing +5, the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs adopted a mandatory resolution which required Mercosur institutions to incorporate a gender perspective in all its activities (Resolution 84/2000), although without providing for a monitoring mechanism.

After the turn of the millennium, when left-wing governments came to power in all member states (except Paraguay), gender became more prominent on the regional agenda. These governments extended the narrow trade-liberalisation agenda of Mercosur and opened a window of opportunity for civil society. In the context of the Beijing +10 UN Conference in 2005, women's movements seized the opportunity to make gender a central issue on the Mercosur agenda. They were aided by the institutional platform offered by the OAS and the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) (Roggeband 2014). The MERCOSUR Meeting of Female Ministers and Highest-Level Authorities on Women (RMAAM)

was created in 2011 as a successor to the REM. It is a space for dialogue between the highest authorities on gender of the member states. Its remit is to advise on gender issues with the authority to issue declarations and recommendations (De la Riva and Muñoz 2015). In 2012 recommendations were adopted on a broad range of topics, including the participation of women in economics and the integration of women in development. Of particular relevance for trade policies is Recommendation 10/2012, which proposes to mainstream gender into all Mercosur agreements with third parties (Ribeiro Hoffmann 2014). The quality of the norm was further increased in 2013, when the Council adopted the Directive of Gender Equality Policy in Mercosur. This directive, which was elaborated by RMAAM, requires Mercosur to gender mainstream the ‘design, creation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policies, regulations, strategies, programmes, action plans as well as resource management and budget design’ of the regional institutions and policies (De la Riva and Muñoz 2015). In order to prevent the directive and the recommendations from remaining paper tigers, the Latin American chapter of the International Gender and Trade Network has launched an observatory to monitor the gender mainstreaming of free trade policies of Mercosur.

SADC and Gender Mainstreaming of Trade and Development Policies

Prior to the establishment of SADC in 1994, the 1989 Abuja Declaration of UNECA had already identified gender mainstreaming as an important strategy for Africa. Strong feminist involvement in the setting up of SADC resulted in the establishment of a Gender Unit at the SADC secretariat. It had the task to facilitate and coordinate SADC gender equality commitment, and functioned as a hub for regional feminist networking. In 1997, against the background of the ‘Beijing’ pledges for gender mainstreaming by all governments, these feminist entrepreneurs within and outside SADC institutions managed to push the SADC Summit to adopt a Declaration on Gender and Development. The Declaration aims to promote ‘women’s full access to, and control over productive resources such as land, livestock, markets, credit, modern technology, formal employment, and a good quality of life’ (SADC 1997: H.iii). The Declaration articulated the idea of gender mainstreaming without explicitly calling it as such, where it aims to ‘putting into place an institutional framework for advancing gender equality ... which ensures that

gender is routinely taken into account in all sectors' (SADC 1997: F.ii). This commitment was elaborated in the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), which did explicitly refer to the UN definition of gender mainstreaming (SADC 2003: 158), and promised that 'cross-cutting issues such as gender, HIV and AIDS, information and communications technology, statistics and science and technology will be mainstreamed into all areas of focus' (SADC 2003: 65). The RISDP itself is gender mainstreamed in the sense that gender issues come up in all policy areas, including mining, energy, agricultural research, forestry, fisheries and wildlife, and water management, to name but a few. At the launch of the RISDP, Benjamin Mkapa, then president of Tanzania and chairperson of SADC reminded the other heads of state and government that

good governance demands that we should never lose sight of the importance of mainstreaming gender in all our operational activities. Our full potential, and our aspirations for development, cannot be fully realised unless women are fully integrated, and given a chance to assume their rightful role as equal partners with men in socio-economic development. (SADC Council and Summit Records 2004)

However, when, in 2005 in preparation for the Beijing +10 assessment, the Gender Alliance conducted a gender audit upon demand by the SADC Gender Unit, their findings were sobering and they asked for binding instruments. Although the Council of Justice Ministers approved the upgrading of the 1997 Declaration into a binding Protocol, the Summit decided 'it was not as yet an opportune time' to do so (SADC Council and Summit Records 2006). Thanks to the commitment of Magdaline Mathiba-Madibela, head of the Gender Unit, a Draft Protocol was elaborated in collaboration with key stakeholders such as legal and feminist experts from the region, as well as financial and technical assistance from international donors. Sixteen regional and national NGOs established the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance and pushed all parties to go ahead. In August 2008, thirteen member states (except Botswana and Mauritius) signed the Protocol and in October 2011, it came into force. The binding Gender Protocol has operationalised gender mainstreaming as 'identifying gender gaps and making women's, men's, girls' and boys' concerns and experiences integral to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all spheres so that they benefit equally' (SADC 2008: 7–8). The Gender Protocol includes three specific targets concerning trade:

By 2015, adopt policies and enact laws which ensure equal access, benefit and opportunities for women and men in trade and entrepreneurship, taking into account the contribution of women in the formal and informal sectors; (Article 17.1)

By 2015, review their national trade and entrepreneurship policies, to make them *gender responsive*; (Article 17.2; emphasis added)

By 2015, [...] introduce measures and ensure that women benefit equally from economic opportunities, including those created through public procurement processes. (Article 17.3)

Since the coming into force of the Gender Protocol, the main efforts of the SADC Gender Unit and the Gender Alliance have been aimed at monitoring member state progress in reaching the targets it contains. They publish a yearly Gender Barometer and actively inform women of the rights contained in the document (GenderLinks 2017).

Comparing the fate of gender mainstreaming in development and trade in these three regions we have noted differences and similarities between the two policy arenas. As regards development, policies have been gender mainstreamed to a certain extent, but often in an ad hoc or scattered way and in degendered or instrumental frames that undermine its transformative potential. Trade policies have remained almost completely gender-blind, with gender equality largely absent from EU's trade policies, and only slightly more prominent in the trade policies of Mercosur and SADC. All four regional organisations lack a strong enforcement mechanism. They conduct critical assessments, and monitoring may lead to naming and shaming, but sanctions are never imposed because there is no court of law competent to do so in any of these organisations. SADC has the strictest monitoring mechanism because of the targets and deadlines in the Protocol and the commitment of feminist NGOs; but even here, a 'hard' enforcement mechanism is absent.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE EU-MERCOSUR-OAS-SADC

Thanks to decades of mobilising by women's organisations, ending violence against women came high on the international agenda in the 1990s resulting in a body of treaties, conventions and soft law. In 1993, coordinated action by feminist activists, human rights lawyers and governments at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna led to

the recognition of violence against women as a human rights violation. The 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against women was the first important step to the codification of violence against women as a human rights issue. Prior, two General Recommendations the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, had been formulated with specific reference to violence against women. Recommendation 12 (1989) recommends to the States parties that they should include in their periodic reports to the CEDAW Committee information about legislation on violence against women and other measures to eradicate violence and support victims. Recommendation 19 (1992) defines gender-based violence as a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

At the regional level women's rights activists have been even more successful in creating strong normative frameworks to combat violence. In 1994, OAS adopted the Inter-American Convention for the Prevention, Punishment and Elimination of Violence against Women, also known as the Belem do Pará Convention. This Convention was the culmination of decades of persistent struggles by Latin American feminists to address violence against women (Roggeband 2014). Situations of military dictatorships and armed conflict in many Latin American countries had made feminists in the region particularly concerned with state violence against women. Women's organisations pointed to torture and rape of political prisoners and the use of rape as a weapon of war, and connected these forms of violence to deeper societal patterns of subordination and violence against women in both the private and public sphere (Roggeband 2016). Their attempts to get these issues on the political agenda were hampered in the absence of strong states and the context of nascent democracies, but found resonance in the international arena. The Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) of the OAS took up the issue of VAW in response to regional feminism (Meyer 1999). For drafting the OAS Convention CIM could build upon the experiences and insights of regional and national women's organisations in developing measures to combat violence. This national and regional expertise shaped the language and structure of the Convention (Meyer 1999; Friedman 2009).

The OAS Convention uniquely includes state-sponsored violence. It also makes the state responsible for defending and protecting rights of women. The Convention defines violence against women as 'a violation of their human rights' (Meyer 1999). According to its preamble,

violence against women should be understood as a ‘manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men’ (OAS 1994). The Convention adopts a broad and inclusive definition of violence against women as ‘any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or the private sphere’. It also prohibits violence ‘that is perpetrated or condoned by the state or its agents regardless of where it occurs’. Chapter II of the Convention states that women have the right to be free from violence, which includes the right to be free from all forms of discrimination and ‘to be valued and educated free of stereotyped patterns of behaviour and social and cultural practices based on concepts of inferiority or subordination’. State parties ‘recognise that violence against women prevents and nullifies the exercise of their human rights’ (OAS 1994: II and 5). The Convention requires the state to investigate, sanction, and prevent all forms of VAW. Chapter III of the Convention clearly outlines the duties of states to ‘pursue, by all appropriate means and without delay, policies to prevent, punish and eradicate such violence’. Additionally, states must ensure ‘effective access to restitution, reparations, or other just and effective remedies’. Governments should also modify legal or customary practices that sustain the persistence and tolerance of violence against women; develop programmes to raise awareness; train justice, police, and law enforcement officers; and provide appropriate specialised services for women. States are obliged to send national reports to the CIM explaining how national policies are brought in line with the Convention. Also, individuals or organisations may lodge petitions with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights for alleged violations of states’ responsibilities under the Convention (Article 7). In addition to this regional framework, Mercosur has adopted a number of recommendations on violence against women and one resolution (CMG res 79/2000) which is in line with the Belem do Pará Convention, but does not extend this framework.

Also in Africa, decades of activism led to a number of important regional frameworks. In 2003, African Union governments adopted a Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), in which they commit themselves, amongst others, to ending violence against women. The Protocol entered into force in November 2005, after ratification by 15 states. Gender-based violence also features prominently in the earlier mentioned SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, adopted in

2008. This Gender Protocol was the result of a process that had started with the signing of the Declaration on Gender and Development at the SADC Summit in Malawi in 1997. The motor behind this first declaration was the Gender Unit within SADC. Soon after the Declaration on Gender and Development had been adopted, feminist activists together with the SADC Gender Unit denounced the marginal attention to violence against women and successfully lobbied for an additional document (van Eerdewijk and Van de Sand 2014). In 1998, the Addendum on Violence against Women, containing a list of measures to address the problem of violence against women was approved and signed by SADC members. The Addendum articulated violence against women as a human rights issue, and defined it as reflecting ‘the unequal relations of power between women and men, resulting in the domination and discrimination of women by men’ (SADC 1998: Article 3). To compensate for this inequality the addendum proposes an integrated approach and the allocation of sufficient resources to prevent gender-based violence.

The 2008 Protocol aims to eliminate gender-based violence and contains six specific targets. Member states should enact and enforce legislation prohibiting all forms of gender-based violence; laws on gender-based violence should provide for the comprehensive testing, treatment and care of survivors of sexual assault; review and reform their criminal laws and procedures applicable to cases of sexual offences and gender-based violence; enact and adopt specific legislative provisions to prevent human trafficking; enact legislative provisions, and policies to combat sexual harassment; and adopt integrated approaches, including institutional cross-sector structures, with the aim of reducing current levels of gender-based violence by half by 2015. The clear targets set by the Protocol are measured by the annually updated SADC Gender Protocol Barometer of the Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance. In 2016, the Protocol has been revised to bring it in line with global targets set in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, the African Union Agenda 2063, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The African Union Agenda for instance aspires to be a continent free of violence by 2063. While the targets of the Protocol are very ambitious, enforcement mechanisms are limited. Non-state actors monitor progress, but are limited to ‘naming and shaming’ as tool to hold states accountable.

In contrast to the strong regional norms that developed in the Americas and Southern Africa, binding legislation to address violence

against women within its member states has been surprisingly weakly developed in the EU. The EU issued a single directive dealing with sexual harassment at the workplace (2002 Equal Treatment in Employment Directive). The EU's response to domestic violence in its member states has remained restricted to soft law measures and financial incentives for capacity building, mainly because the issue falls outside of the scope of the EU treaties (Montoya 2013; Krizsán and Roggeband 2018). Interestingly another regional organisation in the European region, the Council of Europe, issued a Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) in 2011, which entered into force in 2017. This Convention is the first instrument in the European region to set legally binding standards specifically to prevent gender-based violence, protect victims of violence and punish perpetrators. The Convention defines violence against women as a structural problem, 'a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women' (Council of Europe 2011). Violence against women is a social mechanism to maintain existing inequalities. The EU signed the Convention in June 2017. A Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) has been appointed to monitor the implementation of the convention. In addition, a political body, the Committee of the Parties, which is composed of representatives of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention follows up on GREVIO reports and conclusions and adopts recommendations to the Parties concerned.

Comparing the development of international legislation to combat violence against women in these three regions, we see unevenness in strength and gendered quality of norms. Europe has been a laggard in developing strong instruments to deal with the issue. Latin American activists have been pioneering a human rights framing of violence against women and this framework inspired both the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against women and the Inter-American Convention on violence against women (1994). In the absence of an explicit international treaty on violence against women, the issue has been recognised in re-interpretation and articulations of existing provisions in for instance the General Recommendations 12 and 19.³ By contrast, the OAS Belem do Pará Convention requires that States parties apply due diligence to prevent, investigate and

impose penalties for violence against women and contains detailed provisions regarding the obligations of States to enact legislation. In addition there are strong monitoring instruments and cases can be brought to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights leading to important additional jurisprudence. The SADC Protocol is also binding in nature, but focuses on implementation through a set of targets within a specified time frame. Progress is monitored annually by non-state actors, but there are no strong enforcement mechanisms attached to the Protocol.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS BASED ON OUR EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The unequal trajectories and qualities of the regional norms on gender mainstreaming and violence against women are summarised in Table 3.1. This unevenness provides a number of important insights about regional diffusion processes. Firstly, norm diffusion is a multidirectional process, rather than a top-down global-to-local one (see Chapter 1). By including the regional level, we have shown how it is also a polycentric process, with gender equality norms emerging at regional levels,

Table 3.1 The quality of regional gender equality norms on Gender mainstreaming and VAW

		<i>SADC</i>	<i>OAS</i>	<i>Mercosur</i>	<i>EU</i>
Gender mainstreaming	<i>Development</i>	1979 – Modestly strong – Targets – Monitoring	2000 – Weak	2000 – Present – Monitoring	1997 – Partially transformative
	<i>Trade</i>	– Modestly strong – Targets – Monitoring	– Limited	– Modestly strong – Monitoring	– Largely absent
Violence against women		2008 – Gendered – Targets – Monitoring	1994 – Gendered – Binding (litigation)	2000 – Gendered – Binding resolution	2002/2006 – Limited (2017 Council of Europe Convention)

sometimes parallel to international norms, sometimes earlier than or in more progressive forms than at the international level. For example, shortly after the 1993 UN *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*, the OAS adopted a Convention on violence against women which is more comprehensive, also including violence by the state and has stronger enforcement mechanisms attached to it, in the sense of allowing for litigation.

Secondly, we see issue-specific dynamics. Stronger norms have been developed in relation to violence against women compared to gender mainstreaming in the field of development and trade. The field of trade proved to be the least open to the diffusion of gender equality norms. Thirdly, variations also are noted between different regional organisations. OAS and SADC have relatively strong norms on violence against women in comparison with the EU and Mercosur. Moreover, whereas gender mainstreaming of trade has found an entrance in SADC and to a lesser extent in Mercosur, it has hardly gained ground in the EU. In the next section we aim to provide an explanation for this unevenness.

GOVERNANCE LANDSCAPES, LOGICS AND ACTOR CONSTELLATIONS

The unevenness of gender equality norms across these four regional organisations underlines the situatedness of norm diffusion and engagement. The way norms on gender mainstreaming and violence against women have been shaped and enacted cannot be understood without looking at the regional governance landscapes in which they are being negotiated, contested and diffused. Our notion of governance landscapes, as ‘the *where* of norm engagement’, speaks to actors, organisational issues and environments, the elements of the situated approach (Fejerskov et al. 2019). These are integrated into the notion of regional governance, as a ‘system of rule at the regional level where authority is exercised by state and non-state actors in formal and informal ways’, at the intersections between global, national and sub-national levels (van der Vleuten and van Eerdewijk 2014: 18). Regional governance has a transnational character, in the sense that it entails a multiplicity of interactions, moves beyond the nation-state boundaries, and involves non-state (i.e. civil society) actors (van der Vleuten and van Eerdewijk 2014: 33–35). In that sense, regional governance not only speaks to the ‘place’

of norm engagement, but also to its relational nature, by pointing to the types of interactions.

Regional governance landscapes are not open and neutral spaces in which norms are diffused and promoted. Rather, regional governance landscapes affect the way violence against women and gender mainstreaming take shape as gender equality norms. These landscapes are the 'places' of norm engagement, in which we understand 'actors', 'organisations' and 'environment' in an integrated way. These governance landscapes carry institutional and normative features in the logics they embody: these logics are present in the identity, mission and formal institutional mechanisms and procedures of regional organisations. A second characteristic of regional governance as a 'site of encounter' entails particular constellations of actors that are included and involved in norm engagement. Regional governance landscapes differ in the access and platform they provide to (sections of) regional bureaucracies, to state actors, and to civil society organisations and regional advocacy networks. Different situations allow for different encounters between different actors, and this underlines how norm engagement occurs in social interaction. We now take a closer look at how logics and actor constellations affect the diffusion of gender equality norms.

Underlying regional governance landscapes we find logics. Our cases have shown how gender equality norms fare differently in different policy arenas and different regional organisations. The concept of logics may help us to make sense of these differences. As we pointed out already, regional organisations all have some initial mission. Also, they tend to refer to some shared history and identity which constructs the region and its boundaries, and defines its (potential) member states. Over time, the mission and identity will shape the logic underlying regional governance. This logic shapes regional institution-building, and it will enable and constrain the institutional evolution. Implicitly or explicitly, the regional governance logics are gendered, which means that they have institutionalised gender inequality and gender bias in particular ways (Waylen 2008). They thus impact upon the potentially transformative aim of gender equality norms and may be transformed by them.

Many regional organisations, including the EU and Mercosur, have been created in order to better deal with economic regionalisation and globalisation. As a result, they have been constituted by a market-making logic. A market-making logic distinguishes itself from a state-building logic, as the former aims at improving the chances of success for market

forces, whereas the latter aims at (re)distribution of material and ideational resources. In essence, a market-making logic often (but not always) boils down to deregulation or liberalisation and asks for state intervention as far as it serves the market. Especially the domain of trade policies is shaped by this logic and cannot easily absorb the inherently interventionist logic of gender equality norms (such as gender mainstreaming) which do not aim at improving the functioning of the market. We also clearly see this market-making logic at work in the ways in which the EU has limited its policies to deal with VAW to sexual harassment in the workplace. In Mercosur, gender mainstreaming of trade policies became possible only after the narrow market-integration logic was broadened in the 2000s by the left-wing governments in the key member states. Admittedly, SADC is also based on market-integration, but it differs from the EU and Mercosur as it has coupled this logic with the interventionist aim of redistributing wealth and eradicating poverty. Here we see reflected how SADC articulated its identity based on the Liberation struggles and the fight against discrimination. This in turn provided a potential opening for both gender-based violence and gender mainstreaming norms. The OAS, finally, is based on a logic of protection of state sovereignty and of the individual human being. As a result the OAS offers on the one hand fertile ground for the introduction and adoption of a strong norm on violence against women, defined and defended as an individual human right. On the other hand, constrained by the underlying logic, the OAS is unable to adopt a gender mainstreaming strategy aiming to transform the relations between state and individual. It has reduced gender mainstreaming to ‘the inclusion of a gender [sic] perspective’ and the collection of gender-segregated data.

The role of feminist actors is key in understanding the development and implementation of regional gender equality norms (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Zippel 2004; Adams and Kang 2007; Friedman 2009; Roggeband 2014). Yet, our cases make clear that the degree of access that these actors have strongly differs across the regional organisations (Roggeband et al. 2014). The dominant logics of regional organisations affect whether and where feminist actors have access, how the organisation engages with civil society organisations, and which sections of the regional bureaucracies are prominent in negotiating regional gender equality norms. Access also varies per policy field. Gendering the human rights framework has proven easier and more successful compared to gendering the field of trade. Existing policy networks often serve as

gate keepers who allow or hinder the entrance of new issues and actors to policy fields. They may be more or less open to cooperate with feminist actors, depending on the composition of and dominant discourses in these policy networks. Trade policy networks are mostly open to business stakeholders and other relevant economic actors, and only to a limited extent to other non-state actors. Trade departments in regional organisations like the EU or Mercosur are often very closed and technocratic spaces where feminist actors have little or no access.

To increase their political leverage in such closed policy domains, feminist actors within and outside regional and national institutions have developed cooperative constellations (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Moghadam 2005; Ferree and Tripp 2006; Zwingel 2012). Central players within these networks are the gender equality policy machineries that have been established within regional organisations (Meyer 1999; van Eerdewijk and Van der Sande 2014). Despite their often limited mandate and resources, gender equality machineries try to maximise their effectiveness by using feminist allies outside the organisations and seizing international political opportunities created by the UN conferences, most notably the 1995 Beijing conference. The creation of these machineries is a feminist success in itself to engender regional organisations. While working within the confines of dominant organisational and policy logics they have successfully expanded the narrow focus and mandate of regional organisations and policy fields by including gender equality in multiple domains. Gender mainstreaming, adopted as an organisational strategy in all regional organisations we examined, illustrates this.

Women's organisations and feminist activists have been the driving forces in the creation of gender equality agencies and getting gender on the regional policy agenda. Regional activist networks exchange and generate expert knowledge that has facilitated the gendering of regional governance. This discursive strategic work positions feminist networks as knowledge networks that push for the construction of regional gender equality norms. In addition, feminist networks also play a key role in developing policy instruments, coordinating implementation or monitoring regional compliance. Due to these multiple roles, these networks are often open and flexible, adapting their composition and strategies to regional spaces and policy processes. Some networks are issue-specific and attract organisations and individuals that bring in expertise tailored to the scope and needs of the regional organisation. Networks also often

reflect the mission and logics of the regional organisation they target: the strong human rights orientation of OAS makes legal activists prominent, whereas EU and Mercosur attract feminist economists. Different actors also play different roles in norm diffusion processes. Non-state actors often have an important role in agenda setting, whereas internal bureaucrats dominate the policy formulation stage and external experts or politicians may be important in monitoring processes. As a result policy networks are continuously reconfiguring.

To understand the uneven trajectories and qualities of gender equality norms we need to take into account the specific regional governance landscapes in which they are being negotiated, contested and diffused. The way norms on gender mainstreaming and violence against women have been shaped and enacted cannot be understood without considering the role of feminist actors. Feminist engagements with regional organisations to develop gender equality norms entail navigating how to match the logics of gender equality norms to these existing organisational logics.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has put the spotlight on the particular significance of the regional level in transnational diffusion processes of gender equality norms, and shown how norm diffusion is a multidirectional process. The regional level complements international and global norm diffusion processes, and allows for the contextualisation and amplification of gender equality norms. Our comparative analysis of violence against women and gender mainstreaming in four different regional organisations reveals the uneven ways in which gender equality norms diffuse. The trajectories and qualities of gender equality norms across these different 'places' prove to be partly issue-specific. We have sought to explain this unevenness by looking at regional governance landscapes, taking into account both their logics and actor constellations. These notions of regional governance landscapes, and their logics and actor constellations speak to the situated approach of this book. They differ from the situated approach by placing the focus of analysis on the governance landscape, rather than actors or organisations, and conceptualising them in an integrated way.

Regional governance landscapes have proven to be highly gendered. This manifests itself, firstly, in terms of their logics and the extent to which they match or mismatch the logics of gender equality norms. And

secondly, the gendered nature of landscapes is reflected in the actors that are involved in norm diffusion processes. With respect to the latter, feminist engagement with regional governance and regional organisations has proven critical in shaping gender equality norms. Feminist engagement comes from a broad range of actors, both governmental and non-governmental, including activists, femocrats and feminist politicians who collaborate in national and regional networks to increase their leverage in institutional encounters. Feminist networks seek to strategically frame gender equality issues to make these resonate with organisational logics and non-feminist perspectives.

Interestingly, the relation between gender equality norm diffusion processes and the existing governance landscape is not to be understood as one-directional. In fact, the cases illustrate that there is a constitutive interplay between them. This process is activated in interactions and interpretations by feminist regional advocacy networks, femocrats and non-feminist actors operating across the transregional and subregional levels. The emergence, adoption and implementation of gender equality norms are affected by and affect the existing governance landscapes, in terms of partly redefining its logics, the institutional infrastructure, the actor constellations and also the roles different actors have. Gender equality machineries emerge that lead to new connections between femocrats and feminist activist networks. This has implications for conceptualising norm diffusion in terms of norm engagement, as ‘the encounter’ is hence not given, but constantly changing, and subject to contestations and challenges. To understand norm diffusion processes, we need to ask both who is part of the encounter, and what the encounter is about.

NOTES

1. There are 45 trade agreements partially or fully in place, 4 of them in the process of being updated and 11 new ones being negotiated (European Commission 2017).
2. The EU-East African Community EPA (2014), the EU-Eastern African States interim-EPA (2012), and the EU-Southern African Development Community EPA (2014).
3. The original CEDAW Convention (1979) does not include specific provisions on violence against women; only the more recent General Recommendations 12 and 19 (respectively 1989 and 1992) explicitly speak on violence against women.

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CHAPTER 4

Situating the Gender Mainstreaming Norm in Regional Organisations: Comparing the Incorporation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in the EU and OSCE

Andrea Schneiker, Anne Jenichen and Jutta Joachim

INTRODUCTION

Gender mainstreaming is a prime example of a vague and elusive norm (Kardam 2004: 184). It reflects at least two different frames of reference: gender equality and the mainstream (Walby 2005: 322; see also Verloo 2001; Rees 2005; Benschop and Verloo 2006: 22). Gender mainstreaming promotes ‘gender equality through [the] systematic integration of

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[gender in] all systems and structures, into all policies, processes and procedures, into the organisation and its culture, into ways of seeing and doing' (Rees 2005: 560). Given its vagueness, gender mainstreaming can be understood, interpreted and implemented in different ways (e.g., Joachim and Schneiker 2012). It is specifically contested in the field of security, because the military is a profoundly—if not *the* most profoundly—male institution (Apelt 2002) that has, for the most part, excluded and devalued anything feminine. Hence, security policies and their instruments continue to be dominated by men (Conaway and Shoemaker 2008: 10; Willett 2010: 151–152).

The major international instrument for mainstreaming gender into security policies is UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security' (hereafter UNSCR 1325) and seven following, related resolutions (Olsson and Gizelis 2015: 2). When adopted in 2000, UNSCR 1325 was celebrated by activists and scholars alike as 'ground-breaking' (Puechguirbal 2010: 162), a 'landmark' (Hudson 2010: 44), and a 'major milestone' (Willett 2010: 142). It urges not only UN member states but also regional organisations to adopt a gender perspective in all peacekeeping operations be they military or civilian, to conduct gender training for all peacekeepers, to sensitise both military and civilian personnel engaged in peacekeeping missions to the special needs of women and children, and to include more women at all stages of peacekeeping (United Nations 2000; for its origins see, for example, Cohn 2008; Porter 2007: 11–17; Shepherd 2008).

While implementation through the UN has received quite a bit of scholarly attention by now, the efforts of regional security organisations in Europe have either been neglected or been treated in an isolated fashion and, thus, most of the time lack a comparative perspective (Barnes 2011; Coissard and Perrin-Bensahel 2014; Guerrina and Wright 2016; Wright 2016). In light of this omission, we examine the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in this chapter. Interested in how the institutional context affects the adoption of norms and the political struggles around their implementation, we chose these two organisations, because they differ regarding at least three institutional dimensions: (1) The scope of membership: the OSCE has more than double as many members as the EU, including not only Western and Eastern European states, but also North America, the South Caucasus, Central Asia and Russia. (2) The opportunity structures of

both organisations differ with respect to the access of external actors to the policy-making process concerning security matters: whereas the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council and EU Presidencies, as well as the European External Action Service (EEAS) have established close contacts with civil society organisations in the field of EU security (Dembinski and Joachim 2014), access for non-state actors to the OSCE Secretariat is still limited, particularly in the politico-military sphere (Tallberg et al. 2013: 141–155). (3) The approaches of both organisations differ with respect to security policies: The EU's policies, once pillarised, are still compartmentalised with the Common Security and Defence Policy being a policy field separate from the common market or human rights especially with respect to the rules that apply to both. The OSCE, by comparison, subsumes these different security dimensions under a single roof, commonly referred to as comprehensive security and comprising a politico-military, an economic and environmental, as well as a human dimension. These institutional differences that the two organisations exhibit among others, shape the different ways in which the EU and the OSCE incorporate UNSCR 1325.

Combining feminist institutionalism with a norm translation perspective, we argue that networks of norm entrepreneurs, situated both inside and outside of the two organisations acted as translators of the norm and prepared the ground for gender-mainstreaming in the organisations' respective security policies. The activities of these entrepreneurs were influenced by the varying institutional situations they were confronted within the EU and the OSCE and ultimately affected how gender-mainstreaming was understood and appropriated in both organisations. With respect to the analysis of the gender mainstreaming norm and its implementation, the focus is on the policy level rather than the field level, i.e. the concrete application of relevant structures, procedures and policies in the context of field missions. Our analysis is based on primary documents and semi-structured interviews with EU, OSCE, UN and state officials as well as with representatives of civil society organisations that we conducted between March 2009 and August 2016 either by telephone, Skype or face to face.

The chapter is structured in the following way: We, first, discuss our theoretical approach and the value added when combining feminist institutionalism with a norm translation perspective. We then explore how thus far the OSCE and the EU each have approached UNSCR 1325 and the gender mainstreaming norm associated with it, which norm

entrepreneurs have championed the implementation processes in each organisation and how their activities as well as the processes as a whole were shaped by the different institutional situations in which they were couched.

FEMINIST INSTITUTIONALISM AND NORM TRANSLATION

Approaching gender mainstreaming in the security policies of the EU and the OSCE from the perspective of feminist institutionalism allows us to address the gender blindness of institutionalism and thereby adds to institutionalist perspectives on organisational change in the context of norm engagement processes. Institutional scholars, though concerned with institutional change and stability, have for the most part neglected ‘the global and regional political trend of incorporation of women in formal institutions’ (Mackay et al. 2010: 579; see also Weiner and MacRae 2014: 8–9). As a result, not only ‘the remarkable diffusion of institutional reform strategies such as gender candidate quotas, gender mainstreaming policies, equality blueprints and state feminist initiatives have been almost completely overlooked by the NI [new institutionalist] “mainstream”’ (Mackay et al. 2010: 579), but also gender hierarchies and possible power asymmetries that result from them, e.g. between women and men or within these groups, and which in turn influence whether and how norms are incorporated into institutions.

Feminist institutionalist approaches eclectically combine rational, historical and sociological versions of new institutionalism rather than conceiving of them in an exclusive manner (Weiner and MacRae 2014: 3) while at the same time combining them with feminist insights (Mackay et al. 2010: 576). They are particularly helpful for understanding the reluctance of security organisations to approach gender issues and related organisational change because they ‘can systematically identify and track the norms as well as the symbolic and cultural factors that play an important role in gendering institutions and their practices’ (Mackay et al. 2009: 254). Feminist institutionalists, first, offer a notion of change that conforms better with the ways in which gender mainstreaming takes place. Gender mainstreaming is conceived of as a process that is gradual rather than abrupt and that involves ‘... *layering*, where some elements of existing institutions are renegotiated but other elements remain; [or] *conversion*, in which existing institutions are redirected to new purposes’ (Mackay et al. 2010: 577; emphases in original). Second, this perspective

allows us to capture the forces that drive change both within and outside institutions because of the attention that feminist institutionalism pays to the interaction between institutional structures and actors. According to Mergaert and Lombardo (2014: 4), institutional structures provide actors ‘with the necessary hierarchical backing, resources, time, personnel decision-making power and adequate knowledge and training to perform the task’ (ibid.) and to effectively pursue their agenda. However, institutions are also ‘battlegrounds of norms’ (Mergaert and Lombardo 2014: 4) that ‘constitute important “filters” which may either support or resist policy change’ (Mazey 2000: 339; Kantola 2006: 34).

Assuming that new norms ‘ave to fight their way into institutional thinking’ whereby ‘[i]nitially reluctant actors are persuaded to incorporate the novel ideas into their mental world-views’ (Elgström 2000: 458), such processes can be studied in terms of norm translation. The concept of translation is used in the literature on norms to make sense of how norms are interpreted and altered when actors engage with them (e.g., Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). Entrepreneurs and networks are expected to play an important role in this respect by translating a norm from one level to another, such as from the international to the national level, or into international or regional governmental organisations (e.g., Elgström 2000; Boesenecker and Vinjamuri 2011; Zwingel 2012). Such networks, which comprise coalitions of individual and collective actors who promote gender mainstreaming (Elgström 2000: 464), cross-institutional boundaries and may span a variety of sectors. Hence, translators can be situated within as well as outside the organisation into which a norm is translated. Although network participants may be motivated by their shared values, the reasons for interacting with others may also be strategic (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Depending on the concrete situation in which the actors are placed, these strategic considerations can include the need for information, or as Lowndes and Skelcher put it, for ‘direction and co-ordination’ (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998: 315), or for alliances with external actors to legitimate new ideas and practices within a given actor’s organisation (Barnett and Finnemore 1999: 710). In case of the latter, networks may promote an understanding of the norm that fits with pre-existing organisational policies and rules. Seen this way, the organisations are not only norm receivers but in the organisations we also find norm entrepreneurs who can alter the norm in the context of the organisation.

While networks may originate and be composed of actors solely from within an organisation, feminist institutionalists also draw attention to the ‘external drivers of change’ (Mackay et al. 2010: 582). According to Scott and Davis, wider organisational environments can ‘shape, support and infiltrate organisations’ (Scott and Davis 2007: 31), an assumption which fits with a situational approach to norm engagement as it assigns importance to context. They can be catalysts for new ideas, particularly if actors from within an organisation maintain relationships and engage in networks outside of it. These coalitions of change may then be in a position to ‘simultaneously play different games’ (Crouch and Farrell 2004: 24) and transfer their ‘experience from different action spaces’ (ibid.: 34) or policy domains. In this case, individual gender entrepreneurs assume a boundary role as they become important linking pins and knowledge brokers that mediate the flow of knowledge and information among collective actors (Boari and Riboldazzi 2014: 683). Yet, considering the incremental nature of change in terms of layering or conversion, the strategies and potential outcomes of the networks are conditioned by the institutional context they act in, e.g. internal decision-making structures and opportunity structures allowing for access of external actors (Hanrieder 2014; Moschella and Vetterlein 2014; Waylen 2009). In this sense, pre-existing institutional contexts that either constrain feminist agents and change within the EU and the OSCE or provide them with windows of opportunity can contribute to an explanation of the varying ways of incorporating UNSCR 1325 within the two organizations’ security policies.

INCORPORATION OF UNSCR 1325 IN THE OSCE

The OSCE explicitly integrated UNSCR 1325 into its—since the year 2000 existing—gender policy by adopting the Ministerial Council Decision on Women in Conflict Prevention, Crisis Management and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation in 2005. This decision called for ‘(i)ntegrating into the activities of the OSCE, as appropriate, the relevant parts of UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on the role of women in all levels of conflict prevention, crisis management and resolution, and post-conflict rehabilitation’ (OSCE 2005: Article 2). Prior to this decision, the OSCE had mentioned the resolution only twice and then just briefly with, first, the OSCE Annual Report of 2001 acknowledging the resolution’s adoption and, second, the Gender Action Plan

of 2004 (OSCE 2004) identifying UNSCR 1325 as one of the international commitments OSCE member states had to comply with in the field of gender equality, though, without specifying how. Moreover, the Ministerial Council Decision contained surprisingly few references to the resolution. In fact, its implementation was only mentioned second (OSCE 2005: Article 2) and subsequent to the professed aim of '(e)nsuring proactive implementation throughout the Organization of the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality' (ibid.: Article 1). Furthermore, the proposed strategies were not really new, but had already been part of the Gender Action Plan.

The Ministerial Council Decision equates gender mainstreaming primarily with an increase of women's participation. The way in which the resolution is described in the 2004 Gender Action Plan is also indicative in this respect. It states that '(g)ender mainstreaming of OSCE activities, policies, projects and programs in the politico-military dimension shall also take into account obligations embodied in Security Council resolution 1325 calling for increased participation of women in, inter alia, conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction processes' (para. 36). The Ministerial Council Decision of 2005 that integrates UNSCR 1325 into OSCE policy, accordingly, refers primarily to measures intended to increase the proportion of women in 'positions in the area of conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation processes, in particular for senior management positions' (OSCE 2005: Article 3) and in field missions (ibid.: Article 4 and 5) as well as to training and educational programs intended to encourage the involvement of women, including from civil society such as women peace initiatives (Article 6 and 7). As a concept, gender-mainstreaming appears only twice in this policy document, first, when calling on participating states to regularly evaluate and publicise their efforts (Article 9), and, second, in the very first sentence with a reference to the OSCE's 'commitment to gender mainstreaming, in line with the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality'.

While prior to the Ministerial Council Decision, gender had primarily been taken into account in the OSCE's human security dimension (i.e. in the area of human rights and democracy) it has since then also received attention in the politico-military dimension. Gender, for example, has been introduced into this dimension through the publication of handbooks and toolkits on gender and security sector reform, gender-responsive mediation or internal oversight within armed forces and

the police, but also through the direct contribution to National Action Plan development in participating states, as well as trainings and the support of reform processes in the areas of women's representation and gender-mainstreaming in the police, the army or border security agencies (Ormhaug 2014: 34–37; OSCE Annual Reports 2005–2015). Furthermore, in 2011, a Gender Advisor responsible for gender issues solely in the politico-military sphere was appointed in the OSCE Secretariat.¹ Yet despite these advances indicative of a growing awareness for gender issues in areas of 'hard' security in the OSCE, material progress has thus far been limited. For example, despite an increase of women in senior management positions, women's representation in the politico-military dimension is still relatively low, ranging from 8% in civilian police to 11% in the area of military affairs (OSCE 2016: 115). Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms continue to be rather weak and ineffective, falling short of among other things clear baselines and indicators to measure success (ibid.).

That the OSCE started to consider UNSCR 1325 more explicitly in 2005, can be attributed to an internal reform coalition, led by the Swedish delegation which simultaneously to preparing its own national action plan in response to the resolution took up the cause of improving the track record of the OSCE as well (OSCE Delegation of Sweden 2005; NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security 2005: 63). Main supporters from within the organisation included the Irish and Norwegian delegations (OSCE Delegation of Ireland 2005, of Norway 2006). Later more and more delegations joined, including, for example, Finland, the US and Canada, Turkey and Serbia, often pushed by the female Ambassadors of the delegations. That they endorsed the resolution was not self-evident. Instead, as many of our interview partners stressed, their participation in the reform coalition was reflective of the presence of like-minded individuals in their delegations. These individuals had to do quite a bit of convincing since many state officials were of the opinion that implementation of UNSCR 1325 was a national rather than an OSCE matter, or regarded the resolution to pertain primarily to UN peacekeeping and not to post-conflict activities, which the OSCE was primarily concerned with. Others considered gender issues to be relevant only in the human dimension of the OSCE's security policy, i.e. regarding issues of human rights and democracy, or in other words, 'soft' security issues, and therefore did not understand why 'another' gender policy in addition to the already existing one was required.²

Gradually, however, supporters of UNSCR 1325 were able to convince the sceptics through persistent awareness-raising and continuous advocacy for the resolution, arguing, for instance, that if an organisation wants to be inclusive, gender and women need to be taken into account in all areas of security. Furthermore, UNSCR 1325 advocates argued that through their endorsement of the resolution in the UN, OSCE members (except for the Holy See, which is not a member of the UN) would have committed themselves to support the resolution at all levels, including the OSCE itself.³ The continued work of the supporters of UNSCR 1325 helped to convince OSCE member states, with one exception: The Russian delegation, initially just a sceptic, started to openly oppose more extensive gender mainstreaming activities of the OSCE. According to the permanent representative of the Russian Federation, ‘it should not be forgotten that resolution 1325 is applicable only in certain situations, and therefore we cannot agree with its excessive promotion in the OSCE and especially its extremely broad interpretation. We take the position that the leading role in this regard should remain with the United Nations’ (OSCE Delegation of the Russian Federation 2016: 2). Although supporters of gender mainstreaming and the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the OSCE have favored an ‘... own action plan to integrate the Women, Peace and Security agenda more efficiently into the OSCE policies’ (OSCE 2015: 7), the Russian delegation has thus far successfully blocked all attempts at Ministerial Councils to revise or supplement the OSCE’s gender policy framework (Lukatela 2016). The institutional set-up of the OSCE that requires unanimity in terms of decision-making allows Russia to do so. In light of such resistance, it is surprising that the reform coalition led by Sweden gained any traction.

The support that the coalition received from external actors, including the UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women and the Folke Bernadotte Academy, a Swedish government agency for peace, security, and development, proved critical for the incorporation of UNSCR 1325 into the OSCE’s security policy. This inter-organisational network organised a series of events to inform and heighten awareness about the resolution, including an expert seminar entitled “Women in Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management” (Folke Bernadotte Academy 2005) during which not only the UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser reported on the UN’s experiences with implementing UNSCR 1325, but also representatives

of many OSCE member states and OSCE field missions. Moreover, the Folke Bernadotte Academy provided funding for the secondment of the Gender Advisor of the politico-military dimension to the OSCE Secretariat, who then used its position to promote the resolution from within. Finally, subsequent to the adoption of the Ministerial Council Decision and UNSCR 1325's integration into the organisation's gender framework, the OSCE entered into cooperation related to the resolution with other international organisations, such as the UN, NATO, EU and the Council of Europe, which involved the exchange of information and best practices on implementation during conferences, seminars, meetings, and training events (OSCE Annual Reports 2006–2015). The strategies that the network used in order to provide resources in terms of information and funding shows that actors who push for norm adoption can also shape the structures in the context of which norm adoption is negotiated.

Contrary to the EU, as we will discuss in the following section, civil society organisations have not really been a part of the inter-organisational UNSCR 1325 network in the OSCE. The gender bureaucracy in Vienna involved them only occasionally through invitations to events related to the issue and in context of projects on the development of UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans in participating states that involved the independent research foundation Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and the international NGO Inclusive Security as project partners (Ormhaug 2014; OSCE and Inclusive Security 2016).⁴ The comparatively marginal role of civil society actors is reflective of the relatively closed opportunity structures of the OSCE secretariat. Unlike the UN, the OSCE does not have a system of formal accreditation, which would grant civil society organisations more regularised access to the policy-making process.

IMPLEMENTATION OF UNSCR 1325 IN THE EU

Even though the EU had been an outspoken proponent of UNSCR 1325 within the UN (European Parliament 2010a: 21),⁵ similar to the OSCE it did not—apart from some sporadic measures at the operational level—take action for some time. It was only in 2008 that the Council adopted the first substantive policy document related to the resolution: the Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on Women, Peace

and Security, which envisions a three-pronged strategy ‘to protect, support and empower women in conflict’ (Council of the European Union 2008a: 11). The document identifies as a first necessary step the ‘integrat[ion of] women, peace and security issues in its [the EU’s] political and policy dialogue with partner governments, particularly of countries affected by armed conflict, in post conflict situations or situations of fragility;’ followed by, second, the mainstreaming of a gender equality approach in its policies and activities, especially in the context of crisis management; and, third, calls to ‘support specific strategic actions (...) targeted at protecting, supporting and empowering women’ (ibid.: 11).

Since 2008, the Council has adopted several strategies that can be regarded as, on the one hand, central for its implementation of UNSCR 1325 and, on the other hand, supplementary to the Comprehensive Approach because they identify concrete measures of how to achieve gender mainstreaming in the context of CSDP. They include a set of ‘indicators for the comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security’ (Council of the European Union 2010). The Comprehensive Approach, furthermore, established an Informal Task Force on UNSCR 1325, which meets regularly with the EU Special Representative on Human Rights, the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate and the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability of the EEAS. It consists of members of the EEAS, the Council secretariat and the Commission and is open to participation of member states as well as civil society organisations, creating an ‘important entry point for feminist advocacy’ (Guerrina and Wright 2016: 304) and, hence, creating structural windows of opportunity for advocates of gender mainstreaming. In 2015, the EEAS, moreover, but again a few years later than the OSCE, introduced the position of a Gender Advisor (ibid.: 310).

In line with Crouch and Farrell (2004) as well as Pollack and Hafner-Burton (2000), who regard networks as the drivers of institutional change, and similar to the case of the OSCE, policy networks comprised of gender entrepreneurs outside of and inside the EU were crucial for the gender mainstreaming of the community’s security and defence policy. The cooperation between UNIFEM and now UN Women with the French EU Presidency was particularly central to the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 (European Parliament 2010a: 13 and 18) as it formed the basis for several awareness-raising events similar to those which their peers organised within the OSCE. These included an international

conference in fall of 2008. Supported by both the Council and the EU Commission and entitled ‘From Commitment to Action—the EU delivering to women in conflict and post-conflict. Implementing SCR 1325 and 1820 in EU missions: improving immediate and long-term security for women’, it paved the way and created necessary pressure for the Comprehensive Approach (European Parliament 2010a: 35). Moreover, in 2008, the French Presidency and UNIFEM organised several further meetings that gave not only rise to a network of EU and UN gender advisors as well as gender focal points (EU and UNIFEM 2008; UNIFEM 2008a, b). Their exchanges about ‘best practices and lessons identified from all missions and operations’ (EP 2010a: 61) became more regularised over time and in 2009 culminated in the creation of the Informal Task Force on Women, Peace and Security. Hence, similar to the OSCE, change agents who pushed for the adoption of gender mainstreaming created structures and platforms with the help of which they could promote their concerns further.

Regarding the task force, it was again UN Women that played a particularly important role by providing technical expertise and advice on the implementation of UNSCR 1325, in general, and by revising policy instruments that the EU had adopted, in particular (authors’ personal interview, November 19, 2015). Given that the EEAS was lacking experience in and resources for implementing gender mainstreaming within security policy, it was a willing recipient of new impetus from outside,⁶ as were policymakers, who are ‘always grateful for the expertise [the UN could] provide on the formulation of gender policies for the EU.’⁷

The activities of the network had catalytic effects. Inspired by its predecessor, the Slovenian Presidency, for instance, included gender mainstreaming of security and defence in its portfolio and compiled the first handbook comprised of documents on ‘Mainstreaming Human Rights and Gender into the European Security and Defence Policy’ (Council of the European Union 2008b). Moreover, the cooperation with UNIFEM became more regularised, with the EU more increasingly borrowing lessons from and relying on the expertise of the UN agency. While the network certainly had an important role to play with respect to these developments, the implementation of UNSCR 1325 was driven as well by the reputational benefits that the EU associated with it. In this sense, not only the change agents are norm entrepreneurs, but EU institutions themselves have an entrepreneurial role. Hence, rather than being exclusively norm takers, over time EU institutions become involved in

the promotion of the norm and shape how it is understood in particular ways.

Contrary to the OSCE where member states were initially sceptical of the resolution, in the case of the EU, it was viewed as an exceptional opportunity to construct the EU's own distinct profile with respect to UNSCR 1325 and to continue building the EU's reputation as an international security actor. In the document listing the indicators for the Comprehensive Approach, the Council noted that these indicators would not only facilitate 'clear communication about the implementation of the relevant EU policy' but would also improve 'EU visibility' (Council 2010: 7). Moreover, UNSCR 1325 was perceived as a means to help shape the image of the EU as a unique and different actor. In a study conducted for the Slovenian Presidency, the EU was described as

one of [the few international entities that bring] all the elements of a multilateral approach to armed conflict. It is this potential for the EU to be a positive actor in conflict prevention and the promotion of human security [that] makes the EU an important player in responding to the issue of women and armed conflict. The EU brings considerable added value as a positive actor in responding to women and armed conflict, closely mirroring the EU's potential as an actor in conflict prevention. (Sherriff and Barnes 2008: 4)

Apart from these reputational benefits, that governments expected from UNSCR 1325, implementation within the EU differed in other respects from that in the OSCE. Rather than playing a marginal role, civil society organisations added momentum to the gender mainstreaming of security and defence by pushing 'the EU to the effective implementation of benchmarks for 1325' (European Parliament 2010a: 19), the development of indicators on sexual violence and to continue 'ongoing consultations already existing for a few years in the EU institutions with NGOs, civil society and UN agencies' on the subject (European Parliament 2009b: 42). Two civil society organisations assumed a particularly prominent role in this respect. *ISIS Europe*, a research and advisory organisation in the field of European and international security and defence, was commissioned by EU institutions for writing reports, provided feedback on the implementation process and offered recommendations. The *European Peacebuilding Liaison Office* (EPLO), a platform for European NGOs, networks and think tanks, functioned both as a clearing house

documenting and informing about EU policy initiatives as well as offering policy advice and concrete recommendations.

That in the case of the EU these civil society organisations were more involved in the implementation of UNSCR 1325 than in the case of the OSCE can be attributed to, on the one hand, the already somewhat regularised relationships that they enjoy with individual EU institutions related to security and defence (Dembinski and Joachim 2014). On the other hand, the EU Parliament—itsself and historically an active promoter of gender mainstreaming inside the EU (Woodward and van der Vleuten 2014: 75)—the Slovenian Presidency or the Council secretariat, in particular, involved them in the process of translating UNSCR 1325 into the EU's security policy asking these organisations to write reports or by inviting them to meetings and workshops. In this sense, the institutional structure of the EU provided a window of opportunity for the internal advocates of gender mainstreaming to enlist external entrepreneurs in the promotion of the norm.

In addition, the network of gender entrepreneurs in the case of the EU was joined by prominent individuals, who themselves were members of different networks and akin to the 'change agents' that Woodward and van der Vleuten conceive of as crucial in the promotion of 'gender equality norms and practices' in the EU more generally (Woodward and van der Vleuten 2014: 76). Margot Wallström can be regarded as such an entrepreneur and 'active broker' who was travelling between and was familiar with both the EU and the UN because of her previous appointment as EU Commissioner for Environment and later Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. In this latter capacity, she frequently attended EU meetings or consultations with Council and Commission staff as well as civil society organisations devoted on issues related to gender and armed conflict (see European Parliament 2010a: 10). As a report for the European Parliament points out, 'Wallström decided to work [...] in a pro-active direction and provide, via a newly established Team of Legal Experts, international assistance to institutional and capacity building' (ibid.: 16) in support of gender mainstreaming. In order to facilitate cooperation between the UN and the EU in this respect, she even called for a 'Personal (EU) Advisor to act as a Personal Interlocutor' to her role (ibid.: 48). In addition, Brigadier General Karl Engelbrektsson is symbolic of the actors Crouch and Farrell presumably have in mind when writing about the role of networks for institutional change in which

participants transfer their experiences across ‘different action spaces’ (Crouch and Farrell 2004: 20–31). As member of the Swedish Armed Forces as well as former commander of the Nordic Battle Groups and Swedish representative to the EU Military Committee, Englebretsson was ‘a strong voice in the military for 1325 to become a natural approach to EU policy implementation’ (European Parliament 2010a: 62) and a promoter of gender coaching for head of missions (*ibid.*).

The EU’s openness and receptiveness to external actors such as Wallström or Englebretsson, but also the UN and civil society organisations, can in part be explained with the lack of in-house expertise of how to include gender mainstreaming into security issues.⁸ This shortcoming can, in turn, be explained by the much narrower concept of security of the EU than the comprehensive concept of the OSCE, and its specific institutionalisation. The EU actually has a long tradition of promoting gender equality and of mainstreaming gender into its domestic as well as external policies. However, the ‘approach to gender is fragmented across institutions’ (European Parliament 2009b: 43) due to the institutional structure in terms of pillarisation (established by the Treaty of Maastricht and in place until the Treaty of Lisbon) that conferred the security and defence policy to the second—intergovernmental—pillar whereas development policy, that is also affecting some dimensions of peacekeeping, was—at least partly—part of the communitised first pillar. Moreover, gender has been for the most part a matter linked to the common market and development assistance where the European Commission is a central player and where also the most resources are still located (European Parliament 2009b: 43). Security and defence policy, primarily under the purview of the Council, by contrast, had been relatively untouched by institutional commitments to gender prior to UNSCR 1325’s implementation, explaining the lack of gender expertise in that particular field.

In policies on the common market and development assistance, furthermore, the European Parliament has more competences. In the CSDP, even though it ‘had long acted as one of the primary advocates of a more forceful EU policy on women’s issues’ (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000: 436; see also EP 2000: 3; 2006: 2 and 8–9; 2009a: 5; 2009b, 2010a: 46–47; 2010b: 4) and vowed to ‘ensure a constant pressure’ on Council and Commission members and on the Security and Defence Subcommittee (SEDE) ‘to strengthen EU mechanisms towards implementing [UNSCR] 1325’ (EP 2010a: 47), the Parliament

only has the role of a watchdog. Still, its never-ending ‘Sisyphus’ labor’ (Benschop and Verloo 2006: 31) can be regarded as a part of efforts to raise the kind of awareness that gender mainstreaming requires and to pave the way for more powerful actors to tie gender mainstreaming into the EU’s CSDP. Given the intergovernmental nature of the CSDP, states are the ‘[a]ctors in positions of power [that] can use their authority to change the “rules of the game”’ (Mackay et al. 2010: 579, in reference to Pierson 2004: 36). They can shape the agenda by identifying a list of priorities for their tenure, especially if they hold the Presidency, as was the case with France when it laid the groundwork for the Comprehensive Approach in the autumn of 2008 (EP 2010a: 35).

CONCLUSIONS

Gender mainstreaming is a contested norm, particularly in the field of security. Following the calls of the UN Security Council in its Resolution 1325, regional security organisations, such as the OSCE and the EU (regarding its CSDP), have started to engage with this norm. However, the interpretation and adoption of the norm—which we study in terms of norm translation—is situated in different contexts in these two organisations. The major differences between the OSCE and the EU that matter in this respect are the width of their membership, the openness for external interaction, and their security concepts and institutions.

As suggested by feminist institutionalism and the norm translation perspective, norm entrepreneurs coming from both within and outside of the organisation were the main advocates of UNSCR 1325’s implementation. In both cases, the gender entrepreneurs not only brought relevant knowledge with them, often gained outside the organisations, but also pushed for structural changes within the organisations. Yet, while we find a similar group of entrepreneurs in the case of the EU and the OSCE, there are also differences. In both cases, Swedish actors played a strikingly prominent role in the translation of UNSCR 1325. This is no coincidence given that Sweden can be considered a trailblaser with respect to gender mainstreaming in security policies seeking to integrate as many different actors as possible (European Commission 2013; Swedish Armed Forces 2013) and given that the institutional structure of both the EU and the OSCE privileges state actors over others.

However, the norm translation processes in the two organisations differed regarding the participation of external norm entrepreneurs. This can be explained with the varying degrees of openness of the EU and the OSCE and the more or less accessible they are to external actors. In the case of the EU the policy network was comparatively broad, including also civil society organisations such as ISIS Europe or EPLO members, while civil society actors were considerably less involved in the policy network active in the context of the OSCE. While this can be explained by the varying need to acquire external expertise on gender and security and the different access structures of the two organisations, it also affected how the two organisations engaged with UNSCR 1325. In the case of the EU's CSDP, it was these civil society actors who pushed the organisation to formulate concrete benchmarks for the implementation of the resolution.

A focus on the situatedness of norm incorporation in institutional structures on the one hand, offers insights into who was able to translate the gender mainstreaming norm within the two organisations and why, and, on the other hand, it sheds light on the extent to which the translators' room for manoeuvre was shaped by previous organisational policies as well as the membership and members' interests. In the case of the OSCE the already existing gender dimension in its security policy—albeit only regarding human security—delayed the inclusion of gender in the politico-military component of the organisation's security policy because it nurtured the impression among participating states that a 'new' gender policy would be redundant. As to the EU, the separation of security from issues such as human rights and development—partly caused by the pillarisation—where gender mainstreaming had already been established, made it difficult for gender entrepreneurs to include gender into the CSDP. Last but not least, the differences in membership and different interests of members might also account for different approaches to gender mainstreaming in the organisation's security policies. While, in the case of the EU, individual states such as Sweden, France, or Slovenia saw the inclusion of gender into the CSDP as an opportunity to sharpen the profile of the organisation and to set it apart from the UN, the OSCE's wider membership and especially the veto of member states such as Russia seem to have limited the incorporation of UNSCR 1325 into the organisation's gender and security policies.

Our findings demonstrate that institutions and the institutional context matter for how a norm is appropriated and understood within

organisations. Norm translation is situated in different institutional contexts, which shape how actors engage with the norm. This is not only a theoretically relevant finding, but also important from a practical perspective, because it affects the possibilities and room for manoeuvre of external actors, such as civil society, to influence organisational policies. Yet, our analysis also has demonstrated that in some instances actors are able to change the structural environment in their favour. Situations in terms of windows of opportunity might open up as a result of their activities and the pressure they exert which, in turn, empower both external and internal actors to work together for the incorporation of the norm.

NOTES

1. The position of the OSCE Gender Advisor in the Secretariat, a position that had already been introduced in 1999, became a senior position at the ambassadorial level, complemented by three Gender Advisors, each of them responsible for one of the three security dimensions (politico-military, economic and environmental, human).
2. Authors' personal and telephone interviews, November 5, 2015, December 15, 2015, July 5, 2016.
3. Authors' telephone interviews, December 15, 2015, July 5, 2016.
4. Authors' personal and telephone interviews, November 4 and 5, 2015, December 15, 2015, July 5, 2016.
5. For example, the input of former Finnish Minister of Defence and Minister of Equality Affairs, Elisabeth Rehn, was crucial for the adoption of the Windhoek Declaration which became the blueprint for the UNSCR 1325.
6. Authors' personal interview, January 8, 2016.
7. Authors' personal interview, November 19, 2015.
8. Authors' interview, November 19, 2015.

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Gender Equality as Myth and Ceremony? Situated Norm Engagement in Organisations

Adam Fejerskov and Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde

INTRODUCTION

Organisations are central to the promotion of normative change and political goals, for good and ill. Whether in working life or social life, organisations in particular represent central arenas within which individuals engage with, contest and enact norms of gender equality. In their ideal form, such norms challenge dominant practices of patriarchal social relations, positions and advantages. Their inherent pursuit of an ideal state of equality means that they do not form a static set of scripts and rules, as a result having to ‘fight their way into institutional thinking’ (Elgström 2000) in order to become genuinely ingrained in organisations—or rather someone has to fight for them. This is not least because the incremental and stable nature of many organisations means that, more often than not,

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they are not prone to change and to a lesser extent to the disruptive qualities of a set of norms and ideas such as those on gender equality. When attempts are made to institutionalise such norms into organisational practices and discourses, or they are promoted through them, they meet a host of conditions that constrain and facilitate their potential institutionalisation. We know that feminist bureaucrats (Cağlar et al. 2013; Eyben and Turquet 2013) and institutional workers (Boxenbaum and Battilana 2005; Freidenvall and Krook 2011; Franceschet 2011) are indispensable for institutionalising gender equality in organisations. On the other hand, we also know that such work may easily prove unsuccessful or be undermined, sometimes because of the deliberate efforts of others to resist, sometimes by the contingent nature of organisational life. This may lead to questionable approaches to gender equality (see Chant 2012; Chant and Sweetman 2012), to the point where these norms only serve ceremonial purposes or are reflected on the surface without progressively shaping organisational practices. This underlines the need for analysis to understand engagement with norms in organisations as situated, that is, as shaped by the individual situations and instances during which they are enacted or engaged with—the core argument of this book. In this chapter, we try to explain what this means by asking what are the factors in a given organisational situation and context that may come to shape the way norms are engaged with and enacted?

Though the arguments made here may be applicable across diverse types of organisations, we deal here with a particular type in our analysis—organisations engaged in global development. Development organisations present a particularly interesting avenue for exploring the nature of how normative change is advanced. These are multi-scalar organisations operating in contexts governed by multiple and at times conflicting logics, while serving a multitude of interests, concerns and stakeholders. Development organisations are expected to adhere to international normative agendas like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to be considered legitimate actors, simultaneously shaping such normative concerns and working on the ground to promote them in development relationships and interventions. As fundamentally political organisations, they offer a valuable setting for exploring the dynamics of how norms are engaged with, whether in processes of institutionalising new normative concerns or in externally promoting them to others.

In global development, norms regarding gender and gender equality have had a significant life of their own as a contested yet inevitable

aspect of the concept of development itself. Since the late 1960s, the work of feminist social scientists has explored the multiple ways in which development processes either ignored women or assigned them roles that hindered them in benefitting from development in the same way as men (Boserup 1970). Feminist scholars have often interpreted this as an outcome of how different cultural value systems assign lower social status to women (Ortner 1974; Oakley 1972). Though gender debates sometimes tend to become specialised tools in the world of development policy, implicit in these debates are contested notions of the role of the state, the political and democracy in addressing issues of inequality and difference. Over time, it has become a central goal of the global development agenda to challenge culturally embedded ideas about the status and role of women. Since the world's first conference on the status of women in 1975, feminist scholars have maintained a longstanding interest in numerous aspects of gender norms in global governance. These include the evolution of international declarations and conventions (Zwingel 2005, 2012); the relationship between gender policies and implementation (Branisa et al. 2013; Moser and Moser 2005); how organisations promote international agreements on gender equality such as the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Shepherd 2008); how organisations frame gender policies (Verloo and Lombardo 2007); and how feminists in large development bureaucracies create strategies to promote gender equality goals (Eyben and Turquet 2013). Furthermore, the speed and extent with which gender norms, in particular gender mainstreaming, have been diffused into modern bureaucracies across the globe has received attention far beyond feminist policy circles (True and Mintrom 2001), pointing to a growing similarity across organisations with regard to development policy (Swiss 2012). Often, however, the diffusion of gender equality norms and ideas have mainly led to purely symbolic or superficial institutionalisation, with a deep gulf between official policies and the inner workings of organisations preventing gender policies from shaping organisational efforts and practices in the long term (Piálek 2008; see also Eyben and Turquet 2013; Çağlar et al. 2013).

This chapter aims to answer the question of why we so often witness the adoption of symbolic approaches to gender equality in organisations by arguing that situated engagement with norms means that efforts to promote gender equality will always be met by a range of factors both facilitating and constraining such processes of institutionalisation. It is not our aim to explain exactly how organisational change

happens or how gender equality norms can be successfully institutionalised. Rather, we intend to identify the key factors that influence such processes of norm engagement and institutionalisation in a given situation in an organisation, sometimes facilitating and sometimes constraining the potential for change. To explore and explain these factors, we draw on empirical examples and experiences from case studies developed as part of a collaborative research programme on ‘Global Norms and Heterogeneous Development Organizations’, or GLONO for short. Here, seven different development organisations (South African Development Partnership Agency [SADPA], Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation [AMEXCID], Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark [DANIDA], World Bank, Islamic Relief Worldwide [IRW], Oxfam International and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) have been opened up in order to study how they enact or resist norms of gender equality and women’s empowerment in their efforts (see Cold-Ravnkilde et al. 2018).

SITUATED NORM ENGAGEMENT IN ORGANISATIONS

The past decades have seen us cast away earlier assumptions about the inherently rational and ethical qualities of modern organisation and replace them with a recognition of the complexity and uncertainty of organisational life. Organisations may be seen as attempts to order, structure and control the chaotic world, and to achieve a more stable and predictable form, and they may be created because of the values and legitimacy they embody as much as for the efficiency they act with. On the other hand, and despite intentions of stability and order, at their core organisations are often about unpredictability, flux and uncertainty. This inherent duality, this meeting of order and disorder, makes for an exceedingly interesting dynamic in exploring engagement with gender equality norms within them. It also leads us to consider the nature of organisational change. Seldom, if ever, is organisational life a matter of long periods of stability followed by short disruptions and subsequent stability in a new form. Organisations require active maintenance, recalibration and renegotiation to remain what they are (or to change), in interaction with the contexts they are embedded in. And exactly what they are and become is exceedingly difficult to pin down if we see them as open and loosely coupled systems, where policy and implementation may be far removed from each other, their relative

independence not even undermining the organisation's work, where political decisions may be resisted, and where change can come not only from the core but also from the periphery. But this is also where, in light of their political nature, the efficiency of their activities will not always be the core determining factor of their progress or success. The fact that they are loosely coupled implies no guarantees that institutionalisation or engagement with certain norms or ideas in one part of the organisation necessarily makes it to other parts, and likewise that something that comes to the forefront of organisational discourses or policies does not ensure that it will be present or reflected in core organisational practices. Rather, different teams or groups may pursue goals that not only interpret norms differently, but that ultimately require or impose conflicting and incompatible measures.

The ways in which global norms of gender equality are enacted and pursued in organisations are thus shaped by a multitude of organisational, individual, political and social factors. In this chapter, based on the findings from the GLONO research programme (see also Cold-Ravnkilde et al. 2018), and in consultation with the relevant literatures, we try to conceptualise at least four dimensions that shape situated engagement with gender equality norms in organisations: (i) organisational histories, cultures and structures; (ii) actor strategies, norm entrepreneurship, emotions and relationships; (iii) organisational uncertainty, pressures and priorities; and (iv) the normative context and stakeholders. They should be understood in a non-hierarchical sense, as each may vary in strength across different cases, and they are not mutually exclusive but largely overlapping, interdependent and, for some, even mutually constitutive.

Organisational History, Culture and Structures

When gender equality norms are brought into organisational contexts, they do not meet empty halls but layers of practices, rules and ideas embedded in individual organisational histories. Having a religious, entrepreneurial, banking, anti-apartheid, ministerial or voluntary historical origin greatly shapes how gender equality is conceptualised in organisations. The issue of gender equality is emphasised by all the organisations analysed in the GLONO research programme, but not for the same reasons. The framing of gender equality is highly dependent on how the organisational culture legitimises different arguments, ideas and

concerns (Mosse 2004). Over time, organisational cultures will develop with relatively coherent meanings, beliefs, rituals and images (Schein 1996; Scott 2014). Although far from unchangeable, uncontested or unambiguous, these cultures become institutionalised in the mandate, history, iconography and procedures of the organisation. They shape the ways in which external demands, changes and contexts are interpreted, and they make certain interpretations more feasible than others. This is not least because organisational cultures substantially shape the way staff relate to each other both within departments and in intra-organisational relations with other departments, during which clashes over issues of power, authority and resources may occur. Jones (2018), for example, shows how the World Bank's (re)turn to gender equality as a form of 'smart economics' gained legitimacy and credibility by being framed in a way that was particularly appealing to the dominant logic of economists, with imageries of women as active economic agents resonating with broadly supported values of micro-economic thinking in the organisation.

The case of South Africa's development cooperation (Cold-Ravnkilde, in progress) reveals that, even though gender equality has a strong *historical resonance* in institutionalised gender policies in the administration, the myth was not converted into institutionalised practices and well-defined priorities. This points to the fact that whether an idea or a practice is institutionalised depends on whether or not it is seen to *resonate with the local organisational context*. Ansari et al. (2010) point to various aspects of how an idea can resonate with the organisation in question, whether in terms of the technological base and absorptive capacity, its compatibility with cultural values, practices and beliefs, or the interests and agendas of adopters. As such, ideas are rarely neutral but instead loaded with normative world views that may affect the balance of power and interests in adopting organisations. The importance of resonance with existing logics and practices is connected with the central point that the institutional context both constrains and enables different interpretations, as new ideas and practices need to be blended into the local context. Sørensen (2018), in the context of the Mexican aid agency AMEXCID, shows how gender equality norms are introduced in the policy setting through a very strong resonance with a national femicide, coupled to ambitions of wanting to end it, with gender equality becoming an important part of AMEXCID because of Mexico's national historical experiences of (unsuccessfully) addressing violence against women.

Decisively, the degree to which a new idea or practice resonates within the adopting organisation is not given a priori as a reflection of some fundamental nature of the idea, but rather found in how actors inside organisations interpret and understand the nature of that idea as a negotiated attribute. In his work on how gender equality made its way into the Gates Foundation, Fejerskov (2018) shows how the elasticity or flexible interpretability of ideas allows them almost to be manipulated by actors as they try to make them resonate with specific organisational cultures. In the Gates Foundation, this meant that attempts were made to institutionalise norms of gender equality with reference to the mantra of ‘optimise, never equalise’, eventually leading to an approach that utilises women as agents of impact effectiveness, de facto stripping away any chance of impacting on gender (in) equality.

A key aspect of how organisations pursue gender equality, whole also heavily shaping organisational culture, is the way in which these are structurally organised, greatly shaping the distribution of roles, tasks and activities among staff and units, as well as the standardised and formalised mechanisms that govern both internal and external relations. These structures of organisations are also fundamental in shaping organisational narratives and practices. They often reveal degrees of formal commitment to gender equality, ultimately helping us understand to what extent we may witness the decoupling of foregrounded expressions from organisational efforts to implement these concerns. Particularly for development organisations, the organisation of policy-making units and implementing organs creates a separation of fundamentally different kinds of practices in different socio-economic contexts (Mosse 2005; Engberg-Pedersen 2014). Whereas local offices are embedded in contexts of implementation and shaped by the logics that prevail there, the headquarters may pursue vastly different objectives, as they mainly relate to other development organisations far removed from the implementation of gender equality concerns on the ground. Despite what are often formally presented as one-dimensional relations between units and departments, organisational structures are characterised by a multiplicity of dimensions that shape narratives and practices by compartmentalising and separating organisational cultures, thus resulting in different practices and beliefs, not only between local branches and headquarters, but also very much within them.

*Actor Strategies, Norm Entrepreneurship,
Emotions and Relationships*

If one concern has been repeated time after time regarding the likelihood of institutionalising gender equality norms in organisations, it is that actors play a central role in facilitating and shaping this process (Cağlar et al. 2013; Boxenbaum and Battilana 2005; Franceschet 2011). From this work, we come to understand how individual actors can act and work to shape the implementation of ideas, norms and practices of gender equality (Eyben and Turquet 2013). However, such organisational actors are faced with numerous challenges when they seek to initiate and influence processes that institutionalise gender equality norms. They may have to undermine existing logics and practices and legitimise new ones in the eyes of other organisational actors, or create hybrid forms in which new and old ideas are merged together. For this purpose, they need to plan strategies for how to mobilise different forms of material, political and organisational resources, frame new organisational practices or rules in acceptable manners and then create resonance to inspire other organisational actors. To create a coherent vision for change that appeals to other organisational actors, including implementing staff, actors may frame their projects of change to align with dominant values in the organisation, constructing imageries that lend coherence to new norms and ideas, or creating stories through which heroes and villains are defined. Yet doing so will often prompt resistance from ‘institutional defenders’ (DiMaggio 1988) who benefit from the organisational status quo, sometimes in the form of covert opposition, and sometimes through high-profile clashes at meetings or in corridors. Fejerskov (2018) shows how, in the Gates Foundation, the ambitions of gender proponents to produce a new gender strategy in fact provided ammunition for their opponents, allowing them to draw out negotiations for months, or diluting the language of the strategy to ensure that its influence was miniscule.

We may describe individuals who work to influence their organisational and institutional contexts *gender entrepreneurs* (see Chappell 2006). These are crucially important agents of change who leverage resources to transform institutions or create new ones, initiating different changes and actively participating in implementing them. In the related concept of institutional entrepreneurship, this form of agency has been explored by relating it either to the properties of the actors or to their

specific positions in a given field (MaGuire et al. 2004). The first stream directs attention to the special abilities, characteristics and qualities of such entrepreneurs that allow them to initiate institutional change by promoting alternative “templates” or logics to the existing ones. The institutional entrepreneur is thus described as an “*analytically distinct social type who has the capacity to take a reflective position towards institutionalized practices and can envision alternative modes of getting things done*” (Beckert 1999). The second stream is more interested in how a number of different subject or social positions are created from which actors may catalyse change (Battilana et al. 2009). Organisations and even organisational fields are thus understood as loaded with positions granting agents access to resources and power, which in turn provides them with the capacity to initiate change. Explanations of motivations for these kinds of entrepreneurs are commonly made with reference to ideational commitments, altruism or empathy (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998), underlining how these actors engage in such activities because they believe in the ideas or values embedded in the norm in question. However, actors are just as likely to be engaged in such projects of change because this strengthens their organisational position or career paths. Importantly, we often see how some of the central individuals who act as gender entrepreneurs benefit from their experiences in working with similar ideas in other, earlier organisational contexts. This underlines how individuals with higher levels of interorganisational mobility, and thus exposure to different organisational contexts, may be more likely to be aware of heterogeneous institutional arrangements and thus able to identify windows of opportunities for action leading to organisational change (Greenwood et al. 2002). Embeddedness in multiple institutional or social environments thus makes them more likely not to take the prevailing institutional arrangements for granted, increasing the probability of their moving gender equality practices from one organisational context to another.

A weakness in using these concepts of gender or institutional entrepreneurs is that they tend to overemphasise the hyper-muscular and rational dimensions of such actors, adopting a misconstrued portrayal of them as a unique ‘species’ of ‘heroes’. This places the ability to exercise influence in the hands of a select few and fails to acknowledge that change may also come from the margins of organisations, from a wider array of actors involved. The causal or evolutionary connection between action and reaction (change) is neither linear nor necessarily easily

identifiable. Actions that seem unimportant at first may soon escalate or be leveraged to a level at which they being about radical change, and we should recognise the influence and potential escalation of seemingly unimportant actions and changes. Instead of the isolated actions of individual actors, we should be interested in their actions and practices, that is, the *work* these engage in as they attempt to institutionalise norms of gender equality. Such practices may be specific forms of social interaction, but they may also be extended through the formation of networks and connections.

The centrality of actors and their strategic practices in institutionalising norms of gender equality also compels us to consider their emotions and relationships. Several areas in the contemporary social sciences and humanities devote increased attention to emotions (or ‘affect’) as part of a material (re)turn to the body (Rose 2013), even to the point of engaging in the neurosciences of these phenomena. In this interpretation, emotions are considered a set of automatically triggered brain–body behaviours and expressions that are inherently independent of intentions (Smail 2007). In other manifestations, this turn has served in part to challenge the (over)use of rationality in making too flat accounts of what forms opinions, motivates action and shapes judgment. Emotions, in this perspective, should not be regarded as purely individual-level psychological factors divorced from individuals’ social positions or rational cognitive processes (Voronov and Vince 2012). When agents become engaged in projects of change they consider highly meaningful, their motivation is likely to rise, and their involvement in shaping institutionalisation increases. Zeit et al. (1999) point to the phenomenon of self-identity formation, in which ideas or practices that are being institutionalised share a similarity to an agents’ distinctive identity or character, thus strengthening the connection between individual and idea or practice. In particular, the theories and aims of global gender norms quite often trigger strong emotional responses in the staff of development organisations because they have direct experience of gender inequality themselves. For instance, Boxenbaum and Battilana (2005) trace key translation agents’ histories of involvement in 1970s women’s movements, seeing them as forming crucial individual preferences for them to participate actively in introducing diversity management into Denmark. The notion of emotions emphasises the importance of actors in organisations and sheds light on how an organisation’s staff mobilises energy around a norm (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996; Benford and Snow

2000). In a ‘relational approach’ to development, Anne-Marie Fechter (2012) considers relationships and emotions to be essential attributes of development practices. In that sense, staff’s personal relationships, beliefs, values and motivations are likely to affect how gender equality norms are engaged with in specific situations and how they are manifested within development organisations (Mosse 2011). However, often what may initially seem personal is in fact entangled in bureaucratic pressures and priorities. Crewe (2018) describes well this conflict in her tale of how Oxfam GB, pushed forward by ambitions to be the ‘go-to-agency’ on women’s rights internationally, was caught at the intersection between a strong marketing department moulding gender into commodities for potential new funders and strong personal commitment to gender justice from gender advisors.

Organisational Pressures and Priorities

Despite the eagerness of individual gender entrepreneurs, when norms are engaged with in organisations, they are strongly influenced by organisational pressures and priorities at a given time and place. These pressures and priorities are management concerns and organisational threats and opportunities that staff feel override their more immediate daily tasks. Particularly in relation to new projects and policy-making, organisational pressures and priorities tend to establish a determining framework for organisational processes. They include what can be called *political opportunity structures* when organisational leaders assess such windows of opportunity as central to their organisation. However, it is typically threats to organisational survival and organisational processes of change that shape top leaders’ and managers’ agendas. Thus, staff perceptions of formal and informal priorities, as well as changes in funding strategies, influence whether, but also how, gender equality norms become a strong focus in concrete development programmes. Such shifting organisational priorities foreground the importance of temporality. The rapid institutionalisation of gender equality ideas may ease resistance from both inside and outside the organisation and overcome the strongest opposition swiftly, but it might also entail shallowness and a greater likelihood of decoupling, in which the norms that have been institutionalised never make it to the back end of taken-for-granted organisational practices and discourses, remaining merely figures in policies or strategies. Prolonged processes of incremental change carry with

them the same double-sidedness. Patience and persistence may make for an institutionalisation that gradually creates a strong resonance between the organisation and gender equality norms, not least by approaching institutionalisation as a step-by-step ladder. On the other hand, the passage of time creates the risks of contingent changes ending up somehow blocking the process of institutionalisation, with new priorities and pressures, or expectations, emerging and making new demands to which the organisation needs to respond. It may also increase the sheer risk that the norm never materialises in any substantial form, but continues to live a life in the dusty and neglected corners of the organisation.

As a tangible organisational pressure, demands to increase funding or make changes in funding structures may dramatically change the framing of gender work within an organisation, including from a gender-mainstreaming, political advocacy-oriented approach, to a more result-based logic emphasising the utility of supporting girls in achieving economic growth, as some have experienced it (Crewe 2018). Whereas some scholars emphasise the role of transnational actors in spreading gender norms (True and Minstrom 2001), such as gender mainstreaming, in the aftermath of Beijing 1995, the attentiveness to pressures and priorities shows that the structural conditions of organisations also influence to what extent and how transnational social movements can influence policy diffusion. However, formal priorities in terms of development policies emphasising gender equality may not automatically lead to the issue being strongly emphasised in concrete development programmes. For instance, staff members in the Danish development agency Danida appear very apt at sensing the ‘real’ priorities of development ministers and top managers, regardless of official policies (Engberg-Pedersen 2018). Many Danish development ministers have repeatedly stated their support for gender equality, but several evaluations record limited success with respect to gender mainstreaming. Thus, the absence of the minister when a new gender policy is presented to the public sends a signal about how it is prioritised. Yet, formal priorities may be important, especially if they are in line with staff perceptions of informal pressures and priorities.

Some of the other analytical dimensions dealt with here, such as organisational cultures and history, only experience incremental change over the course of years if not decades. The organisational history of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation essentially means that it is deeply embedded in private-sector practice and thought, with a strong belief in

technology and measurability as a cure for the illnesses of the world (see Fejerskov 2018). Such cultures are not easily challenged or transformed, and ‘foreign’ ideas such as gender equality may have a hard time spurring change in these contexts if they do not resonate well with the already dominant logics. Elsewhere, Zilber (2002) has shown how, over the course of decades, organisational practices may remain the same, even though the logics with which they are associated changes on the surface. Such decouplings between foreground discourses and background practices speak to the persistent nature of organisational culture and history. Organisational pressures and priorities, on the other hand, often go through rapid change as a consequence of changes in leadership, the influences of different stakeholders or shifts in the normative environment. This is not least the case for development agencies, for whom elections are a frequent source of disruption in political priorities and thus in organisational pressures.

Normative Environment and Stakeholders

The normative environment, understood as the collective force of organisations involved in the same fields, espouses specific values and influences organisations and actors through normative measures such as legitimacy (see Meyer and Scott 1983). Gender equality and global agreements as such very much depend on having strong normative environments through which they can spread. That is, actors in these environments encourage particular forms of action, logics and goals, and they may accordingly favour particular kinds of engagements with gender equality norms, exerting indirect power through knowledge, legitimacy or prestige. Organisational responses to pressure from the normative environment may take many forms. Decoupling is a core argument in institutional thought (Meyer and Rowan 1977), in which organisations disconnect foreground (symbolic) changes from more structural or procedural changes in the organisation’s machinery. Pressure perhaps from several different normative environments creates multiple and often conflicting demands to which the organisation is expected to respond in a timely fashion, something that is not always possible. Moreover, public development agencies are expected to respond simultaneously to the national political environment (which is more often than not of a fragmented nature) and the normative framework espoused by the international community of peer aid agencies. Defiance of pressure from

the normative environment is an equally likely response, though one with potentially significant consequences, as an organisation may come to appear illegitimate if it does not reflect dominant normative frameworks. In this case, we are reminded how the institutionalisation of gender equality norms into not just an organisation's external work but its innermost machinery of taken-for-granted practices is also a process of experimentation. As gender equality begins to grow as an organisational priority and perhaps slow attempts are made to institutionalise it, it begins to be reflected in the organisation's relationships with partners, grantees and peer organisations. As it does this, it begins a process almost of testing, in which it needs to meet the challenges of relevance and resonance. The internal process of convincing colleagues of its importance is critical, as we discussed in respect of the second analytical dimension, but so too is the role of the normative environment as it begins to respond to the approach or particular interpretation of the idea. Actors in the normative environment may react encouragingly to the organisation's work on gender, but they may also disagree with the particular approach, initiating a process of negotiation or appropriation. This may take the form of direct interaction if an actor finds the interpretation to be problematic and directly confronts the organisation in question regarding its approach, but it may also be more indirect or normative if the environment reacts negatively without engaging the organisation. Juul Petersen (2018) has shown how the NGO IRW, in preparing its first gender strategy was caught between the conflicting environments of mainstream development donors and a more conservative Islamic milieu. This eventually prompted a policy framed around gender justice instead of equality, as equality was seen to lend itself to controversy for denoting the sameness of genders, while the word 'justice' encompassed better a focus on creating symbiotic relations between the genders as opposed to actual equality.

Decisively, in these normative environments, opportunity structures may arise that can facilitate the institutionalisation of gender equality norms. These are field-level facilitative conditions that actors or organisations may choose to utilise in order to influence institutionalisation processes or facilitate the institutionalisation of new ideas or practices, and they can take on different forms and *inter alia* be political, cultural or social in shape. These can support actors' mobilisation of resources, intellectual attention and organisational or political support for their particular interpretation, and may do so through either formal institutional

and legal structures or informal structures of power relations. Political opportunity structures have been by far the most explored of the three mentioned, often in terms of how different social movements have utilised such structures to draw attention to a cause or facilitate different forms of action. But cultural or social, or even more specific ones like ‘gendered’ opportunity structures (McCammon et al. 2001), may also arise and provide agents with the tools they need to shape processes of institutionalisation in distinct directions. Opportunity structures can exist without ever becoming relevant, partly because actors are not reflexively aware or able to identify such opportunities, and partly because they choose not to activate them.

BEYOND GENDER EQUALITY AS MYTH AND CEREMONY

Processes of institutionalising gender equality norms are very demanding, requiring consistent work from actors in order to make progress or prevail. They take place under pressure from organisational defenders who are attempting to maintain the status quo or undermine these emerging concerns, from existing or emerging priorities and pressures within the organisation, and from changing normative environments that may adjust their support to, or interpretation of, the norm. Moreover, the contingency of organisational dynamics means it is difficult to foresee when and how these constraints come into effect. To understand the institutionalisation of gender equality norms in organisations is thus to foreground issues of contestation and struggle, as well as the distinctiveness of engagement with norms in individual situations. Different situations in different social or spatial contexts will trigger different social identities and thus provide shifting constraints and opportunities for institutionalisation.

Despite the significant efforts that are being undertaken at the international level to establish global norms and scripts for legitimate paths towards the adoption of notions of gender equality, development organisations interpret and institutionalise these norms in substantially different ways. Normative environments, stakeholders and the history of all organisations differ significantly, almost excluding similar institutionalisations. Moreover, the contingent nature of the institutionalisation processes, due to short-term phenomena like organisational pressures and priorities, actor strategies, emotions and relationships, rules out similar interpretations of a complex issue like gender equality. The diversity of

organisational processes indicates that global norms for how to address gender equality are constantly being reframed due to changing circumstances, power relations and ideational contexts. Development organisations perceive themselves as actors framing what development is about and, to varying degrees, they try to tread a thin line between referring to global norms to gain credibility and aiming to change the global norms themselves. When norms of gender equality are engaged with in organisational contexts, perhaps with efforts being made to institutionalise them, they are faced with a range of factors that may both facilitate and constrain such processes. In essence, this necessarily leads us to understand such engagement with norms as situated, with different situations shaping the engagement with the norm. In this chapter we have identified and discussed four such factors: (i) organisational histories, cultures and structures; (ii) actor strategies, emotions and relationships; (iii) organisational uncertainties, pressures and priorities; and (iv) the normative context and stakeholders. We have brought these different dimensions into play to highlight the great significance of agency in shaping institutionalisation processes. Underpinning these dimensions is an understanding of bounded individual intentionality, thus advancing a situated approach between agency and structure. We may see actors as a primary driving force in situated engagement with norms and potential institutionalisation, but this does not make individuals free to interpret as they see fit, like a form of methodological individualism. On the contrary, actors are constantly faced with different normative, material or organisational concerns that constrain and enable different kinds of actions and interpretations. At the same time, however, we can witness the importance of discontinuous and non-linear processes of institutional change, that is, of coincidence or contingency. Yet the fact that not every outcome of organisational action is foreseeable should not encourage us to equate this with failure or to think that any outcome is possible. Actions might be purposive, but they have consequences far beyond the expected, being both productive and counterproductive for the projects of change in which actors are engaged. If we focus too narrowly on intentionality, then we cannot account for significant forms of institutional work entailing sets of unintended consequences. We should not only account for those practices where we are able to confirm logically the intentional or purposive consequences.

Individual translations are productive in so far as the individualisation entails tailored approaches that strengthen organisations' work with

gender equality. Understanding organisations as loosely coupled systems nonetheless highlights how policies, priorities and organisational ambitions do not necessarily govern action, leading to normative structures and intentions easily being decoupled from behaviours and practices. That is, translation too may very well give way to the dilution and thinning of normative ideals such as gender equality. Of the greatest importance, then, is not so much who does what to shape institutionalisation processes, but rather the form and nature of the organisational work that in essence incites change, perhaps by opening up new paths for normative shifts. It is this work of reconstituting alliances and networks, of justification through strategic framing (*why should we do this?*), that paves the way for new ideas and norms and that in the end may re-gender dominant modes of operation and thinking in organisations. This is not a type of work that is exclusively intentional and free from institutional, material or ideational constraints. Rather, as we have shown here, it is very much shaped by factors that are beyond the control of any individual, but still ones that may be manoeuvred to reach that advantageous point that can be critical to any success, and that is needed in the negotiations that will certainly become necessary in any organisation for those who are attempting to initiate normative change.

CONCLUSION

Organisations and institutions form central arenas of norm-engagement in contemporary human life, from the UN and the EU down to the smallest local NGO and village council, as this book readily shows. At the same time, organisations are among the most rigid and unyielding institutions, rarely prone to change, especially the kind of transformative change that is inherent in strong norms of gender equality and women's empowerment. Work by Çağlar et al. (2013) and Eyben and Turquet (2013), and countless more, shows how feminists and ideas of gender equality have made their way into, or at least got a foot in the door, of organisations and governance institutions, but also that moving beyond agenda-setting and symbolic interaction remains an ever-present challenge in almost all contexts where the institutionalisation of gender equality norms has been explored. This chapter set out to explore the factors that shape this gap between symbolic interaction on the one hand and deep institutionalisation and normative change on the other—that is,

the concerns influencing how gender equality norms are engaged with in different situations within organisations.

We identify these factors across notions of organisational history, uncertainty and pressures, actor strategies, or the normative contexts within which all organisations are embedded, and do so with a view to seeing how situated engagement with norms foregrounds the dialectical relationship between actors inhabiting these very situations, and then the contexts and structures within which they take place. In these situations, actors seeking to spur change will have to navigate some of the challenges outlined that emerge from different sides of organisational life, but they may also utilise the many different opportunities that arise here as well. The situatedness of engagement with norms at the same time implies that actors may never freely translate or localise ideas *into* their organisational contexts, but also that structural concerns are never just a constraining influence but may very well be used to leverage forms of change. Unquestionably, what drives and incites normative change in respect of gender equality are actors, entrepreneurs and femocrats, or however we frame them, who engage in everyday efforts not just of initial institutionalisation but of the persistent and continuous furthering of these norms. This last point is important in discussions of how to move beyond symbolic engagement with and institutionalisation of norms, emphasising that efforts to integrate gender equality into organisations are just as much about what happens beyond agenda-setting in the work to maintain the focus on, resources for and support to gender equality. And while we strongly underline the importance of resonance between the organisation in question and the set of ideas or norms that it is being attempted to institutionalise, we do so with a view to seeing resonance partly as a negotiated attribute (i.e. actors may construct a resonance—it does not have to be given a priori) and partly as contingent on situations. That is, organisations do not just have static and centralised cultures and values with which an idea may resonate or not, but this resonance has to be found or negotiated in each situation of engagement with norms where different forms of resonance and dissonance may come into play.

Throughout this chapter, we have mostly emphasised the institutionalisation of norms of gender equality as a product or end-goal of organisations—that is, organisational change leading to the institutionalisation of gender equality into an organisation's practices, discourses, and efforts. In the end, of course, the adoption of these ideas and norms in any development organisation itself serves a further and

perhaps even more important end—that of addressing gendered inequalities through the organisation’s efforts in the ‘real world’. This leaves us with fundamental question of whether organisations that may reproduce problematic notions of gender in their own organisational practices and discourses may ever be able to produce constructive or transformative changes in gender norms in their outward-focused work.

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CHAPTER 6

Remaking Women's Human Rights in the Vernacular: The Resonance Dilemma

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The question of how norms developed in one place are adopted or appropriated in another is often described in terms of diffusion or travel. However, as this book argues, the process is better understood in terms of the relationship between the social situations in which norms are produced and those into which they are absorbed. Norms do not remain fixed in this process, since they are embedded in social relationships, identities and subjectivities and are transformed by the social context into which they move. The contextual system of meanings shapes all

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norms, since they are always enacted in particular ways depending on their surrounding set of social relationships, ideologies and power structures. However, some are more malleable than others. For example, norms based on law have more fixedness than those based on systems of kinship or political ideas such as justice.

When normative ideas or practices move from one social context to another, they are inevitably translated, redefined and adapted to the new circumstances. We have referred to this process as vernacularisation (Merry 2006a, b; Levitt and Merry 2009). Our work examines the translation and adaptation of global women's rights norms about violence against women to local social contexts. Clearly, the production of such global norms is itself a social process, deeply shaped by local social movements whose ideas and agendas constitute the global norms. The list of major women's rights issues and norms reflect a range of concerns developed by activists in countries around the world, such as dowry deaths, female genital cutting and child marriage. When ideas generated in the context of local social movements are taken by activists to international institutions, they sometimes coalesce and become articulated in international laws and declarations. There is hardly a uniform set of norms of women's rights or gender equality at the global level, but as particular ideas about women's rights, including gender equality, become formalised in legal documents, they take on a more fixed definition. This legally created fixity of norms offers a repertoire of ideas and practices that can be both normatively and strategically adopted by local organisations and individuals seeking to promote similar goals. It is important to note that not only are norms about women's rights produced through myriad social movements around the world, but that some of them are now legitimated by acceptance by the global community.

Yet, norms of women's rights and gender equality are inevitably transformed in the process, even becoming unrecognisable in their local instantiation. There are typically intermediaries who take global ideas, developed in one social context, and interpret them in terms that are more effective for another social context. In this way, vernacularisation is a situated process in which ideas and norms are constantly being reinterpreted and renegotiated in the context of particular social situations. It is important to recognise that vernacularisation is both a pragmatic and strategic approach to norms as well as an ideological one inspired by moral convictions. It is an instance of the situated approach advocated by this book.

In this chapter, we show how the process of vernacularising ideas about women's rights to live free of violence depends on the social contexts in which they are being introduced and the individuals who lead them. It demonstrates the active role of intermediaries in reinterpreting global ideas for local contexts and shows the extent to which norms may be transformed in the process. Indeed, the price of vernacularisation can be such a dramatic transformation of the norms that they no longer carry the same meaning. As we will show, the organisation, funding and national context, along with the situation of the various parties to the transactions and translation, determine how norms are understood and adopted.

The question of how and where women's rights ideas are produced and adopted is a critically important one. After two decades of global feminism in the late twentieth century in which there was a remarkable development of ideas, practices and people both nationally and in international conferences and policy statements dealing with a variety of women's issues including violence against women, there are indications of resistance, retrenchment and a turn away from women's rights concerns. In the USA, some young women feel that the battle has been won and they no longer are concerned about women's rights and equality. The country has witnessed the emergence of hyper-masculine leaders who survive despite misogynistic actions and comments. Globally, resistance to women's rights has appeared in the area of reproductive rights, gender equality and LGBTQ rights. Human rights organisations in many countries are under attack. The core human rights principles of equality, autonomy, choice and security of the body and person are fundamental to the claim that violence against women violates women's human rights.

Under these conditions, it is important to ask how ideas of women's human rights move from one setting to another, when and how they are adopted and how they are changed in the process. Under what conditions are they translated into local contexts and when are they resisted or rejected? Why are ideas of gender equality readily accepted in some countries while others insist on seeing men and women as fundamentally different and unequal? Why are ideas of the acceptability of same-sex relationships spreading quickly in some countries but fiercely resisted in others? This is a temporal as well as a cultural question. Ideas resisted at one time may gradually be accepted later, and some groups, of various social, cultural, religious, regional or class characteristics, may be more willing to adopt new ideas of various kinds than others.

Based on our ethnographic research, we find that in order for globally established ideas of gender equality to be accepted, they have to be adapted to some extent to local cultural categories, symbols and ideologies: they need to be made to fit in with what is already there. In the late 1980s, Abdullahi An Na'im described this process in terms of cultural legitimacy (1990, 1992). He argued that ideas are more readily accepted if they fit into existing value systems, using the example of Islamic law and human rights. He argued that seeking out areas of compatibility between human rights and Islamic law enables advocates to negotiate a shared moral and legal system. We have found many examples of this process. In 2005, we visited an NGO in Nigeria that had developed a booklet that defined women's rights based on texts from the Koran. At a conference in Gaza in 1999, Palestinian women activists argued with Islamic scholars about the definitions of women and their entitlements in Islamic texts. A third example is the Yogyakarta Principles, adopted in 2006 in a UN effort to define LGBT rights within the widely accepted framework of discrimination. The protection of LGBT rights was framed in the template of protection from discrimination, a pattern already established in the human rights system for race and gender. These examples illustrate the adaptation of rights ideas to frameworks that will make them more acceptable, particularly to local communities with differing ideas about gender and sexuality. They show how global laws and policy statements are appropriated by local organisations and translated into terms that make sense in their communities. This is the process of vernacularisation: the extraction of norms and practices from the universal sphere of international organisations and their translation into ideas and practices that resonate with the values and ways of doing things in local contexts. Local places are not empty, of course, but rich with other understandings of rights, the state and justice. Some of the most important actors in this process are leaders of women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that translate women's rights ideas into terms that make sense to their organisations.

Vernacularisation is a process of translation within context. How various ideas are redefined or rejected varies across countries and settings. NGOs select how to use women's human rights according to their funders' preferences, their allies' interests and their clients' support. They adapt them to local meanings of women's rights, formed by the political and historical experience with gender equality and women's human rights in the country. Where human rights ideas are central to political movements and have a long history, as in Peru, framing women's claims

to equality or freedom from violence in rights terms evokes greater public support than where human rights seem to be new and threatening, as in China. In general, enthusiasm for human rights discourse depends on its historical and cultural resonance in particular locales.

THE VERNACULARISATION PROCESS

Women's rights are typically produced in particular places, become redefined as global, and then are adopted in local contexts. For example, violence against women is the sum of a wide variety of particular issues, some more general such as rape and domestic violence, others more specific such as honour killing, dowry murders, female genital cutting, face veiling and sex trafficking, which are all merged into a general category of violence against women. Women's human rights ideas emerged from national women's movements, which pressured the international human rights system to incorporate women's rights as human rights. The 1993 Vienna Conference on Human Rights marked the first substantial recognition of women's rights by the UN human rights system. This idea was accepted only after a massive mobilisation by women's groups around the world. Throughout the 1990s, leaders of national women's movements worked to establish women's rights as human rights by attending UN conferences, drafting documents, and demanding media attention, building on networks and ideologies that local activists had already put into place. These global institutions were shaped by the pressures of local and national social movements. Thus, women's human rights came out of local social movements, were formalised in the international system, and subsequently adopted to varying degrees by local communities.

This is a spiral process. Women's human rights are created through diverse social movements in many parts of the world. Over time, they have coalesced in international organisations and have, to some extent, crystallised into international law under the supervision of the UN and its human rights organisations in the form of treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women or the Convention on the Rights of the Child, along with many resolutions and agreed conclusions of important commissions such as the Human Rights Council and the Commission on the Status of Women. In many ways, the high point of women's human rights was the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and its outcome document, the Platform for Action 1995.

THE PROBLEM OF RESONANCE

Yet, this process of vernacularisation poses a dilemma for activists working to translate ideas from one context to another in order to promote social change. If the idea or norm which is appropriated is very similar to the existing set of norms or ideas, it will be more readily adopted. On the other hand, it is then less likely to produce change. Change comes when naturalised forms of inequality are challenged, and familiar-sounding ideas are less likely to challenge inequality. If it is more dramatically different and challenges existing patterns of inequality, it is less likely to be widely adopted but has greater potential to enact change. However, it is likely to encounter considerable resistance. Although innovations are always likely to be challenged, the resistance mounted against norms that are not presented in familiar terms and diverge from existing norms sharply is considerably greater than resistance against norms more aligned with existing practices and presented in more familiar terms. Yet the familiar norms are less likely to produce change than the more unfamiliar ones. This is the resonance dilemma. To be accepted, norms fare better when they are familiar, but to make change, they fare better when they are less familiar.

For example, the battered women's movement in the USA, as in many other countries, claimed that violence against women in the family is a crime. In many places, including the USA in the past, male heads of house have the right to discipline women and children. As heads of house, they are responsible for the order of the household, while the state is responsible for order outside the house. To redefine this disciplinary authority as a crime is a dramatic shift in the way family social order and kinship are conceived. To define violence within the family as an action that the state takes an interest in and is willing to intervene to stop and punish is a big change. Stopping domestic violence depends on developing new ideas of gender, marriage, family, kinship, the role of the state and of law. It requires changing established ideas of kinship obligations, family arrangements for marriage, ideas of responsibility for misbehaviour and the social order of the family. It promotes individual safety over family solidarity. Not surprisingly, in the USA adapting to this normative system has taken decades.

Merry's ethnographic research in a small town in Hawaii in the early 1990s shows the dramatic shift, this idea gave to conceptions of kinship, family, gender and the state (Merry 2003, 2009). Men who had assumed

they could hit their wives for what they viewed as misbehaviour found themselves in court and batterer retraining programmes. Some of these men were both surprised and outraged that they ended up in court for violence that they had long seen as a normal part of their everyday lives. Many felt entitled to use violence to discipline their partners, wives and children when they thought they were misbehaving. In batterer treatment programme meetings, they justified their violence as appropriate when women flirted with other men or they suspected that they might, or when they failed to take care of the house and children adequately, or when the women disobeyed them. Under the influence of this new perspective on domestic violence, however, women who had long assumed that violence was an unpleasant but inevitable dimension of marriage began to call the police and take their complaints to court. Some women who were forced to have sex with their partners or husbands began to see this as an instance of rape.

The transition to a new view of domestic violence as a crime was not a smooth or easy process, as many family members of both men and women rejected women who turned to the law for help. Women with supportive mothers tended to fare better than those whose mothers felt that they had chosen this relationship and now had to put up with it. Thus, there was both acceptance and resistance to the new regime of criminalising domestic violence. In the process, some women were better protected but faced hostility from kin and some men refused to accept the legitimacy of the new regime.

As this example shows, changing ideas about the acceptability of domestic violence is a long, slow process, one that challenges many basic understandings of social life. It is a relatively radical change, framing kinship obligations and marriage relationships in terms of crime and the law. Instead of viewing the family as inviolate from the law, it is now constructed as open to state intervention. This idea has not been adopted equally everywhere, by any means. Activists typically present criminal justice interventions into domestic violence as a radical break from past ideas of male authority in the family. In Merry's research, she found that it is often experienced as such. Thus, the idea that domestic violence is a crime that the state takes seriously is an idea that leads to a radically different conception of the family. This makes it hard to accept.

On the other hand, Merry also studied an organisation that introduced the idea of domestic violence as a violation in less challenging ways. In the same town, a large Pentecostal Christian church took a

very different approach to domestic violence (Merry 2001). Interviews with several pastoral counsellors who work with women and couples revealed that violence against women is a common issue, for which pastors use both Christian ideas of demonic influence and psychotherapy. The Christian model teaches women to submit to their husbands, to turn away wrath with gentle words, and to pray to dislodge demons who hide in strongholds created by resentment, grudges and hostility. Forgiving or being forgiven weakens these strongholds and helps to eliminate the demonic forces which produce anger and violence. Like other Charismatic and Pentecostal churches, this church envisions the process of healing as a battle between the power of God and Satan. Anger is caused by demons in a person's body while the devil, residing in the flesh, is the ultimate source of sin. As one pastor put it, 'When you walk with the Lord and you do something wrong you know it's Satan doing it'. This does not mean that the person is 'possessed', but that there is enemy influence. The enemy can put ideas in people's minds. For example, if a person who is abusive suspects his wife of relations with other men, that idea was put into the person's head by demons. It is sometimes necessary to expel the demons. This process, called deliverance, requires prayer, reading Scripture and renewing the mind as well as commanding the demons to leave. Deliverance requires eliminating the stronghold where a demon lives and opening the space to the Holy Spirit to prevent the demons from returning. Bitterness and lack of forgiving create strongholds for evil spirits. If a person is not repentant and able to remove these strongholds, even demons that are rebuked and driven away will come back.

A woman who is experiencing anger or violence from her husband or partner is admonished to have a meek and quiet spirit and not provoke her husband, using the Biblical advice that 'a gentle word turns away wrath'. This does not mean she should be a doormat or stay in an abusive situation. If there is serious violence or she is in danger, she should separate from her husband for a while. Pastors agree that the law has an important role to play at this point. But interviews with former church members indicated that some pastors discouraged women from leaving violent partners.

Thus, this approach to domestic violence builds on the Pentecostal Christian understanding of human behaviour rather than on ideas of criminality. It presents the importance of diminishing violence in families in a way that is compatible with Christian beliefs about persons and

families. In contrast to the idea that domestic violence is a crime, it builds on existing ideas of the role of God and demons. On the other hand, it does not challenge the authority of men over women. Nor was this an issue of great significance within this church in 2000 when Merry did the research or in the Hawaiian evangelical community at the time. Thus, while offering a more culturally compatible framework for understanding violence against women, the Pentecostal Christian approach also did relatively little to challenge gender hierarchies or the importance of ending violence in families.

In sum, if the new ideas are close to established ones, they fail to induce much social or cultural change. If an organisation tells women that leaving a marriage is not possible but she should work within it, she has some possibilities for change, but not a great deal. Clearly there is a tension between providing culturally legitimate ideas and ideas that can produce dramatic, radical change. This is a key problem for social change activists, especially in an area as socially embedded and culturally weighted as gender rights. The situation is hardly fixed, however, and norms that are rejected by some communities at one point may be acceptable later.

VERNACULARISATION AND RESONANCE

Local activists face what we call a 'resonance dilemma'. The more similar and culturally compatible the new idea is, the more readily it will be adapted. However, it is also less likely to challenge basic ideas about gender and sexuality. The more radically different and challenging the idea is, the more it will be resisted, but also the more transformative its consequences can be if it is adopted. In our study of women's NGOs in 2003–2005, we examined two women's human rights NGOs in each of four cities: Baroda, India; Beijing, China; Lima, Peru; and New York City, USA looking at how women's rights NGOs vernacularise human rights (Levitt and Merry 2009). Human rights constituted a valuable political resource and source of gender equality norms in many of these places. Advocates adapted universal ideas of women's human rights to a variety of particular situations. NGO leaders translated globally recognised norms and ideas into local situations.

Why did they not just use local ideas? We found that women's human rights had a transcendent authority based on the recognition that these were ideas that many countries had accepted, that they represented

the collective opinion of a global society, and perhaps also global ideas of modernity. Framing claims in terms of human rights often added to their power and allowed groups to build alliances with others promoting different kinds of human rights. Thus, we found many NGOs in these four cities who were working to remake international human rights for women in the vernacular. But they did so in very different ways, depending on what the local community was willing to accept. Human rights ideas are not the only inspiration for women's NGOs, of course. There are also national rights and other ideas of morality, sometimes based on religion or nationalism. Some groups put more emphasis on national rights while others turned to international human rights.

The resonance dilemma means that the more extensively a women's human rights issue is transformed to fit with existing cultural frameworks, the more readily it will be adopted, but the less likely it is to challenge existing modes of thinking. The less extensively the women's rights idea is vernacularised, the less likely it is to be adopted but the more likely it is to challenge existing social structures. For example, one NGO we studied in India focused on familiar women's issues such as female infanticide and domestic violence and had widespread support of women's groups in the city, while another sought to improve the rights of LGBT individuals, a far more radical idea in the mid-2000s, and had limited uptake from individuals or other women's organisations in the city. This organisation's leaders were from another part of India and were not included in the network of women's organisations in the city, in part because of their unconventional engagement with LGBT rights.

However, the extent to which any translator can promote new ideas that are only somewhat resonant with local issues depends on organisational autonomy and funding sources. Funding has important implications for the ability to promote unpopular or transformative ideas and projects. Locally supported organisations were less radical than those receiving foreign funding and their leaders were more concerned with satisfying the local community. International funding allows activists to promote ideas that are more likely to be resisted or rejected. Funders themselves may advocate culturally incompatible ideas. Two examples show this interaction, both based on research in the mid-2000s.

In one case, in the city of Baroda in India, we compared two women's NGOs, both of which said they were working to promote women's human rights.¹ One organisation, Sahiyar, offers legal aid and counselling for poor women. It is located in a poor neighbourhood in a small

and unprepossessing office. It was founded in 1984 by leaders who were influenced by the national women's movement and Marxism. The key leader is a Trotskyite who attended university in Baroda and belongs to the dominant caste in Baroda. All of the organisation's trustees belong to the same caste and come from the surrounding region. The leaders and staff deliberately speak the local language rather than English, although the leaders are fluent in English. The staff members are primarily lower-middle-class young women who live in the immediate area. Their parents consider it a safe place to gain work experience. They receive a small honorarium rather than a salary because the work is considered a movement, not a job. They do not attend international conferences. Until recently, the organisation refused to accept foreign funds. Its small budget comes from local sympathisers and organisations such as Hindu and Muslim charities.

The major issues tackled by this programme are domestic violence, sex selection, advocacy for slum dwellers and communal (Hindu/Muslim) violence. These are all core issues of the Indian women's movement. The programme claims to support women who face violence, sexual exploitation, injustice and/or discrimination in the family, at their workplace or in society at large by providing counselling, moral and emotional support, legal help and other practical help. It offers free legal advice through a lawyer who volunteers her time and counselling through two regular staff members who are trustee-employees of Sahiyar. Many of the women who come to Sahiyar seek help for problems of domestic violence or divorce. During 2005/2006, Sahiyar registered 51 cases, according to its annual report, over half of which (28) concerned domestic violence. Sahiyar's report says that it settled the problems of 18 women without going to court, eight cases are pending in court, and 24 cases are still in counselling and negotiation (Rajaram and Zararia 2009).

From March 2005 to November 2005, Rajaram and Zararia observed 47 persons coming to seek help, including four men. The women varied widely in caste, educational level and income. Although most wanted legal advice, many required psychological counselling as well. In general, many women come just to see what their options are. One-third of the clients come to the office only once. Sahiyar often tries to bring the parties together and help them reach a settlement. For example, in 2005 a woman came for help to claim her inheritance from her deceased husband's family. The family was willing to provide some support for her children but insisted that she pay a portion of an old family debt. The

staff of Sahiyar met with both sides, offering legal advice and trying to persuade them to negotiate a compromise. In this and other cases, there was considerable discussion of the alternative of going to court. Human rights were rarely invoked but provided a backdrop for the intervention. For example, the lawyer at Sahiyar pressed the family to increase its contribution to the widow and her children.

Sahiyar also works on forging better Hindu/Muslim relationships and carries out public campaigns to combat widely recognised problems such as sex selection and dowry murders. The group uses traditional communication technologies to convey its messages, such as making and selling kites with messages on them (traditionally done during kite flying festivals such as *Uttarayan*). One project involved hiring poor Muslim women in the neighbourhoods to make kites that highlighted the problems of sex selection for a kite festival in January. Programme staff and volunteers sold the kites to repay the workers and to spread the message, dropped from the sky as kites fell to the ground.

The programme also stages street plays using familiar narrative forms. These plays take traditional folk tales and rewrite them to expose social problems such as domestic violence. For example, a street play called *Bandar Khel* (Monkey Show) uses conventional characters, songs and performance to address the problem of dowry violence and murder. It features a snake charmer (Kallu Madari), a male monkey (Ballu Bandar) and a female monkey (Banno Bandariya).

Thus, Sahiyar tackles issues that are fundamental to the Indian women's movement through communication technologies that rely on established styles of performance and presentation. Their approaches to helping women through counselling and legal aid are common among NGOs in urban India. Sahiyar's leaders are closely tied to Baroda's women's movement, frequently collaborating with other groups with whom they share a pragmatic and Gandhian orientation. The leaders of Sahiyar talk about women's human rights but there is not much discussion about it among the staff or with clients. Staff members frame the problems clients face in moral terms instead, in conformity with local understandings. For instance, after the communal riots of 2002 in which Muslim homes and businesses were attacked, staff members asked if it is *just* to attack innocent women from the minority community or if it is *fair* to hold women in the dominant community responsible for the wrong acts of their menfolk in carrying out these attacks. The organisation is deeply embedded in Baroda society through its leadership, funding, staff and

client population and uses human rights only as an incidental addition. The norms of gender equality it promotes are not sharply divergent from those of the Indian women's movement more generally.

The second group, Vikalp, is far more national and transnational in its organisation, leadership, funding and issues. Although it promotes women's human rights and has been influenced by Marxism, it foregrounds different concerns and techniques. The programme began in 1999 as a workers' rights organisation. Now it works with an agricultural development programme, supports women's courts or *nari adalats* and works on HIV/AIDS issues. It has spun off a new group, Parma, that works on lesbian rights, a radical issue in this part of India, particularly in the mid-2000s. The leaders were raised and studied in other parts of India and abroad and are not Gujarati. They speak Hindi and English, are well-versed in national and international feminist debates and embedded in international activist networks. In the past, several of the leaders worked for the *Mahila Samakhya*, a feminist national women's organisation. They travel widely and have recruited a board of trustees made up of like-minded, internationally oriented activists. Staff are encouraged to attend international conferences. The organisation receives substantial support from the Ford Foundation and other international foundations which allows it to rent a fairly spacious office in a newer, middle-class area of the city.

Vikalp uses women's human rights discourse at the national and international level and to secure grants from funding agencies. At first it framed issues for staff and clients in terms of norms of justice and morality, but it has started using the human rights framework for its staff as well and is pressing them to use it in their interactions with clients. During the two years of our study, leaders' references to staff about human rights increased. Some campaigns were framed in human rights language. For example, in 2005, during a period of floods, Vikalp sought to prevent the demolition of houses of the poor living on 'encroached' land along a storm water drain. Rich encroachers succeeded in regularising their land seizures, but the poor lacked the resources to do so. Vikalp collected allies, got media attention for the problem and persuaded a well-known human rights lawyer to take this issue to the state high court as a human rights violation. The lawyer got an injunction saying that the poor should not be moved until alternative housing areas had been identified by the authorities. Vikalp also used rights language in a 2005 meeting on World Consumer Day when they sought to sell

booklets and educate villagers about their consumer rights. At a rally on International Women's Day in 2005, Vikalp leaders distributed leaflets and talked about women's rights, issues of *dakan* (witch accusations), providing education for the girl child, delaying the age of marriage, gender discrimination, domestic violence and alcoholism.

The leaders of Vikalp also used women's human rights in their campaign for acceptance of alternative sexualities. They found relatively little support from Indian women's NGOs for lesbian rights, so turned to the international community and started using the global language of 'women's rights are human rights', CEDAW, and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Other groups collaborated with them on issues like housing rights for slum dwellers, but not on alternative sexuality. In 2006, they extended support to two lesbian girls from a small town near Baroda. After they ran away together, the parent of one of the girls and her brother were arrested by the police to force the girl and her partner to surrender. The leaders of Vikalp intervened to get the relatives released. After the girls were found, the local court gave an order saying that these two girls were free to go anywhere since they were adults.

Vikalp adopted novel modes of communication to present this issue to the public. At the Gujarat World Social Forum, Vikalp helped to sponsor a presentation by a gay and lesbian group featuring dance and testimonials about the difficulty of living as a gay person in this community. In 2006, one of the leaders appeared on a national TV channel in a discussion programme about gays and lesbians. In the same year, she published a book about the lives of working class lesbians in India that garnered national attention (Sharma 2006). They developed new approaches for LGBTQ women such as a drop-in centre for lesbians. The national and international sexual rights movement is an important source of inspiration for the work of this organisation. A poster developed by the programme exemplifies its use of national and international symbols for the lesbian rights movement. In this poster, traditional Indian religious figures are reconfigured to represent equally sized males and females and adorned with the Indian flag and the pink triangle as the poster announces that lesbian rights are human rights.

The impact of international human rights ideas about gender is greater in Vikalp than in Sahiyar. It actively appropriates ideas and strategies from abroad and combines them with locally recognisable approaches to address new issues. This organisation has international

funding and its leaders are connected to national and international social networks. In contrast, Sahiyar is more Gujarat-oriented and uses locally appropriate repertoires, funds and language to address women's concerns. The language of human rights is present when the leader talks about her work, but it is not actively incorporated and deployed in everyday practice. Both organisations advocate helping women to stand up for themselves, but Vikalp is more likely to refer to this as human rights and to locate this empowered subjectivity outside the home. For Vikalp, international human rights are particularly valuable for pursuing sexual rights, an issue that does not yet have broad support in the Indian women's movement.

Thus, both groups translate parts of the women's human rights agenda to support their activities, but even though they work in the same city, they do so quite differently. Clearly, Sahiyar is far more embedded in the local community while Vikalp has national and international networks. Also, Sahiyar relies on local funding, Vikalp on international. This affects any organisation's ability to promote ideas that have less local resonance but are more radical and transformative. International funding allows Vikalp to promote a set of norms at variance from that of mainstream women's organisations.

A second case study, in New York City, USA, illustrates a similar contrast. Here we also studied two organisations, one of which was primarily concerned with survivors of domestic violence and the other with passing a law in New York City implementing CEDAW and CERD. Both used human rights language, but the latter far more explicitly.²

New York City is an environment characterised by ambivalence towards using human rights to address domestic wrongs. The USA consistently denounces perceived human rights violations around the world yet refuses to ratify several existing international human rights conventions. There is a sense that national institutions do a better job at protecting rights than their international counterparts. However, since the early 2000s, there has been a resurgence of interest in human rights by progressive groups, especially women's human rights. For example, some groups advocate seeing the victims of Hurricane Katrina as internally displaced people and adopting international standards to protect them, others use a human rights framework to criticise prolonged detention of captives in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars in Guantanamo Bay.

We compared two NGOs in New York (see Rosen and Yoon 2009). One group, Voices of Women (VOW), works with women who have

survived violence and now lobby for better treatment for battered women in the legal system. The other, the Human Rights Initiative (HRI), seeks to incorporate human rights principles into New York City law. Both groups talk about women's human rights and ways to apply them, but the second group has a far more explicit commitment to human rights. Its mission is to pass an ordinance in New York City implementing the human rights conventions on women and race (the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, or CEDAW, and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination or CERD). There is more human rights talk here than at VOW.

The Voices of Women Organizing Project (VOW) of the Battered Women's Resource Center started in 2000 with the goal of enabling domestic violence survivors to become advocates on policy issues that affect battered women. In its recent report on the New York City family court, it describes itself as 'a grassroots advocacy organisation of survivors of domestic violence who are working to improve the many systems battered women and their children rely on for safety and justice. VOW members represent the diversity of New York City and include African American, Caribbean, Latina, white, Asian, immigrant, lesbian, disabled and formerly incarcerated women. Since 2000, VOW members have documented system failures and developed recommendations for change, and they have educated policy makers, elected officials, the public and each other through trainings, meetings, testimony, and most recently, with this report' (Voices of Women 2008).

Voices of Women is heavily influenced by the discourse and strategies of the battered women's movement. Members talk about being survivors. Human rights ideals are not a frequent topic of conversation, but are an additional political resource. For example, VOW produced a report on the family court that argued that government accountability is a universal human rights norm and that institutions that provide public services should discharge their duties according to human rights principles such as accountability, transparency and participation (Voices of Women 2008). The organisation mostly speaks the language of the feminist movement against domestic violence, but sees human rights as a valuable extra resource.

The organisation has a small staff of director, associate director and part time staff member and a modest budget. It relies heavily on volunteers—formerly battered women who now do advocacy work in

the courts and in the legislature. It is the only organisation in New York with a mission to empower battered women in their transformation from victim to survivor to activist. The organisation's focus on advocacy and activism renders it distinct from the service-delivery model of many other domestic violence organisations. The director has extensive experience in community organising and leadership development and has worked with survivors of domestic violence for more than twenty-five years. The associate director came to VOW with expertise in direct services to battered women and advocacy on domestic violence policies. The organisation's guiding principles and practices reflect the view that survivors' perspectives are an important source of authority and expertise. Interviews with members suggest that working with VOW involved a distinct process of politicisation and transformation in consciousness. Thus, its political advocacy is deeply influenced by the battered women's movement, but some of VOW's work is also informed by human rights.

VOW members do not talk about how to use women's human rights or about specific international mechanisms such as treaty articles and institutions. However, staff and members have attended human rights trainings and use human rights technologies in their political activism. In 2003 the organisation initiated the Battered Mothers' Justice Campaign in collaboration with the Urban Justice Center's Human Rights Project in an effort to provide human rights documentation of the experiences of battered women in New York City family courts. VOW staff and the Human Rights Project trained fourteen VOW members to interview survivors. In 2006, they interviewed 75 domestic violence survivors about their experiences in New York City family courts. Women talked about losing custody of children to their batterers despite histories of being the primary caretaker, about inadequate measures for safety in the court building, and about unprofessional conduct of judges and lawyers against women who were claiming to be victims of domestic violence. The data provided the basis for a report, *Justice Denied: How Family Courts in New York City Endanger Battered Women and Children* that documented these problems and identified the articles of human rights conventions that the Family Courts violated (2008). It offered recommendations for change. The report was presented to city and state government officials and made available to the public on the web. VOW also planned to organise a tribunal, inspired by comfort women tribunals, for battered mothers and children to testify about these violations. These examples show how the organisation adopted human rights technologies.

The HRI uses human rights far more explicitly. It has an ambitious agenda of promoting human rights in the USA. The project was born out of discussions among national and international activists at the world conference on racism in Durban, South Africa in 2001. Building on a successful effort in San Francisco, the leaders formed a coalition of organisations to draft and pass a new city ordinance in New York on women's human rights. Unlike the San Francisco ordinance, however, the law the HRI developed took an intersectional approach, prohibiting both gender and race discrimination. A coalition of three national groups, NOW Legal Defense Fund (now called Legal Momentum), Amnesty International USA and the ACLU (including its local chapter), and two New York groups, the Urban Justice Institute and the Women of Color Policy Network of NYU, worked on writing and promoting the ordinance. They formed a broader coalition of 160 New York City NGOs interested in using human rights for their activism, although the fifteen we interviewed expressed a cautious commitment to human rights and were somewhat sceptical about its potential impact in the USA. After two years of work, the ordinance was sent to the city council, which substantially revised and weakened it. At the same time, after initial strong support by the better funded national organisations, there was some drop-off in enthusiasm by these organisations and reluctance to devote further staff time to the project. The city organisations were left to carry it forward. When they failed to get funding, the initiative lost critical staffing and stalled. As of 2018, the law had not been passed.

The HRI used human rights law explicitly as the centrepiece of its work. It built a coalition of supportive organisations and provided them with human rights training. In contrast, VOW relied largely on the battered women's movement as its framework but appropriated parts of human rights language and tactics in its documentation project. In contrast to HRI, which put human rights at the centre of its strategy, VOW used human rights largely as a communications technology rather than as a way to define issues or focus its work. HRI relied on staff from well-funded national organisations and foundations, but lost steam when these sources of support disappeared. In contrast, VOW, with its volunteer advocates, was less reliant on substantial external funding. HRI emerged from a UN conference and an international network of human rights activists while VOW was closely tied to the US battered women's movement. Thus, the differences in the way these organisations used human rights is closely connected to their choice of issues, mission,

organisation, leadership and funding. Substantial funding enables a group to venture into less conventional areas of work, such as passing a municipal human rights ordinance, but makes that group vulnerable if the funding disappears. Local support and funding means that the group is less challenging to prevailing ways of thinking, as we see with VOW that adopted much of the approach and talk of the battered women's movement, but can still adapt parts of human rights language as well.

CONCLUSION: NO EASY ANSWER

For all these organisations, women's human rights are an important aspect of the way they do their work. Of course, women's human rights are only one set of ideas and approaches available to them. Some groups are deeply embedded in other justice ideologies such as liberation theology or the feminist violence against women movement and make only fleeting and indirect references to human rights norms. Some rely on national justice ideologies or local ideas of morality and justice. Sahiyar and VOW focus on core issues in their national women's movements and say relatively little about human rights. Vikalp and the HRI are explicitly committed to human rights and take on issues not so widely supported or relatively little vernacularised. Both encounter more resistance than the first two groups.

Funding is an important dimension of this variation. External funding, including international funding, offers more space to move into challenging issues and to engage in work that is relatively unsupported by local and national women's organisations and ideologies, such as lesbian rights in India or the HRI's efforts to persuade New York City to pass human rights legislation. Both projects challenge conventional ways of thinking about women's status. Funding allows them greater latitude to develop campaigns that are less resonant with local cultural understandings.

On the other hand, this funding comes with strings attached. Organisations must respond to the agendas of their donors. Insofar as the donors wish to promote human rights, the organisations must take this approach. Groups that are less dependent on external funding tend to rely on ideologies and discourses grounded in national or local movements and domestic rights frameworks, such as socialism in the case of Sahiyar or the battered women's movement for VOW. These groups appropriate women's human rights in more limited and pragmatic ways. Their work is more resonant with local ideas.

What does the women's human rights framework offer in situations in which it does not have a strong resonance or a close fit with existing ideologies? It offers the legitimisation of a transnational set of standards, the magic of a universal moral code, and technologies of building cases through reporting and documentation. But perhaps the most important contribution is access to allies outside the local community. By phrasing women's issues in the language of human rights, they become understandable to other organisations and individuals who circulate through the transnational human rights system. International networks for information and support are important for groups that lack support from local women's groups, such as *Vikalp*. These international links provide political resources and ideas that challenge local ways of thinking and working. However, these linkages come at a cost. Groups that rely on such international support are less in tune with national and local ways of framing problems.

Clearly, there is a connection between the organisation of an NGO and the issues and strategies it adopts. Funding, leadership and networks all make a difference. The interesting feature of this comparison is the variety of ways women's human rights, as a global discourse, is used under these different organisational and national constraints. It is clearly an open discourse, with multiple uses and appropriations. As it is vernacularised, it is reshaped so that its ideas and practices bear little resemblance to the original legal documents and political projects that put them into motion. The extent of transformation depends on the characteristics of the organisation and the wider social context within which it works as well as the level of resistance it evokes. Organisations funded by international donors tend to develop approaches at greater variance from local understandings but more similar to the human rights framework itself. They pose a greater challenge to local hierarchies but are more dependent on global funding and ideas.

Locally supported organisations pick and choose segments of women's rights ideas and practices but embed them within familiar issues and strategies: they are vernacularised. In this process, issues, communication technologies and modes of organisation and work are appropriated and translated, sometimes in fragmented and incoherent ways. This is often a pragmatic strategy for mobilising political, cultural and financial resources. Vernacularisation is not a form of cultural homogenisation since human rights ideas are substantially transformed by the

organisations that use them. Nor is it a clash between universal principles and cultural relativist assertions of difference. Instead, it is a pragmatic process of negotiation and translation. When organisations talk little about women's human rights, this often reflects a lack of political traction for women's human rights norms, not cultural relativist resistance. The process is a dimension of the partial, pragmatic and unstable nature of the transnational circulation and adoption of ideas and practices that Anna Tsing refers to as 'friction', shaped by the structural conditions under which adoption and resistance take place (2005).

The need to vernacularise rights in a way that is resonant with local cultural practices serves as a limitation on the transformative power of global norms. Our research shows a broad capacity on the part of human rights activists to tailor human rights ideas to local situations which promotes adoption of these ideas, but possibly in a more attenuated form.

Of course, the human rights system itself has no control over the way these ideas are appropriated, so that the process of vernacularisation can produce ideas and practices antithetical to human rights ideas themselves, yet legitimated by the aura of an international consensus on rights. For example, abortion debates can be framed as the opposition between the right to life and the right to choose, illustrating the malleability of human rights as a discourse of claims-making. From a pragmatic perspective, the risk of a vernacularisation that deviates from human rights principles is offset by the benefits of vernacularisation that make them more appealing in particular cultural contexts.

Vernacularisation captures the agency of intermediaries who remake transnational ideas and practices to fit into the local, along with the structures that constrain agency. These include state policy, organisational leadership and North/South inequalities in funding along with cultural factors such as historical experiences and familiarity with ideas like human rights. An organisation's funding, and the support for its leaders, is enormously important in shaping what kind of work it can do and to what extent it can challenge locally pervasive gender norms. By focusing on organisations and actors that work across local, national and international scales, we can begin to understand the dynamics of power and agency that shape the transnational circulation of norms and practices such as women's human rights. Understanding the role vernacularisation plays in the rights process highlights two dilemmas for women's human rights practitioners: first, the process of vernacularisation may so

attenuate the core principles of human rights that they no longer carry the meaning that is embedded in the system as a whole. Second, women's human rights as a frame of reference can be appropriated in a variety of ways, including those that violate the core principles of the human rights system itself. Nevertheless, such active appropriation and redefinition of human rights is an inevitable dimension of the global circulation of ideas and practices that allows them to travel. The resonance dilemma explains something of the way they travel: All human rights ideas need to be locally adapted, but in order to be deeply transformative, they cannot be overly resonant. On the other hand, if they are insufficiently different from prevailing moralities, they may well be accepted but not institute change.

Resonance is of course not fixed, but can change with context, with who the actors are, with both local and global shifts in power and funding. Ideas that seem resonant with a rural community may not in an urban setting. Conceptions of a set of gender equality ideas that were rejected as inappropriate in a particular situation can be enthusiastically adopted a few years later. The movement against rape, for example, succeeded in redefining this as a crime rather than a male prerogative, an act of war or an inherent right of marriage, but only in some contexts and only within certain social groups. Resonance is not a broad, sweeping phenomenon but rooted in the particularities of local social situations, actors, organisations and constraints. Clearly, even within a small community, there will be disagreements about gender equality norms and individuals willing to challenge them. Individuals may draw support from international legal forms or nearby social movement leaders. The situated process is one of contestation, resistance and acceptance to various degrees even within a small social group. However, the problem of resonance remains, even as the terrain of normative standards changes and proponents of various versions of gender equality disagree with one another.

NOTES

1. N. Rajaram and Vaishali Zararia were excellent research collaborators on the project. See Raharam and Zararia (2009).
2. Mia Serban Rosen and Diana Yoon provided excellent research collaboration for the study. See Rosen and Yoon (2009).

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Gender Equality as a Declaration: The Changing Environment of Nordic–Russian Cooperation

Yulia Gradszkova

In recent years, Russian political discourses and legislative practice have been characterised by their open hostility to gender equality, feminism and women’s rights. While some publications, TV shows and newspaper articles were already warning of a ‘feminist conspiracy’ in the mid-2000s (Nikonov 2005; Antonov 2008; *Zlobnyi oskal* 2012), in 2013–2016 the number of such programmes and publications increased dramatically and became an important part of the official anti-liberal and nationalist discourse in Russia (Kosto and Blakkisrud 2016). On the legislative level, these anti-feminist and anti-gender equality tendencies were reflected in the tightening of the legislation on abortion and discrimination against LGBTQ persons and organisations. The draft of a law completely banning abortion had already been discussed several times in Parliament (most recently in September 2016), while in 2011 a law imposing a ‘waiting time’ before abortion could be agreed was adopted by the Lower Chamber, the State Duma.¹ In August 2013 the Russian

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Parliament adopted an infamous law against ‘homosexual propaganda’² that seriously damaged the rights of LGBTQ people and particularly endangered homosexual families and the lives of LGBTQ teenagers (Karlson-Rixon 2016; Edenberg 2017). Finally, the law on ‘foreign agents,’ a law putting restrictions on organisations receiving foreign financial support, adopted in 2012, was applied to many NGOs and research centres dealing with gender research and the protection of women’s rights.

This turn seems to be in sharp contrast to the transnational policies of gender equality being promoted by organisations like the UN (CEDAW) and the EU, as well as with the progress being made in gender equality in many other former Soviet states (e.g. Georgia or Kazakhstan) and many countries in Asia and Africa (Gradska and Sanders 2015). It also seems to be quite unexpected if we take into account previous developments in Russia with respect to gender equality that could be found in progress reports some ten to fifteen years ago (see Sperling 1999; Brygalina and Temkina 2004; Saarinen et al. 2014; Azhgikhina 2008). While many researchers documented the difficulties in institutionalising gender equality in the context of the cult of femininity (see below) and concerns over low fertility rates, which were widely expressed in the mass media (Rivkin-Fish 2010), up to the 2010s transnational organisations were still mainly assuming that gender equality was slowly being embedded in Russia.

Even though the failure of gender equality politics in post-Soviet Russia has been determined by many factors—economic, political and involving international relations—the organisation and conflicts around cooperation between transnational actors, the Russian authorities and women’s organisations, probably, also played a role. In order to explore the history of the internationalisation and unsuccessful institutionalisation of gender equality in Russia, in this chapter I analyse one case of this large and geographically varied history, namely cooperation around gender equality between the Nordic countries and northwest Russia.

The chapter uses a situated approach to addressing the diffusion of norms and explores how norms of gender equality were interpreted, applied and transformed as part of cooperation between transnational organisations from the Nordic countries and the Russian Federation. I focus mainly on actors and analyse how they engaged with global norms of gender equality. How did the organisers of cooperation from the Nordic countries see the situation regarding gender norms in

post-Communist Russia, and how did cooperation have to be organised? What were the attitudes of the Russian actors to transnational norms of gender equality and the Nordic actors' agendas? How did different actors' interpretations of gender equality change the process of cooperation in the context of post-Soviet Russia?

In order to answer these questions, I have analysed documents dealing with cooperation (programmes, reports, speeches, printed and internet self-presentations of different actors), as well as interviews with participants in this cooperation.³ I start with a brief presentation of the main actors and periods of cooperation and explain the specifics of cooperation on gender equality between the Nordic partners and Russia. I will then analyse how the participants on both sides saw the cooperation. In the final part of this chapter, I explore how the Russian government found it possible to use the agenda of cooperation around gender equality to strengthen authoritarianism and foster nationalist sentiment and why they did so.

ACTORS AND THE DYNAMIC OF GENDER EQUALITY COOPERATION AFTER 1991

Among the many transnational agencies and organisations to offer their expertise in institutionalising gender equality to the central and local authorities in Russia, as well as to women's organisations in the country, the Nordic countries occupied a quite special position due to both their geographical closeness and their high record on gender equality. Like many other post-communist countries, until the mid-1990s Russia had a fairly well-developed network of women's associations and groups, but due to a lack of resources most of the new women's organisations that were created from below were financially and ideologically dependent on international NGOs and various foundations and transnational networks (Gradszkova 2017).⁴ While in many cases international donors' help was a condition for the survival of the Russian NGOs, criticism of international cooperation started rather early. According to Saarinen et al., for example, 'Much criticism has been centred on East-West dependence, ideational and financial, that has been created through these interventions made in a feminist spirit' (Saarinen et al. 2014: 9), while, according to Valerie Sperling, the availability of foreign grants influenced local women's organisations by converting them into 'opportunity structures' (Sperling 1999: 262).

At the same time, support from abroad contributed to the rapid growth of these organisations. Already in the late 1990s, women's associations in Russia were addressing various problems concerning women and gender inequality in the areas of unemployment, poverty, domestic violence, women's political rights, children's rights and LGBTQ rights. Many women's associations saw themselves as a part of the movement for social and political change in the country, and they presented themselves as an obvious part of the human rights movement, even though internationally it was only in the 1980s that women's rights were recognised as human rights (Moyn 2010). Thus, women's organisations were usually associated with discourses on rights and democracy (Azhgikhina 2008), which were widely associated with the period of perestroika in the Soviet Union and with the 'West'. The cooperation of women's NGOs with transnational Effort to Save Orphans from Europe and USA and their dependence on the latter's financial support underlined the association of women's NGOs with the 'West' even more.

At the same time, previous research suggests that political and social change in post-Communist countries had certain similarities with the process in the global South in being characterised by cuts in state welfare expenditure, the marketisation of many spheres of life, like housing, education and family life (Rivkin-Fish 2010; Rajkai 2015), and propaganda surrounding the notion of the new, flexible, self-reliant individual (Lerner 2011). In this context, many problems with which women were confronted, like low-paid jobs or the closing down of child-care facilities, were often presented as those connected with the legacies of the Communist past and/or the lack of adaptation to the new economic freedoms. While the majority of women lacked any experience of collective action in defence of their economic rights, women's organisations in receipt of international support had to follow the transnational agenda on gender equality, rather than collecting and representing local demands (McIntosh Sundstrom 2006; Hemment 2007; Gradska 2015). Soon collaborating women's organisations found that they had to play the important role of experts that offer their services to society. As a result, many women's organisations 'reconstituted themselves as formal non-governmental organisations' responsible for expertise on women's rights (see, for example, Suchland 2011: 844–845). Julie Hemment has shown that, over time, the connection of NGOs with women's groups became weaker, and the organisations themselves became 'NGO-ized' (Hemment 2007: 45–60).⁵ Indeed, she states that

the logic of attracting international financial and institutional support for civil society forced many women's organisations to make difficult choices between the demands of their donors and their own understanding of what should be done for the protection of women's rights as well as to reach greater gender equality.⁶

However, all these conflicts escaped heated public discussion in Russia up until the early-2000s due to the Russian state declaring democratisation, marketisation and modernisation to be its important goals and stating that it did not intend to intervene very much in the cooperation between Russian NGOs and transnational organisations. However, the state's policies already started to change from 1999, the start of Vladimir Putin's first presidency, when the failure of modernisation policies, combined with the oil price crises of the late 2000s, led Russia to adopt a much more anti-Western position and to defend nationalist values (Kosto and Blakkerud 2016). As a consequence, problems arose connected to the practice of using the functioning of women's NGOs in Russia to attack democracy, 'Western views' and gender equality.

The post-Soviet history of cooperation around gender equality in Russia can be divided into four periods: The early 1990s was the period when the first representatives of transnational organisations started to arrive in Russia and establish contacts with the new political parties. It was a period with only a few women's organisations, most of which lacked work experience and were oriented towards particular groups of women and solving a particular problem.

The second period between 1994–1995 and 2005 was the main period of cooperation around women's rights on all levels. During this period NGOs became a widespread form of organisation, and women's NGOs became a legitimate part of civil society. Most NGOs received support from transnational and foreign organisations, which also provided different kinds of training, seminars and conferences for NGO members. Women's NGOs in many regions also cooperated closely with women's studies and gender research centres (Salmenniemi 2008). Probably the public visibility of gender equality as an issue reached its height in 2003–2004, when the Russian Parliament started to discuss the draft of a law on gender equality that complied fully with the Russian state's international obligations (the signing of CEDAW supposed the adoption of the special law). However, the law was not passed, and it was not discussed in Parliament again until 2014.

The third period, from 2005 to 2012, was characterised by growing authoritarianism and shrinking space for civil-society activism. In particular, in 2006, a law restricting the activities of NGOs was adopted, and it was made more difficult for many women's NGOs to be registered and to obtain financial support. At the same time, after many East European countries had joined the EU and started working on the institutionalisation of gender equality within the European framework, Russian women's organisations experienced a degree of isolation, including from their donors (Gradskova 2017). Thus, from the early 2000s, many international organisations, American as well as European, started viewing transnational cooperation with Russia less optimistically. This was connected to changed priorities in international cooperation (in particular, lesser interest in Russia after the 2004 EU enlargement), evaluation of the initial results of cooperation (Hemment 2008; Johnson and Saarinen 2011) and the fact that Russia remained outside the process of intensified Europeanisation that was going on elsewhere. The most obvious consequence for Russia was a drastic reduction in financial support to women's NGOs (Johnson and Saarinen 2011). Some powerful organisations whose agendas included gender equality and gender research, like the Open Society Institute, stopped their activities in Russia in the early 2000s. However, in spite of the changed situation and the new Russian law on NGOs (2006), which seriously restricted the activities of non-governmental organisations, cooperation with Russia continued. Many foreign transnational, national and non-governmental organisations went on working in Russia during the following years, contributing to projects ranging from the training of Russian NGO leaders to providing financial support to diverse women's organisations and publications.

Commencing the final and fourth period, the adoption in 2012 of the law on 'foreign agents' not only seriously reduced the ability of many organisations to receive funding from foreign donors, it also created an atmosphere in which cooperation with organisations promoting ideals of gender equality quite openly started to be seen negatively by the state and media. Representatives of transnational organisations now began to encounter increasing difficulties in their work. This happened in an atmosphere of discussions on a ban on abortions and on gender studies being a foreign conspiracy against Russia's national interests (Mizulina 2016; V RTR 2015). The law against homosexual propaganda adopted in 2013 and the rise of patriotic propaganda after the annexation of Crimea were the next steps on the way to ending work on gender equality issues within a framework of international cooperation.

GENDER EQUALITY AND NORDIC ACTORS

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Nordic countries took an active part in supporting the development of democracy in the countries around the Baltic Sea, first of all in the newly independent Baltic States, which were seen as particularly close culturally (Waldemarson 2017). This cooperation was aimed at overcoming the ideological legacy of totalitarianism, activating economic and cultural contacts and improving security in the region, but the participants' ideas were still influenced by Cold War thinking (Waldemarson 2017; Kharkina 2013). Cooperation with Russia started in this general context of providing assistance to emerging democracies and increasing regional security.

Evaluating the position of the Nordic countries, it is important to take into account that up until the mid-1990s these countries had experienced important achievements with respect to gender equality that were visible not only in connection to the former communist countries, but also compared to many EU members. The gender equality legislation with respect to work, parental leave, the custody of children and a special institution to support gender equality, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman (in Sweden, Norway and Finland), were some important symbols of it. Thus, the Nordic countries defended gender equality in the EU (Waldemarson 2017), and by the mid-1980s gender equality was already an important component of developmental cooperation programmes (see, for example, *Sida Portfolio Within Gender Equality 2012*), also being presented frequently as a Nordic model of gender equality. Criticising the idea of such a model, however, Waldemarson (2017) stated that each Nordic country was still on its own difficult path to gender equality, with Nordic countries never being able to agree on any particular model, while the equality ideals and political instruments were constantly changing with the various political parties and coalitions that were in power at any one time in each country (2017). Indeed, in her book *It goes well (Det går an)*, dedicated to the Swedish Equal Opportunities Ombudsman (Jämo, 1980–2008), Eva Blomberg showed, that, in the case of Jämo, the political space was particularly important, as this was where the possibilities for articulating relationships between gender and politics were disputed. This political space nonetheless allowed policies regarding gender equality norms to be pursued in Sweden through negotiation (Blomberg 2015). Still, according to Blomberg the political history of Jämo in Sweden is far from being an ideal picture of social and political harmony. Indeed, throughout its

history, Jämo has been at the centre of political conflict in Sweden, first being opposed by the Social Democrats, then meeting resistance from employers and the bourgeois parties (Blomberg 2015: 27). Finally, different political parties also used the idea of equal rights and equal opportunities differently, some stressing formal equality, other defending practical equality (Blomberg 2015: 37).⁷

How did this complexity influence the politics of cooperation around gender equality in the case of Russia? Northwest Russia,⁸ the main region of cooperation with the Nordic countries, has often been included in cooperation programmes with the newly independent Baltic States. According to Carita Peltonen, the Nordic Council of Ministers' (henceforward NCM) Coordinator of Cooperation with the Baltic States and northwest Russia in the mid-1990s and 2000s, this cooperation started as part of the work of the Nordic Forum in Turku (Finland) in 1994. The NCM wanted to know more about possibilities of cooperating with northwest Russia, and Peltonen was given the task of collecting the information. And soon contacts were established with women's organisations, as well as with the regional and local authorities. Explaining the NCM's strategies in an interview, Peltonen stressed the importance of working for gender equality on different levels, not only at the grassroots, but also with regional, subregional and local administrations: 'It is very important for issues of gender equality to be in contact with those who can take a decision'. Being herself a participant in a women's movement in Finland, Peltonen saw it as important to connect the strategies for the institutionalisation of gender equality in the Baltic region with the experiences of the women's movements for equality at home. She further stressed that

it is always important in the women's movement to cooperate on different levels. Grassroots, or women's organizations – all kinds of women's organizations. But it is also important to cooperate with women's associations in the political parties. Then it is very important to cooperate with those who take the decisions, the politicians. Then it is also important to work with the civil servants...and with researchers.⁹

The story as Peltonen tells it shows that any example of mutual sympathy or earlier contacts that could be used to make progress in institutionalising gender equality was seen as important in making progress with cooperation in this area more generally. For example, she said that even

the fact that the cities of Turku and St. Petersburg had been twinned since Soviet times and that the St. Petersburg government (and Vladimir Putin himself) had established ‘special relationships with Turku’s administration’¹⁰ could be beneficial in advancing different aspects of cooperation, including with respect to gender equality.

Thus, Peltonen’s story suggests that to a large degree cooperation was connected with making good relationships, and establishing and maintaining cross-border contacts. At first cooperation around gender equality seemed to develop quite successfully. In northwest Russia it was manifested by the large number of women’s NGOs, joint workshops and study trips for civil servants employed in different spheres, the police, social workers, etc. Information on gender equality and how it functions in the Nordic countries was distributed widely (Gradszkova 2017). Among particularly large successes was the nomination of the first ombudsman for women in the Russian Federation and the adoption of a ‘Statement on gender equality’ (*Kontseptsiia gendernogo ravenstva*) by St. Petersburg’s city administration in 2004. In the absence of a federal law on gender equality, the adoption of the Statement in Russia’s second largest city was considered to be a step towards both the development of similar strategies in different regions and the adoption of the Federal Law. Even the plans for the creation of an equal opportunities ombudsman in St. Petersburg were discussed in this context. However, in practice the Statement had the status of a ‘strategy’, not a law, lacked finance and had only one office with three employees to coordinate the programme. Nonetheless, cooperation on gender equality issues seemed to be developing and in 2005 a large-scale conference, ‘Women and Democracy’, was organised in St. Petersburg, attended by delegations from the Nordic countries and the official representatives of the Russian president.¹¹

The official cooperation reports also indicated that the development programmes conformed to global norms of gender equality. Thus, the Swedish International Developmental Agency (Sida)’s 2005 country report on Russia listed many achievements of the programme:

The Russian side has now chosen to work in three spheres: equal opportunities for public management, reduction of gender based violence and dealing with men’s roles in society and family – changes of gender stereotypes. One more gender equality project was aimed at gender and media in Russia and was realized by the heads of TV and radio in Sweden and

Russia. The aim was reducing gender stereotypes in Russian media. The result of this project was also a talk show that was focused on gender equality and was broadcast to an audience of thirty million. The support in Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg continues according to the plan and is aimed at supporting the participation of women in politics and entrepreneurship. (Sidas landsrapport 2005–2006: 13)

Peltonen herself was recognised in St. Petersburg for having coordinated cooperation for several years, and in 2008 she was awarded a special diploma by the city administration (Bedekor 2009: 17).¹² However, several years later, another Sida report stated with respect to [gender] equality that

(...) it was Sida that had become the initiating party [for the introduction of gender mainstreaming]—despite the fundamental policy that contributions were to be initiated and prioritized by the local parties—due to the fact that interest in equality was weak in the region. (Sida 2009: 70)

Analysis of the cooperation documents and interviews shows that the Nordic experience with gender equality was mainly presented as positive, while internal conflicts and the problems that were widely discussed by women's movements at home were rarely revealed to the Russian cooperation partners. For example, a Swedish researcher who took part in conferences in Russia in the mid-1990s, said that the Nordic organisers were very unhappy with her attempts to present gender equality in Sweden as contested and as an object of criticism.

WORK ON GENDER EQUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF 'ANTI-EQUALITY' REFORMS: COOPERATION ACTORS IN RUSSIA

Discussing the post-socialist transition, Jennifer Suchland wrote about the importance of taking the breakdown of the Soviet system and previous histories of equality into account. The equality of all people, regardless of race or gender, was at the core of the communist ideology and was preserved in the main documents of the Soviet state throughout its history. Although the realities of the state socialist economy and of everyday life did not correspond to the principles laid down in the Soviet Constitution or Communist party documents (see Posadskaia et al. 1989;

Einhorn 2006), the Soviet state was active in defending women's rights not only within the country, but also abroad, not least through international organisations such as the Women's Democratic Federation (see de Haan 2010; Ilic 2011). The Soviet Union also ratified the CEDAW as early as in 1981. As stated earlier, the first period of the work of women's organisations in post-Soviet Russia was characterised by enthusiasm for the possibility of political expression, but at the same time by the lack of experience and funding. Also the involvement of women in the work of such organisations was connected with the difficult task of women recognising, accepting and making public their own experiences of discrimination (Khodyreva 2002).

However, as already noted, women in Russia experienced many difficulties in everyday life, including the restructuring of the labor market, low salaries and reductions in state welfare support, including state support for childcare (Gradskova 2012). State welfare and equality through redistribution were ideas of the past, as it was now personal success that mattered. This situation of looking at issues of equality as belonging to the (Soviet) past made it particularly difficult for women's organisations and other civil-society actors to advocate equality of any kind—social, ethnic or gender. In particular, the Soviet regime was criticised for depriving women of their femininity (Zhurzhenko 2008), their children and their control over family life. Thus, the general context in which gender equality was advocated was almost the opposite to what took place in the 'West' in the 1970s–1980s, when, for example, Sweden adopted laws on equality in parental leave arrangements.

Furthermore, women usually constituted just a tiny minority of the political leaders and higher level civil servants in post-Soviet Russia, making it difficult for women's organisations to be heard by the new political elite. According to the leader of the Karelian NGO, LB: 'Those who knew me, they invited me, otherwise it was impossible to get anything from those in power'.¹³

On the other hand, those few female leaders 'with power' who were interested in cooperation with their Nordic partners seemed to be interested in good relationships per se and were ready to cooperate on a variety of subjects, often not considering gender equality to be a real priority. This emerged, for example, in the form of such an important political figure as Valentina Matvienko, a former mayor of St. Petersburg, the key person in the success of the St. Petersburg gender equality project discussed above (her role was specifically stressed by

Peltonen in the interview). However, after she left St. Petersburg and moved ahead in her political career by becoming the Chairwoman of the Federation Council in 2011, her attitude to gender equality seemed to change completely. She now became one of the producers of the discourse of the new nationalism, claiming that women's organisations have an important role to play in explaining Russian foreign policy, solving social problems (Matvienko 2015) and demanding a strengthening of the legislation against organisations that could be considered 'foreign agents' (Sovfed 15).

In contrast to the high-level politicians, the middle-level civil servants were frequently genuinely interested in ideas of gender equality. However, the lack of democracy deprived them of influence. For example, the former coordinator of St. Petersburg's office for the realisation of the above-mentioned Statement, noted that, when the Coordination Council for Gender Equality in St. Petersburg's government was created in 2004, it was one of the deputy mayors, who helped the organisational work on the practical level. However, the government did not allocate any resources (except for office and salaries for three employees) to the realisation of the Statement, and later changes in the city administration left the Council without any influence:

Several years ago, we developed a Statement on gender equality, in St. Petersburg. But it was only a political document, I can say. But there is no financial aspect of this activity, so it's just like a declaration. And of course we can follow this Statement and do something, but we have no government resources (now).¹⁴

The post-equality situation, in combination with state propaganda regarding 'true femininity', hampered the development of wider grassroots activism. Thus, in contrast to many countries in Western Europe, where the women's movement continued to play an important role as an observer and exerted pressure after gender equality had been institutionalised, in Russia grassroots organisations had no such possibilities. According to the coordinator of the NCM programmes in St. Petersburg, for example:

In general [gender equality] is not a very popular model, because the most popular model is that women should be beautiful, and take care of the home and the kids, and that men should earn money, and that's all.¹⁵

Thus, even in those cases that were considered a ‘success’ and a ‘step’ on the way to the further implementation of gender equality by Western and/or Nordic partners, such cases did not receive wider recognition on the part of the grassroots, nor were they seen as particularly important by high-level cooperation actors in Russia.

THE THIRD SECTOR AND THE SPIRITUAL STAPLES:
THE NEW RUSSIAN NATIONALISM AND TRANSFORMATION
OF THE NARRATIVE ON GENDER EQUALITY AND COOPERATION

The growth of authoritarian tendencies in Russia in the second half of the 2000s not only made work for NGOs, including those dealing with women’s rights and gender equality, more difficult, it was also connected with attempts to create a new state ideology to help reconstruct ‘Russia’s greatness’ and importance in the world. One particularly acute problem was the supposed threat of depopulation, and a special policy for stimulating the birth rate was adopted in 2007. However, as previous research on so-called ‘maternity capital’ has shown, the policy of stimulating the birth rate through targeted and postponed payments to mothers of two or more children did not fulfil all its aims fully (Chandler 2013; Rivkin-Fish 2010). Thus, the state increasingly supported the new religious morality being propagated by the Orthodox Church, which advocated the values of faithfulness, patience and family solidarity, rather than rights or choices. The new programme of the ‘spiritual staples’ was believed to help in both strengthening the Russian nation and raising the birth rate.

Problems of family and gender norms were also increasingly addressed by invoking the Orthodox Christian discourses on moral values and spirituality. In 2011 a new public holiday, the Day of Family and Faithfulness, was introduced in Russia, and Orthodox priests, pedagogues and psychologists assumed an important position in media circles. For example, Svetlana Medvedeva, a well-known Christian Orthodox psychologist, particularly stressed that having a family requires one to be ready to sacrifice one’s own life for its good. This sacrifice was particularly important for the country:

I am sure that the preservation of the family is very important for our society. Without it, it would be impossible to solve one of the most important problems in our country – the problem of demography. Also if we reject

family, then we can go further, rejecting ordinary human relationships, which will be replaced by egoism and self-adoration. (Legoida 2009)

The lack of finance for state intervention in family policy was not only compensated for through the new ideology. As Salmenniemi has already shown, the established form of social organisation, the NGO, had to be transformed into the so-called ‘third sector’, defined as organisations prepared to cooperate with the state in solving important social problems (Salmenniemi 2008). Indeed, instead of challenging the state as NGOs did, the broadly defined NKO (non-commercial organisations) were expected to help in dealing with problems that the state was not able or did not want to deal with—home care for old and handicapped, drug addicts, orphans, etc.

In an interview a former deputy mayor of St. Petersburg and one of the most active supporters of cooperation with the Nordic countries and of the adoption of the Statement on gender equality in St. Petersburg, presented an interesting version of both the history of cooperation and the social role of women’s NGOs/NKOs in the new geopolitical context: Economic problems in the form of unemployment, low salaries, shortages of goods and food etc. had led women, ‘those who according to our tradition were responsible for family and children’, to start organisations during the transition in the early 1990s. And it was in these difficult years that ‘humanitarian’ help from the ‘West’ was particularly important: ‘life was difficult, and it is no secret that many institutions for children and the elderly only survived through humanitarian aid’ (interview May 14, 2013). In continuing the conversation, however, the former vice-mayor of St. Petersburg carefully avoided speaking about political rights, gender equality or NGOs. Instead, she drew our attention to the deluge of social problems and the special role of women’s organisations in their solution:

A lot of what existed in the Soviet Union stopped functioning, and problems were snowballing. And as a result of this new social institutions started to appear thanks to civil organizations and to the initiatives of people, mainly women. Indeed, it was mainly women’s organizations that raised these questions. Thus, the city had to find solutions to these problems, which were already being discussed in the media. And we started opening such organizations as asylums for homeless children, children in difficult life situations, those who had been thrown out of their homes, who had been beaten.¹⁶

The interview documents important changes in the discourse on cooperation and women's activism in Russia after 2011. While the former deputy mayor expressed her gratitude for the cooperation with NCM several times in the course of the conversation, and in particular for all the new knowledge that was accumulated, in the event this knowledge seemed to be applied to the care of children, the elderly and the disabled rather than to gender equality or women's rights per se. Even when describing the opening of a shelter for women who had suffered from domestic violence, the shelter was presented as important for the well-being of the women's children. Thus, the messages on gender equality that were pertinent to the Nordic cooperation actors became transformed into a Soviet-style regime for the protection of 'women and children', where it was women, not men, who were responsible for children's health and well-being. The former deputy mayor described women's organisations, which she called NKO's, as doing important work for the state (like working with orphans) and thus receiving financial support from it. Thus, the women's organisations began to cooperate with the state, rather than having their own agendas and being able to challenge and even control the decisions of the state and the city administration. It was this harmonious unity between the Russian state taking back the control over the functions that were lost in the 1990s and the women's organisations that was presented as the true face of cooperation.

In contrast to the cooperation discourses of the 1990s–2000s, the former deputy mayor constructed her story by starting with local needs and problems and practically ignored transnational documents and agendas on gender equality. As a result, her story centred on the nationalising state converting both Nordic cooperation partners and women's organisations in Russia into temporal or occasional helpers in the realisation of the state's strategic interests. Recognising the importance of cooperation, which was achieved with her active participation, the former deputy mayor presented it rather as a form of transnational 'crisis assistance' that was important in the context of the destruction of the Soviet state in the 1990s. She also stressed the primacy of the state's interests and denied women's organisations any agency outside its guidelines.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The material analysed in this chapter shows that the notion of ‘gender equality’ described in transnational documents and presented in Russia by its Nordic cooperation partners was a highly contested concept in the context of Russia’s post-Soviet political and social transformation, neo-liberal economic reforms and new geopolitical controversies. While many women’s organisations (NGOs) and some civil servants in northwest Russia chose to work for gender equality as part of a broader programme of cooperation, its content was interpreted differently by different participants in cooperation. Furthermore, ‘gender equality’ in the form proposed by the Nordic partners often did not offer a solution to the most acute problems that women experienced in the process of social transformation. On the other hand, transnational ‘gender equality’ norms frequently recalled declarations on the equality of men and women by the former socialist state.

The situated approach to the process of implementing norms and practices of gender equality in Russia using the example of Nordic cooperation with both state and non-state actors from northwest Russia shows that to a large extent cooperation priorities were justified with reference to transnational and global goals and were mainly interpreted by Nordic organisations using examples from their achievements in this field. The Nordic and other transnational actors hoped that, with time, the importance of gender equality would be understood locally and that gender equality norms would be disseminated. However, the local partners frequently had their own views on women’s needs and problems and tried to use financial and ideational help so as to adjust it to their own vision of what was important. In particular, as the case of St. Petersburg’s administration shows, Russian politicians and civil servants were often interested in cooperation, but not in gender equality per se. Thus, gender equality documents never acquired the force and financial support needed for practical steps to be realised.

The nationalist ideology of defence of the nation through population growth and the strengthening of the family and religion seriously affected women’s rights and met active protest on the part of many organisations involved in cooperation over gender equality issues and women’s rights. Confrontation with the state led to the closing down of many organisations and their being declared ‘foreign agents’. At the same time, some organisations and actors with long-term experience of

cooperation adapted themselves to their new role as the state's 'helpers' and to the narrative of the importance of 'Russian traditions'. Some women's organisations started to participate in the state's social partnership programmes by assuming the role of the 'third sector', while some key figures in the earlier process of cooperation made new political choices and took a firm anti-western position. Although the project of cooperation on gender equality issues may seem to have failed totally, some artistic practices and internet networks have appeared in recent years¹⁷ suggesting that the radicalisation of the state's anti-gender equality discourse and policies may lead to a new wave of the politicisation of 'gender equality' in Russia, where it is again being defended, disputed and challenged.

NOTES

1. The law 'On protection of citizens' health in Russia' states that women having fewer than eleven weeks of pregnancy have to attend medical and psychological consultations in a clinic for seven days before being granted permission for abortion.
2. The law prohibited the dissemination of public information about the sexuality of homosexuals, transgender people and queers. Information about LGBTQ people was also totally prohibited for those under age. The last measure led to a particularly difficult situation for LGBTQ families with children.
3. The interviews were collected in 2012–2013 within the framework of the project "Mourning becomes Elektra", supported by the Swedish Research Council and the Baltic Sea Foundation.
4. Important supporters also included TESIS, the Global Foundation for Women, the Eurasia Foundation, and the MacArthur and Ford Foundations. A focus on women's rights was important for *The American Bar Association* (ABA/CEELI [<http://www.owl.ru/aba/>. Accessed October 8, 2015], which opened its Moscow office in 1992). It would take several pages just to list the donors supporting organizations dealing with women's rights up until the mid-1990s (see, for example, the Appendix in McIntosh Sundstrom 2006: 215–223).
5. For more on criticisms of NGOs as organizations acting according to an agenda produced globally rather than locally see, for example, Amar (2013) and Korolczuk (2016).
6. According to Hemment, in Russia the resulting 'civil society' was connected to new hierarchies and dependencies; not infrequently, old elites

- could use their ‘cultural capital and *blat* connections generated under the old system’ (Hemment 2007: 60–61).
7. The complexity of Swedish politics, and Nordic politics more generally, concerning gender equality during the period under review has also been discussed by several other researchers (Melby et al. 2008; Borchorst et al. 2012).
 8. This consisted mainly of territory close to the borders of the Nordic countries, including St. Petersburg, Arkhangelsk, Murmansk, Petrozavodsk and Kaliningrad, all of which were particularly important.
 9. Interview September 24, 2012.
 10. Interview September 24, 2012.
 11. <http://www.norden.org/en/news-and-events/news/womens-power-in-st-petersburg>.
 12. A civil servant who was involved in the cooperation in the 2000s was interviewed in St. Petersburg in 2013 and still stressed the importance of cooperation (including on gender equality) in spite of the changed climate with respect to women’s rights and gender equality.
 13. Interview February 8, 2010.
 14. Interview June 5, 2013.
 15. Interview May 14, 2013.
 16. Interview May 14, 2013.
 17. On protection for LGBTQ rights, see, for example, Karlson-Rixon (2016); see also publications by the magazine *Meduza* (<https://meduza.io/en/news/2017/03/08/seven-feminist-activists-arrested-for-hanging-banner-off-kremlin-reading-men-in-power-for-200-years-out-with-them>) and publications by Nadia Plungian: <https://art-leaks.org/2013/03/10/what-happened-at-the-exhibition-international-womens-day-feminism-from-avant-garde-to-the-present-moscow-russia/>.

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CHAPTER 8

Missing Women: The Crowding Out of Gender Equality Norms in Ugandan Microfinance

Ben Jones

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I look at gender and microfinance in Uganda. It is a context where gender norms would seem an obvious part of what is going on. Microfinance relies on a normative set of claims around women and economic development, and the discourse and imagery that surrounds the work of microfinance NGOs relies heavily on women and girls. BRAC, the largest lender in Uganda, speaks of ‘helping poor Ugandan women realise their potential’, while their 2016 annual report for Uganda speaks of credit officers ‘sitting down with women’ in the ‘remotest corners’ of Uganda because BRAC’s ‘DNA is to build’ (BRAC 2016). The images posted on the websites of microfinance institutions such as BRAC invariably use pictures of women, either as individual entrepreneurs or in the context of a domestic situation where they are seen to be making responsible decisions for their family. Microfinance is

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premised on the targeting of women on the grounds that they perform better as clients compared to men and that their participation has more desirable development outcomes (Bateman and Maclean 2017: 33).

And yet, I found in the offices of Uganda's largest microfinance NGO—BRAC—that discussions of gender and gender equality were largely absent. There was little interest in translating the public image of microfinance as an engine of women's economic empowerment into part of the work environment. Instead, staff emphasised their technical expertise and a concern with growing BRAC as a business. The office environment was somewhat corporate and those interviewing emphasised the importance of BRAC's partnerships with the World Bank, with philanthropic organisations such as the Nike Foundation and also with a number of leading universities. I also found, that when I spent time with beneficiaries of microfinance NGOs in eastern Uganda there was little interest in thinking about microfinance in relation to gender. Instead, people were concerned with the growing number of fraud cases in the area, and were worried about how to make a living in a system that seemed unfair and unjust.

In making sense of these 'missing women'—the absence of gender from discussions in the office and on the ground—the chapter points to the ways normative agendas are crowded out by other ideas and concerns. In the case of the offices of BRAC conceptions of gender got subsumed into concerns of measurement, efficiency and growth. When gender was spoken of it was more in relation to the differential impact of different intervention methodologies, while the main focus was on the growth of BRAC as a business. In the case of villagers on the receiving end of microfinance programmes, the discourse and ideology that surrounded interventions, often framed around a language of women's participation and economic empowerment was less important than past experiences of NGO work and a larger normative environment shaped by concerns over inequality, corruption and fraud. In this way two sites where we would expect the normative language of 'gender equality' to find its way into the way people situate themselves, women were missing.

The chapter is organised as follows. The first section points to the close alliance between NGOs, donors, government officials and economists. I look at the framings produced by microfinance NGOs, and draw on conversations with microfinance staff in Uganda to show how their work comes to be seen as 'robust' and uncontroversial. I also bring in some of the recent literature that points to the way a language of growth

and business has become central to the way microfinance NGOs imagine their work (cf. Bateman and Maclean 2017).¹ A second section looks at microfinance as an ambivalent space in rural Uganda. One where claims of female empowerment and economic upliftment are set to one side and where people focus on the lived experiences of working with and observing NGOs. I draw on recent work on moral economies and popular culture in Uganda and also on my own conversations with people in eastern Uganda to show the ways microfinance is connected to a more ambivalent view of NGOs, the state, and religious institutions (Wiegratz 2016; Meinert 2015). A growing concern with fraud, trickery and thievery also helps to shape the space around which microfinance is popularly discussed and debated.²

In a concluding section I point to the ways these apparently separate worlds—the ‘business-like’ world of BRAC offices, and the ambivalent world of the field—share something in common. In both cases, work had to be done to make sense of questions of whether and not microfinance was legitimate. For those working in the offices there was an awareness that microfinance has come in for criticism in recent years, and the emphasis on measurement, efficiency and results can be seen as a way of legitimising the work of the sector. In rural areas, microfinance and other forms of semi-formal or informal credit were part of a local economy, whose workings did not always appear legitimate. People were wary of the rhetorical claims of NGOs and microfinance institutions about individual responsibility. They lived in a world where elites are corrupt, where development schemes are sometimes fraudulent, and where the rich get ahead through networks and favours. There was, as some scholars have observed, a normative concern with making sense of neo-liberalism and an understanding—both in the office and the field—that microfinance made normative claims about the way the economy and economic development should be organised (Hilger 2012; Wiegratz 2016).³

GROWTH IN THE OFFICE

The microfinance sector is distinctive for the way it combines an emphasis on gender equality alongside a strong focus on women as economic agents. In the late 1980s, donors and NGOs came to see microfinance as a key to the empowerment of women, particularly in rural areas (Karim 2011). The particular experience of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, established in the early 1970s, found that women were more likely to repay

the money they borrowed and more likely to adhere to the terms and conditions of the loans they received (in the early years Grameen Bank had targeted men). The public face of many microfinance organisations emphasises a wide set of benefits for women involved in microfinance programmes including empowerment and gender equality, much of the focus on women as the targets of lending also links back to more instrumental efficiency arguments about the return to investing in women. A sizeable economics and impact evaluation literature has developed to measure the returns to microfinance investments, and the knock-on effects in fields such as education, governance and health (cf. Banerjee 2013).

Uganda has a reasonably long history of microfinance. The Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans (UWESO) founded in 1986 has been involved in microfinance work for more than three decades, with much of its work targeted at reaching orphans and vulnerable children via their 'caregivers', typically women. The non-profit arm of the organisation also continues to implement villages savings and loans schemes in partnership with donors. A regional microfinance NGO, Wekembe, works across central Uganda and aims 'to provide active poor women with access to financial services to enable them to improve their households' quality of life' (Corsi and De Angelis 2016: 727). 'SYPO Uganda' a subsidiary company of a relatively new Dutch NGO currently lends to women offering: 'structural aid in Uganda by initiating and supporting projects with a sustainable, entrepreneurial character'.⁴ SYPO also claims to pay 'a lot of attention to the evaluation of projects, in order to know which projects are most effective', describing its work as 'results driven'. There are also international NGOs such as CARE providing microfinance services as part of a broader range of development activities. In an echo of what emerges later on in our discussion of BRAC, a number of microfinance NGOs have been involved in impact evaluations.

In terms of the overall reach of the microfinance sector the most recent report of the Association of Microfinance Institutions of Uganda (AMFIU) stated that by the end of 2012 the microfinance industry was serving almost 1.4 million depositors and 553,000 borrowers out of a total population of 35 million (Clark 2016). Ugandans are twice as likely to save with informal rather than formal institutions, a bias that is particularly pronounced in rural areas, such as the ones discussed later in the chapter. Alongside commercial banks and larger microfinance institutions Uganda has a large number of Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies

(SACCOs). These are member-based societies, though they are typically registered with professional unions. According to the 2011 ‘SACCO census’, there were about 2094 SACCO branches in Uganda (Clark 2016: 2). These less formalised microfinance institutions are, perhaps, the most usual experience Ugandans have of the sector. Though even these less formalised institutions rely on a range of trainings and start-up finance from NGOs. Any traveller arriving at a district capital such as Mbale would be greeted by painted signs welcoming them to the town on behalf of the different microfinance institutions operating within.

BRAC, by far the largest microfinance NGO working in Uganda claims to have reached more than twelve percent of the population (4.4 million people) and its work focuses on lending to women and women’s groups (BRAC International’s describes its Uganda operation is as ‘the largest and fastest scale-up in Africa’).⁵ BRAC has its global headquarters in Bangladesh, and started out in 1972 as an organisation focused on relief and rehabilitation work after Bangladesh’s War of Independence in 1971. BRAC’s work then shifted its focus first to community development work, before working on a more targeted approach to economic development through the delivery of credit. As Rao and Kelleher observe BRAC succeeded in the 1970s and 1980s because it proved unusually adaptive to sudden shifts in the development landscape, and they suggest its evolution was less one of ‘smooth transitions’ than of responding strategically to policy and programming changes (1995). For example, it took on board the focus on women that had been part of the Grameen Bank’s success, particularly when BRAC sought out more funding from Western donors in the 1990s. A good example of the discursive connection between economic development and women’s empowerment can be seen on the homepage of the BRAC Uganda website:

Microfinance is the heart of BRAC’s integrated approach to alleviating poverty and helping poor Ugandan women realise their potential. They gather weekly in villages, towns and city neighbourhoods to make repayments on their loans and apply for new ones... We use the microfinance groups as a social platform to deliver scaled up services in health, education, business development and livelihood support.⁶

BRAC’s adaptability can also be seen in its current focus on ‘scale’, ‘reach’ and ‘replicability’. In its current iteration BRAC celebrates its growth as a business and its claim to be ‘the world’s largest development

organisation' whose work touches 'the lives of one in every 50 people across the world' (BRAC 2015: 4). The idea of scale is described both in terms of expanding BRAC's activities to new territories and of getting borrowers to move from smaller-scale loans to loans that support larger economic activities. BRAC's official discourse increasingly promotes microfinance as a 'global solution' and its work is often in partnership with other global initiatives, with BRAC partnering with the Nike Foundation and its 'Girl Effect' and with the WomenWin coalition to promote female leadership through sport (funders include the Gap Foundation, Comic Relief and Nike). The iconography of BRAC's website and publications is almost entirely defined by images of women and girls, and BRAC promotes a strong causal link between lending to individuals and a broader set of public goods including gender equality and women's economic empowerment.⁷

At this stage in the chapter, it is also worth conveying the extent to which microfinance has been the subject of sustained criticism in recent years (see the recent volume by Bateman and Maclean [2017] and also Karim [2011]). There is a clear sense that the sector as a whole has worked to 'financialise' the poor in ways that does not have much to do with poverty reduction of women's economic empowerment. Bateman argues that microfinance works to 'legitimize, maintain, and extend the global neoliberal project' and points to the way microfinance reflected the growing popularity of programmes that made poverty reduction the responsibility of the poor (2017: 17). Mader has argued in a critical review of the sector there is a political economy that has developed around microfinance that turns poverty into a problem of finance making it 'the basis for new credit relations which serve' to indebt poorer people for a promise of economic development that is doubtful (Mader 2015: 79). There are also feminist scholars who have criticised microfinance for what they see as the feminisation of poverty (Chant 2008). As Khandelwal and Freeman observe there is a strong thread of microfinance producing 'heroic' female entrepreneurs, with individual women offering themselves and their families a route out of poverty (2017: 50). A number of economists have questioned the econometric work on which many of the claims about microfinance as a tool of poverty reduction have been based (Duvendack and Palmer-Jones 2012).⁸ This sort of critique is particularly important given that much of the legitimacy of microfinance rests on the idea that its effectiveness can be measured and demonstrated.

BRAC staff in Uganda find themselves in a situation where their work on microfinance has to justify itself in terms of results and replicability.⁹ This is one way in which gender concerns are either out-competed, or subsumed, by a scientific language that makes project work technical and depoliticised. This also grows of the sorts of partnerships that shape the day-to-day lives of office staff in Kampala. BRAC uses randomised control trials and impact evaluations across a range of its projects in Uganda and elsewhere in East Africa, and has since the late 2000s had a dedicated research evaluation division (Barua 2013; Fishman et al. 2017).¹⁰ As the BRAC Uganda website states:

... the Unit has also established research networks with several highly reputed national and international institutes including London School of Economics, University College London, Brooks World Poverty Institute (BWPI) at the University of Manchester, the World Bank, International Labour Organization, and the various research organisations in Makerere University including the Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) and (MISR) Makerere Institute of Social Research.¹¹

In conversation, a staff member went on to add that:

...we keep close contact with these partners and incorporate their feedback. They actually trust us to outsource their surveys, so we do a lot of studies.¹²

Through these partnerships, BRAC is often contracted to do the sorts of impact evaluation work that appears in global reports and development economics journals. I was told of work with the World Bank's Gender Innovation Lab, which focuses on measuring the relationship between gender, microfinance and entrepreneurship. At the heart of this sort of research is a strong interest in what might be 'scalable'.¹³ It was important for BRAC to be involved in randomised control trials and impact evaluations. There was also a concern to keep up with the pack, with one staff member telling me that while randomised control trials 'are expensive and takes some time to come to some conclusion, other partners are doing the same thing'.¹⁴

One example of the way staff related notions of gender to a growing interest in measurement and impact evaluation was the Empowerment for Livelihoods and Adolescents (ELA) programme. ELA was framed

around a logic of ‘sequencing’ where adolescent girls involved in the programme were first invited to join ‘clubs’ to be socialised in ‘livelihood training’ before receiving the lending through the microfinance part of the programme. As was explained:

...for ELA we have two major components. One the club and the other microfinance for adolescent girls. First we form the club later we offer microfinance. In between we offer livelihood training. We have not come to a conclusion yet, still analyzing the data and preparing a final report. The club component is working very well, like addressing pregnancy, early pregnancy dropped a lot.

The staff member went on to discuss the problems dealing with enumerators in the field, and the importance of publishing results as and when they came in. What was also striking was the way gender, if it features at all, had become almost something to be measured from which conclusions could be drawn (the literature on gender in the research reports was drawn from economics journals). In this, there was a difference between the celebratory images of women and girls on the website and a more technical understanding of gender in projects design and work.

A working paper ‘Women’s Empowerment in Action: Evidence from a Randomized Control Trial in Africa’ from 2015 was led by economists from London School of Economics and the World Bank and used a control group to assess the impact of ELA in terms of women’s economic and social empowerment (2015).¹⁵ Empowerment is measured through responses such as whether those involved in the programme described themselves as ‘self-employed’ or the likelihood of their using a condom or becoming a teen mother. The combined intervention found in ELA, where microfinance is linked to livelihood training ‘might be more effective among adolescent girls than single-pronged interventions’ such as programmes focused only on education, or vocational training. The acknowledgements thank the staff at BRAC Uganda as well as ‘Bank Netherlands, Mastercard, Nike, and the Gender Action Plan of the World Bank for financial support’.

In terms of the broader argument of the chapter, there is a strong sense that gender is crowded out by the language that helps BRAC connect to a range of development actors, not only the World Bank and mainstream donors, but also corporate sponsors, the economics departments of elite northern universities and the Government of Uganda.

A place where debates about the efficient use of microfinance are shaped by studies of impact evaluation and randomised control trials, and where there is an emphasis on the idea that economic development can be approached scientifically. In this context, gender was somewhat subsumed into institutional concerns with scale, growth and measurement. The next section outlines the way beneficiaries, many of them women, talk about microfinance. Again, gender is crowded out by other concerns. In this case, a concern that the world of microfinance and NGOs is linked to an unfair and corrupt political order. The point in writing about this second set of experiences is to show another situation where the normative concerns around gender are crowded out.

AMBIVALENCE IN THE FIELD

Through the latter half of the 2000s the Minister of State responsible for microfinance was Salim Saleh, a general in the Ugandan army and the President's brother. His name has been something of a synonym for corruption in the country. Salim Saleh's career captures for many Ugandans, the troubling relationship between government, donors and the private sector in the country. He has been involved in a number of large-scale financial scandals in Uganda, including the purchasing of 'junk' helicopters for the army for which he received a commission of \$800,000. There are also a number of UN-sanctioned reports on Saleh's involvement in 'massive looting, illegal exploitation of natural resources, especially gold' during the Ugandan armies incursions into the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 2000s (Finnström 2008: 176). Prior to becoming Minister of State for microfinance he was investigated for his involvement with Greenland Investments, a company in which he was a major stakeholder, which used a third company, Westmont, to illegally purchase shares in Uganda's largest bank, the Uganda Commercial Bank. As one recently commentator noted, Saleh was part of a clique that has used public office to '(co)-own, run or cash in, openly or covertly, from businesses in almost every economic sector' (Wiegatz 2016: 104).

Or put another way the situation ordinary Ugandans encounter when working with microfinance sector references a different situation and draws on a different set of associations. The second part of the chapter looks at the ways in which microfinance occupies a more ambivalent normative space in Uganda when you leave the offices of an international

NGO. One where claims of women's empowerment and economic upliftment are less central than concerns with fraud, problems of trust and a set of puzzles people face about how and when to engage with the development sector. I draw on recent work on moral economies and popular culture in Uganda to show the ways that poorer Ugandans approach microfinance in a critical and questioning way largely detached from the more celebratory normative environment of microfinance NGOs (Wiegratz 2016; Wiegratz et al. 2018). When compared to the world of BRAC or the framings found in project documents or impact evaluation reports, there is more of a sense that development is a contradictory and uneven enterprise. On the one hand, there is a desire for the sort of economic transformation that microfinance promised. On the other, there is criticism of the work of NGOs, and the role of the Ugandan state and what appears to be a growing concern with fraud, thieving and trickery.

The language of entrepreneurship central to BRAC's work finds its echo in what has been termed a 'neoliberalised moral economy' (Hilgers 2012).¹⁶ Scholars working on Uganda have seen a general shift toward a state-sponsored discourse of competition, freedom and individual, and a broader project of economic liberalisation that has continued into the present (Tripp 2000; Reinika and Collier 2001). Here the relationship between microfinance and gender gets complicated by a discussion of broader changes in society, one where microfinance is less easily disciplined into a narrative of women's empowerment, or where the meanings NGOs would like to associate with are no longer as easy to assert and defend.¹⁷ Wiegratz, for example, suggests that fraud has become a dominant concern in the lives of ordinary Ugandans (2016, see also Meinert 2015). He perceives a sociocultural shift that is closely connected to the sort of development economy of which microfinance is a part, and focuses directly on norms and their relationships to values, orientations and practices.¹⁸

Wiegratz underlines this point by documenting a spate of fraud in Uganda in the name of banking, lending and microfinance in the late 2000s. With names such as 'Dutch International' and with some sort of link to local politicians, these 'NGOs' introduced themselves to communities, collecting money, and then making off with people's savings as soon as the first deposits were made (*Daily Monitor* 2008a, b, 2009). This sort of trickery has parallels with stories of fraud in agricultural projects, pyramid schemes, corruption in government offices, and

pastors who steal from congregants. In people's willingness to give to these different actors there is also a comment on the way people understand NGOs as connected into wider circuits of wealth and opportunity. A farmer who had fallen victim to one such scheme told journalists:

These microfinance people claimed they are from government. The Resident District Commissioner introduced the company and said that they were a genuine financial institution. (*Daily Monitor* 2008b)

The farmer puzzled over the relationship between 'these microfinance people' and 'the Resident District Commissioner' (the Resident District Commission is the central government's representative in the district, and is answerable to the Office of the President.) The fact that microfinance could be 'from government' underlines the blurred boundaries between the state and other actors in Uganda. There is also, of course, a sense that fraudulent activities often receive the protection of those higher up the government.

Over a number of visits to the Teso region in eastern Uganda, I have also come across examples of "fake microfinance". The Teso region, a relatively poor part of Uganda, has lost much of its wealth during a seven-year insurgency (1986–1993) against the present government (Jones 2009). Starting the mid-1980s, the Teso region, like much of the rest of Uganda has become a place where there has been something of an 'NGO-isation' of the local landscape. Development initiatives in the area, including microfinance initiatives, are often framed around a language of 'good governance', 'entrepreneurship', and 'rights based' approaches, what Ellison terms 'idioms of individualism and choice' (Ellison 2009: 81). Microcredit schemes and agricultural extension initiatives promote a discourse of private enterprise and personal responsibility. This somewhat ideal language rubs up against the sorts of corruption and increasing economic inequality that has marked out Uganda's development in recent years.

The cases of fraud I encountered were most usually of people claiming to be microfinance field officers. These 'officers' descended on an area, only to make off with the initial round of donations. In one case the fraudsters had gone to the trouble of setting up a shop in a trading centre, and had established a management board of community leaders (who were unaware that they were part of a scam). There was a sign in front and the usual paraphernalia associated with community

development initiatives. I have also come across the more familiar story of officials ‘losing’ money that had been paid in by poorer people (the popular view being that local elites had conspired with NGO workers and had split the profits among themselves). There are also examples where the gap between the claims of the NGO and its actual practice were at a distance. In one case a Church of Uganda project collapsed after a failure to recoup loans from borrowers (the popular consensus was that the field staff ‘lost’ the money on the way back to the office, though it should be noted that there were also problems with nonpayment of loans).

Which is to say that experiences of microfinance NGOs is shaded by other experiences. There is the uneven flow of donor-funded projects, faith-based development programmes, government initiatives and smaller-scale charitable efforts. There is also a growing private market of credit and debt supported by private banks, local money lenders and loan sharks (Wiegatz 2016). At the same time, people have to make sense of an increasingly liberalised religious scene, with a growing number of churches and sects, some of which promote a distinctly neoliberal language of personal transformation (Bremner 2013). This is all at a distance from the sorts of associations that shape the relationship between gender and development within microfinance NGOs. Instead, popular discussions more easily move to conversations that are critical of NGOs, that worry about the wealth of Uganda’s elite, and debate the sense that fraud, theft and trickery seem to be an increasingly familiar part of everyday life.

To give an example of the sort of ambivalence that might emerge, I would like to focus on a project funded by *The Guardian* newspaper in partnership with UWESO, mentioned earlier in the chapter.¹⁹ The project was funded by *The Guardian* newspaper and Barclays Bank and administered by AMREF, an NGO based in Nairobi. The “livelihoods” work was contracted out to three Ugandan NGOs: UWESO, Care International and Farm Africa. UWESO and Care International focused on the microfinance and community banking elements, while Farm Africa dealt with agricultural inputs (the wider project also focused on education, health, water, and governance). The project was implemented across Katine sub-county, one of the poorest parts of the Teso region. I visited the project on a number of occasions and listened to what people had to say. Many liked the village savings and loans groups they had joined. The following comment from a woman who had joined one group, was typical:

I like my group as it helps me to bank. The group has ten members who each contributed 22000 each month (about five dollars each). I make my money through brewing and selling local beer.²⁰

At the same time, it is important to understand the ways in which conversations about microfinance were cut through by a sense of ambivalence. Discussions often turned to the relative wealth of project workers and the gap between the lives of richer people and the poor. On some occasions there were also criticisms of aspects of the project itself. The woman interviewed above went on to add more generally that:

Some of the leaders are good, some are bad. It is difficult to know who to trust but you try. But the ones running the co-operative, we don't know what they do.

The co-operative was a large structure built next to the offices of the sub-county chief. The NGO reasoned that farmers across the sub-county could use this building to store produce and wait for market prices to rise. In practice, the co-operative building was empty for much of the time, and locals questioned the possible corruption that might be involved in the scheme. I was told of trainings that had been 'accounted for' but which had not been run, of bags of sand that had replaced bags of cement in building work. There was also the sense that the sort of economic development enjoyed by development workers had little to do with the types of transparency and trust required of the microcredit schemes they promoted.

It may also be that the norms around gender that microfinance is felt to promote were missing because traditional systems of lending the area were themselves somewhat gendered. In most cases treasurers of these new VSLAs were women. This seemed uncontroversial to people, in part because it was a pattern that was also found in religious and clan institutions in the area.²¹ I was also told that VSLAs were something similar to much older rotating credit groups whose membership was restricted to women (which may also explain why the language around 'women's empowerment' promoted by NGOs in the area was less central to discussions). These older institutions, *abukonikin* were groups where women would meet and make a monthly contribution and provided a model for how people approached VSLAs. In *abukonikin* money collected would either be banked for a one-off yearly payment or, more commonly given to one member of the group in turn.

One issue that troubled people was theft. An early report on VSLAs that appeared in *The Guardian* newspaper noted that:

The security of VSLAs in the sub-county remains a big issue. According to the Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans (UWESO), a local NGO which is implementing the VSLAs in the sub-county with Care International, about ten cases of theft from savings groups have been recorded in the region recently, of which four were in Katine.

One particularly violent incident took place in October 2009 where a VSLA treasurer, Mary Kokoi, was attacked by three men who used machetes. They found Mary in her hut and she sustained cuts to her head, back and shoulder requiring hospital treatment. The assailants, who were later arrested and charged, stole 4.2 million Ugandan shillings (around \$2100) kept in a secure box in her hut.²² The stolen box was not found, though one of Mary's neighbours paid for a local healer to see if he could compel the suspects to return the money:

The witchdoctor came and did some sacrifices inside mother's hut, where he left a small bottle planted in the middle. He claimed the thieves would return the money at 1am [the hour of the robbery], but up to now there is nothing.²³

The lost money was eventually made good by a donation from the NGO, which was publicised in the pages of the newspaper (and announced during a visit by the then editor of *The Guardian* and the chief executive of Barclays).

This very mixed landscape of theft, a development project, a witchdoctor, suggests the complex set of associations that begin to surround microfinance initiatives in a rural field site, and suggests also why any language of gender or women's economics empowerment might get crowded out by other concerns. Moreover, the happy ending to the story underlines a point that was often made to me: that development was a very uneven business and the money that people had to work to save was easily available to those who sponsored projects. Which is another way of saying that there were a very different set of associations that helped people make sense of microfinance initiatives in rural Teso. The work of NGOs was regarded with ambivalence, while the

relationship between gender and microfinance was shaped more by the history of women as treasurers in the area, than the discourse of the project or the particular concerns of the NGO.

DIFFERENT WORLDS?

In this chapter we have looked at what would appear to be two very different worlds—the office of Uganda’s largest microfinance and a rural part of eastern Uganda where people are on the receiving end of microfinance, and a number of other, development initiatives. One argument has been that in both of these cases the concern with women’s empowerment and gender equality lose out to other concerns. In the office, it loses out to a language of ‘business’ and robust evidence; in the countryside, it loses out to a widespread ambivalence about the way the economy works. In this sense we see the normative language of gender equality and women’s economic empowerment being out-competed by other languages that allow microfinance to be framed in quite different ways. For BRAC microfinance belongs more to a discourse of growth and economic development, in ways that focus on the scale of the enterprise and the organisation’s linkages to mainstream development thinking. For villagers making sense of microfinance there is a normative concern with the way the lending and support offered by NGOs, while popular and widely used, also ties into concerns about fraud and a feeling that NGOs need to be approached with a sceptical eye. The point being that the sets of associations that emerged around microfinance in a rural field site were very different from those found on the website of BRAC or in project evaluations. In neither case did I find the language of gender equality part of the normative landscape.

But is it also possible to see something shared across these two very different spaces? In both cases, there is an awareness that microfinance makes a set of claims to being legitimate. And in this third section, it is to the question of legitimacy that I now turn. The literature on norms and norms engagement emphasises the way ideas need to be seen as legitimate if they are to succeed, and that this often requires alliances and a wide constituency of actors (Perkmann and Spicer 2007). This is the sort of view that sees legitimacy as something that is done to promote a particular agenda, or validate a particular norm. In this chapter, we find something slightly different. Two situations where the question

of legitimacy is raised less around a single norm and is instead part of a broader discussion about what it means to work in a microfinance NGO, or how best to make sense of what it means to be a beneficiary.

As such, while it is possible to see the business-like language of ‘scale’ and randomised control trials that form part of the large microfinance NGO such as BRAC as a way of making sense of pressures to be competitive and relevant, it is also possible to see them as related to a sort of legitimising work. The focus on producing robust evidence helped both address and focus attention away from the criticisms that have been made of microfinance. The specific concern with scale and replicability among those I interviewed, and broader concerns about scale and growth reflect the sense that microfinance has become big business. As a number of scholars have described, microfinance has become very much part of the development mainstream, and BRAC Uganda’s work with the Nike Foundation, the World Bank and a number of economics departments of elite universities and a strongly corporate identity had developed across the sector (cf. Bateman and Maclean 2017; Mader 2015). Concerns of gender equality or women’s economic empowerment lost out to the sort of work that legitimises BRAC as a corporate development institution. There is also an awareness that microfinance needs defending from its critics, and that most of the criticism has been around its claims to poverty reduction. As noted earlier, a number of economists and political scientists have challenged the evidence that microfinance works, and so the emphasis on measurement, efficiency and results—in making microfinance a technical, almost corporate product—can be seen as a way of legitimising the work of the sector.

At the same time, the focus on fraud and ambivalence for those on the receiving end of microfinance helps possible beneficiaries think critically about ideas of individual responsibility and economic upliftment at a time when corruption and irresponsibility are the ways through which rich people appear to get richer. In the rural locations where I have spent time there is a wariness concerning the claims made by NGOs and microfinance institutions. Stories of corruption and fraud were common, and there was an understanding that NGO workers and government officials were sometimes fraudulent in their behaviour, and where the rich got ahead through networks and favours. As such, the rhetoric of microfinance was greeted with ambivalence and any language of gender equality and women’s economic empowerment was subsumed within this more critical, reflective space. In this case, it is the legitimacy

of microfinance and, more broadly, about an economic system, that finds its way into the work of BRAC and into the lives of ordinary Ugandans. These concerns crowd out the normative claims to gender equality and women's economic empowerment that are part of the public face of microfinance. Moreover, the chapter suggests that the sort of normative concerns observed in rural areas, should not be seen as part of some sort of 'trickle down' from the offices of microfinance NGOs.

As such, the assumption, common to studies of diffusion or translation norms, that particular normative agendas offer the most useful way of making sense of the way ideas work at different societal levels may not be the most interesting way of thinking about the way people make sense of particular situations. Instead, norms are made sense of (or overlooked) by actors depending on the what is at stake, the situation in which they find themselves, and the sort of competition coming from other agendas. In the first half of the chapter we saw microfinance as a sort of global object to be measured and evaluated, in the second half we saw a situation where concerns about theft, fraud, and an ambivalent relationship to the development sector. There is a methodological point to be made in looking, in a fairly open-ended way, at situations where a particular normative framework might expect to dominate. In this section, I have also suggested the ways in which two somewhat different situations might also share in something: in this case, a need to respond to the claim made by microfinance that it represents a legitimate approach to development.

CONCLUSION

While BRAC's international image is of a civil society organisation changing women's lives through community banking, the organisational pressures and business outlook of many of those I spoke to meant discussions of gender were shifted into the technical field of impact assessments and project evaluations. Norms around gender equality and the economic empowerment of women, which would seem to be central to the ideology of microfinance NGOs, are in the case of BRAC tied to concerns with 'scaling up' their work and affecting social change on a global scale. These sorts of concerns produce a situation within BRAC Uganda where microfinance work with women is increasingly shaped by technologies of impact evaluation and a focus on results and replicability. BRAC defines itself as the 'world's largest development organisation' and in a

recent awards ceremony for the NGO sector came out top, described as ‘more than a reference; it is leading the non-profit world toward its next degree of efficiency and leverage’.²⁴ This makes for a particular situation which causes staff to value associations with the World Bank, the ILO and the London School of Economics.

At the same time, those living in rural areas were more concerned with the ambivalent position of NGOs, growing inequality, and the corruption of elites. In terms of the situation found in rural Uganda, where people valued their participation in savings and loans schemes but also wondered about the NGO sector as a whole. Here any idea of economic transformation was undercut by experiences of corruption across a range of institutions as well as the unequal experience of development more broadly. Stories of “fake microfinance” as well as the obvious inequalities that cause NGO workers to live very different lives to beneficiaries was one way in which people read their participation in village savings and loans associations. There was a mixture of optimism, ambivalence and criticism. Many welcomed the chance to build on older traditions of rotating credit, while also casting a critical eye over the broader work of NGOs and other development actors.

The focus of this chapter has been to make sense of the way gender equality norms, as a set of rhetorical commitments made by NGOs, are not always that important in the offices of BRAC or in areas where microfinance NGOs are working. When set against the broader framework of the book we can think of both examples as situations where other normative concerns crowd out notions of gender equality and where microfinance is thought about in relation to how it may or may not be legitimate.

NOTES

1. At the same time, it should be made clear that I am not arguing for an absence of ‘gender’ from the situations I observed. In both the office and the village interactions were intensely gendered, and my interactions with male BRAC staff shaped by my own gender and position. Rather it was the specific formulations around gender equality that might be expected to be found in the world of microfinance that were missing.
2. On the politics of microcredit and poverty in (South) Africa and elsewhere, see e.g. Bond (2007), Chowdury (2007), and Weber (2002).
3. The chapter draws on a period of fieldwork in Uganda from 2016. Alongside interviews with BRAC staff and World Bank employees in

Kampala I also undertook fieldwork in the Teso region, a poor, largely rural part of eastern Uganda, where I have conducted research before (Jones 2009).

4. <http://www.sypo.nl/engels/index.html>.
5. http://brac.net/uganda#who_we_are.
6. <http://brac.net/uganda-programmes/item/739-microfinance>, BRAC's focus on women as business people and social entrepreneurs brings us back to older efficiency arguments about gender and development (Miller and Razavi 1995). Women are portrayed on the website as the key to the social and economic transformation of Uganda (Bedford 2009: 19; Chant 2012: 202).
7. As Cornwall et al. observe of the development sector more widely, women tend to be subsumed into 'an image of the protective mother who will translate any gains from the market into the means for household survival, and will be prepared to make unlimited personal sacrifices to provide the household' (2008).
8. Karim has suggested that the 'evidence that microfinance empowered women in Bangladesh was largely produced by MFIs themselves' REF.
9. This fits in with the shift towards experimental and quasi-experimental studies in development economics, and the use of randomised control trials and impact evaluations to measure development outcomes (Banerjee 2013).
10. Randomised Control Trials typically take a number of years to run (to test for significance in the intervention group as opposed to the control group) and it can take a number of years before the academic component reaches publication. See, for example, the Village Enterprise's Randomized Controlled Trial (see <http://villageenterprise.org>) which ran from 2013 to 2016 and has yet to produce academic publication.
11. <http://www.brac.net/search/itemlist/user/666-brac?start=240>.
12. Interview with BRAC staff member, Kampala. August 10, 2016.
13. It should also be noted that in conversation, I pressed my own interest in gender equality, to see what sort of response this generated. For those managing the research efforts I was told 'we keep quiet about that', and that gender equality was not something that was that useful in working with government.
14. Interview with BRAC staff member, Kampala. 10 August 2016.
15. As with a number of other initiatives that BRAC promotes in Uganda, ELA has been tied to research partnerships with other institutions, and has led to research publications (Bandiera et al. 2017).
16. Africa, as a whole, has been at the forefront of reforms that can be characterised as neoliberal, with the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s leading to 'waves of deregulation, privatisation and institutional reforms' (Hilgers 2012: 82).

17. There are also resonances with Karim's work on microfinance in Bangladesh, where the relationship between microfinance and gender is a complicated one. Karim found that richer women often got the loans; that women often give the money directly to their husbands; that loans are often used to pay back other loans; and that those who borrow the money often become moneylenders themselves.
18. From a conversation with a group of women, Katine sub-county, September 9, 2010.
19. <https://www.theguardian.com/katine>.
20. From a conversation with a group of women, Katine sub-county, September 12, 2010.
21. Partly this is because the Teso region is patrilineal and patrilocal meaning that women are generally considered outsiders in the area where they lived, less prone to jealousy and with fewer options for insider dealing (Jones 2009).
22. <https://www.theguardian.com/katine/2009/oct/16/money-stolen-machete-attack>.
23. <https://www.theguardian.com/katine/2009/oct/16/money-stolen-machete-attack>.
24. <https://www.ngoadvisor.net/ong/brac/>.

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Consulting Publics in European Union Gender Policies: Organising Echo Chambers or Facilitating Critical Norm Engagement?

Sabine Lang

INTRODUCTION

The European Union is hailed as a strong norm entrepreneur in the area of gender equality. The norm, first articulated in the equal pay clause of Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, has since become one of the central pillars of Community labor market and social policies (Abels and Mushaben 2012; Kantola 2010; Caporaso and Jupille 2001; Rees 1998) and has travelled into EU policy domains such as development and trade, regional integration, corporate representation and media. At the same time, it evolved and expanded from a focus on anti-discrimination towards positive action and substantive equality (Rees 1998; Kantola 2010). However, despite its overall image as a signature EU-level norm, its framing as a success narrative remains contested. In particular, the very notion of ‘top down’ diffusion of the gender equality norm from the European level into member states is being questioned

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(van der Vleuten et al. 2014). Critics have pointed to the multiple layers of translation that might strongly alter EU-level gender norms in national, subnational or local contexts. Moreover, resistance, prominently articulated by increasing rightwing populist movements across Europe, makes it questionable that the gender equality norm has diffused across the European Union; instead, it presents itself as a volatile, multidirectional and increasingly contentious aspect of EU politics and policies. It is used differently and ascribed differing meanings in different situations and policy contexts (see Fejerskov et al. 2019).

In order to legitimise EU norm promotion via hard and soft law, EU-level institutions rely primarily on organised civil society. Transnational and national gender equality NGOs contribute to consultative bodies, in the process generating and sustaining norm engagement beyond the Brussels beltway. Whereas the role of organised civil society for norm production has been established not just for the EU but for other international governance bodies such as the UN or the WHO (i.e. Joachim and Locher 2009; Steffek and Ferretti 2009; Tallberg et al. 2013), we know much less about how the EU seeks buy-in from larger EU publics. How are norms communicated and negotiated with European citizens? This chapter addresses this question through the lens of EU-level public consultations. Thus, this contribution brings those into the fold who sometimes are simply seen as being on the ‘receiving end’ of norms, namely EU citizens.

The question of how deep norms have to reach in order to produce norm internalisation remains contested, and the standards advanced by international relations scholars to assess reach and depth of norm promotion within a given political entity have been challenged. In the first wave of IR’s engagement with norms, norm internalisation was claimed to have been achieved when states adopted certain norms and turned them into policies that in turn were supported by majorities of citizens and thus internalised over time (i.e. Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 895f.). Increasingly, however, IR scholars grapple with the notion that policy adoption in and of itself does not equal norm internalisation. Even in the aftermath of formally transposing EU law into national law or adopting soft law measures in member states, there are domestic scale-specific or group-specific dimensions to norm engagement that can alter, subvert, or block norm internalisation (Lang and Sauer 2016; Montoya 2013; Elgström 2000). Formal adoption of a policy can lead to renegotiation of its meaning in local or regional or policy-specific contexts.

The fact that state adoption of norms is not the endpoint of norm internationalisation also shows in the field of gender equality. Even though EU member states for the most part have strong laws on gender equality and antidiscrimination, there is evidence that policy adoption has not by default led to policy acceptance (a case in point being gender mainstreaming) and has not profoundly changed masculinist institutions and attitudes.

The public consultation process reflects the European Commission's attempt to invite norm engagement by EU citizens. It gauges policy preferences and underlying norms of EU publics across the polity at several stages of the policy process. At the same time, by signalling engagement not just with organised interest groups and lobbyists, but with 'the people', EU-level institutions want to counter their democratic legitimacy deficit by way of increasing public outreach beyond experts and professional civil society actors. In the arena of European gender politics, there have been demands to broaden EU-level governance beyond professional stakeholders to nurture Europeans' engagements with gender equality norms. It remains, however, unclear to what degree processes of online public consultations can advance this goal. Whereas establishing a robust public consultation system has been hailed within EU institutions and in member states as an important step in order to strengthen transparency and public engagement by citizens, critics raise the spectre of consultations becoming mere echo chambers for issues that are predefined by the EU Commission (i.e. Quittkat 2011).

The chapter will interrogate gender equality norm engagement in the European Union by way of (1) identifying how the specific architecture and process of public consultations signals norm engagement; (2) presenting evidence of how EU gender norms have travelled; and (3) analysing the 2015 public consultation in the area of EU-level gender politics, namely 'Equality between women and men in the EU' as an illustration of norm engagement and norm contestation in the European Union.

I argue that, in principle, public consultations do have the capacity to serve as platforms for norm engagement. They allow the EU Commission to put forth a norm in its specific features and to 'listen' to the EU citizen body's engagement with this norm. The specific architecture and practical process of consultations, however, pose challenges to this principle. The formal architecture of the consultation inhibits deviation and lacks inclusiveness and representativeness. The norm that

the EUC presents is framed such that it invites reification much more than critical challenges. Finally, the norms that are put forth encounter domestic political environments on national and subnational levels and respondents' preconceived collective frames, thus situating the responses to consultation in particular contexts. Situated responses could be seen as the core of critical norm engagement. Engagement with the situatedness of responses, however, does not appear in the 'uptake' and output of the consultation and thus calls into question the 'listening' quality of public consultations.

TWO NORMATIVE DIMENSIONS OF PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

Since its inception, the European Union has thrived on its reputation as norm entrepreneur: first by promoting peaceful reconciliation and interest alignment among former enemies; then by encouraging formal democratisation and substantive democratic policy norms in member states, on the supranational level, as well as in interaction with international organisations and third countries (Kronsell 2002; Ingebritsen 2006; Bjoerkdahl 2008). Reach and salience of EU norm diffusion, however, are being contested, both in terms of form and substance of the engagement process. Formal aspects of norm engagement are being questioned as to their top-down, one-way orientation that does leave EU citizens seemingly unable to assume a more active role in EU-wide norm production and policy making. In terms of substantive norm promotion, recent findings present evidence across numerous policy fields that norm internalisation in the EU is spotty at best (Maggi 2016) and that norm diffusion is neither a one-way street nor a translation process between a single sender and multiple receivers.

The role of public consultations in promoting and debating norms is undertheorised. We know why the Commission consults stakeholders, namely to build up policy capacity and for legitimisation (Bunea and Thomson 2015; Van Ballaert 2017), and why NGOs and interest groups engage in consultations, namely to gain access, influence, and potentially funds (i.e. Lang 2013; Agustín 2008). Yet the normative and strategic interests driving the public consultation process with EU citizens has not yet been explored in detail. I submit that attempted norm promotion by the Commission and norm challenges by citizens are one signature trait of the online public consultation process and that normative engagement is embedded in public consultations in two

ways: One, in the communication process itself and, two, in the substantive policy query that is put forth by the Commission for European citizens to engage with. The communication process, initiated by the Commission, invites a basic form of *interaction* and *deliberation* about specific policies and their underlying norms, thus extending the range of policy-relevant actors beyond institutional politics and organised civil society into the realm of wider EU publics. Consultations are supposed to generate *voice* from stakeholders and interested individuals, thus creating linkages that theoretically establish more salient EU-level norms and policies as a result of increased deliberative processes. Institutionally, consultations are intended to facilitate *procedural buy-in* into the democratic norms of participation themselves and add legitimacy to the EU (Kroeger 2008; Kohler-Koch and Quittkat 2013).

Substantively, consultations are put forth to ‘listen’ to citizen input in regards to a specific policy as well as the norms that guide it. At any given time, there are roughly 20–30 public consultations open online and within a 12-week period ready to receive responses. For example, between January and April 2018, there have been 26 consultations ‘live’ on the Commission Consultation website.¹ Among others, there is a ‘Public Consultation on EU funds in the area of migration’, a ‘Public Consultation on EU funds in the areas of values and mobility’, a ‘Public consultation on fake news and online disinformation’, and a ‘Public Consultation on Strengthened cooperation against vaccine preventable diseases’. Even though some of the consultations seem to have a more technical focus, they will also put forth normative propositions, asking citizens to rank the importance of a particular aspect of an issue in relations to others or inviting citizens to voice alternatives to current policies. Both formal and substantive norm engagement thus form the core of the consultation process.

Engaging Publics in EU Policy Making

The widely perceived ‘democratic deficit’ of the European Union has been a major incentive for increasing the EU public consultation regime. Historically, the EU had tried to bridge this gap between transnational governance in Brussels and member state publics by way of relying on intermediaries, primarily organised stakeholders from business and civil society, who served as stand-ins for consulting with the European polity (Bunea 2017). The first two phases of the European Union

consultation regime consisted broadly of a period of consulting with organised economic interest groups between 1960 and 1980 and a second phase of partnering with organised economic interest groups, social partners and other stakeholders between 1980 and 2000 (Quittkat and Kohler-Koch 2011: 82).

Remaining within the confines of organised interests, however, did not prove to be adequate for legitimising the European integration project. In order to allow for more predictable and sustainable practices of organising legitimacy and norm engagement across nation states and regions, scholars and political activists kept pushing for a stronger engagement of EU institutions with European citizens directly and thus in helping the formation of European publics (i.e. Kies and Nanz 2013). If, so the rationale, policy making within the Union would foster stronger connections to EU citizens, then norm production and policy outcomes would better reflect citizens' political attitudes and therefore norm internalisation would be built on stronger foundations.

After the turn of the century, 'bringing Europe closer to the people' turned from a lofty goal articulated by member states in all the major Treaties into a third phase of the consultation regime as stipulated in the Lisbon Treaty. Its provisions included the European Citizens' Initiative and a stronger formal commitment to process-oriented consultations with and listening to European citizens. As former Commission Vice-President Margot Wallström argued at the time: 'we need to get away from the notion of communication as "selling" and move towards one based on participation' so citizens evolve from consumers to 'an engaged public actor' (Wallström 2008). Representative democracy, according to Wallström, 'needs to be supported by deliberative and participatory democracy (...) The European Commission wants transnational consultation of citizens to become a permanent feature of EU democracy' (ibid., op. cit.; Boucher 2009: 1) in order to counter the notion that the EU seems 'inaccessible to the ordinary citizen because their method of operating is so complex'² EU-level institutions were asked to experiment with engaging citizens.³ 'Dialogue' became the Commission's engagement formula of the early 2000s (Eder 2000: 26).

Today, the EU has arguably the most complex consultation regime worldwide. Aided and enhanced by digital modes of deliberation, e-consultations are perceived as relatively low-cost, high-disseminating tools of gauging public sentiment. Based on the White Paper on European Governance that the Commission released in 2001, as well

as its Interactive Policy Making Initiative, the Commission established a ‘Your Voice in Europe’ web portal that by 2003 assembled all consultations across DGs in all 11 EU languages. During its first two years of operation, an estimated 3 million citizens used the site.⁴ With Plan D, launched in 2005, the three d’s of ‘democracy, dialogue and debate’ formed the core of a thorough redesign of how EU institutions engage with European citizens. Consulting wider publics was a key goal of the redesign, with the Commission in 2006 proposing ‘a fundamentally new approach – a decisive move away from one-way communication to reinforced dialogue from an institution-centered to a citizen-centered communication’ (EUC 2006).

One of the main criticisms of earlier modes of public consultations concerned their timing. Critics argued that citizens were consulted at late stages of policy making when the main tenets of hard or soft law were already in place. Moreover, what transpired was simply that ‘policy actors seem to only pretend to open dialogue with society’ (Eder 2000: 26). Reacting to these long-standing criticisms, the Commission launched The Better Regulation Agenda in 2017 and with it now offers several access points for citizens interested in contributing to EU policy making.⁵ Starting with planned roadmaps and inception impact assessments, when citizens are consulted during a 4 week period, then during a phase of focusing on impact, where we have a 12-week public consultation period, then after the Commission has drafted its policy proposal and put it forward for adoption by the EU Parliament and the Council (also 12 weeks) and finally during assessment periods of already existing laws and regulations. This in effect makes public consultations a continuous part of EU policy making with potentially substantial impact on the direction that specific policies take.

SUBSTANTIVE NORM ENGAGEMENT VIA CONSULTATIONS

Whenever a public consultation is posted on the EU website, the European Commission signals receptivity to citizens engaging with substantive issues within normative frameworks. By launching the consultation, the Commission is asking for guidance on policy development and, directly or indirectly, it invites debate about the salience of norms in specific areas of its portfolio. Often, the consultation will ask about priorities and rankings of detailed aspects of a current policy, thus inviting nuanced and distributed answers to specific norms. Or it will invite

opinions on future policy emphases and guidance on funding allocations and priorities.

Citizens might stay within the normative framework that is being presented to them in the consultation, or they might respond by way of challenging particular norms—especially in open-ended answer sections. These challenges might be the result of specific national or subnational policy contexts. Or they might be based on particular group frames and interests. In effect, public consultations exhibit in a nutshell how norms that the EU propagates intersect with the political orientations and interests of respondents, highlighting the situatedness of respective norm promotion in time, in particular organisational spaces and institutional settings, as well as in the larger political environments. Thus, as much as a public consultation regime in theory allows for continuous negotiation of policy priorities and their underlying norms, consultations are always part of an already predefined set of discourses and policy processes. This in turn influences the frames, emphases and omissions that are inscribed in the questions that public is asked to respond to and it arguably influences the weighing of answers that the EU Commission performs with its reports and resulting policy frameworks.

Norm promotion and norm challenges are not always easily detectable features of online consultations. Attempts to promote norms will be, as I suggest below, legible by way of specific emphases and omissions in the consultation itself as well as when comparing the outcomes of consultations with the input from citizens. Challenges to the norms that the EU Commission sets in and with an online consultation are also a sometimes overt, sometimes only implicit part of analysing the responses to consultations. We assume that the total number of responses to consultation is one indicator of how important a norm is to citizens.⁶ If citizens are vocal about a specific norm, its importance or how they understand the norm in particular, this might feed into the perception of the EU being a norm entrepreneur. Citizens, however, can challenge the fine print of norm promotion in the consultation by highlighting specific features of the norm and sidelining others or by reframing the issues at stake altogether. We know little about how the EU responds to such challenges, more specifically, if critical norm engagement by citizens finds venues of norm uptake and thus is reflected in policy development.

There are, moreover, intervening factors that influence successful norm promotion. Whereas theoretically we assume that Europeans from all walks of life and from all parts of the European Union would respond

to an online consultation if they were invested in the topic, this is in fact not the case. Response rates vary starkly and will skew representativeness of norm engagement across member states and interests. Generally, citizens of member countries where interest groups have mobilised their constituents will be more active, as are citizens of Western European member states. The timing of a consultation will attract particular populations in specific member state settings where ‘hot button’ issues are at that time debated and where civil society intermediaries encourage making citizens’ voice heard to the EU. On the part of the Commission, using consultations for substantive norm engagement requires an organised effort to publicise and encourage response to the consultations within short periods of time. However, there seems to be much variance between DGs in advertising the consultations within their portfolio as well as acknowledging and working with their results (Quittkat 2013). Even though the ‘Better Regulation Agenda’ in 2015 streamlined and intensified the consultation process, the output and uptake side is at this point much less developed.

In sum: Public consultations promote two sets of norms: One is the norm of civic engagement itself, inviting EU citizens to inform themselves and contribute to a discussion on European issues. The other is a substantive norm in a respective issue area, where norm promotion works by way of highlighting or sidelining aspects of an issue, framing it in a specific way, and opening or closing spaces for counter-norms to emerge.

Scholars argue that ‘if there is one area of EU policy which might have been expected to bring the EU “closer to the citizens” this is it (gender equality policy; SL)’ (Cram 2001: 603). There is hardly any other policy arena where EU-level norms have gained such visibility across member states, with most member governments making it clear that it is in fact the European Union that demands domestic action to advance gender equality goals. In the next section, I will sketch the main features of EU gender norms before interrogating the public consultation on gender equality in terms of its focus on norm diffusion.

EU Gender Norms: Pathways of Travel and Resistance

In the area of gender policies, the EU historically had an undisputed status as norm entrepreneur. The introduction of equal opportunities legislation on behalf of women throughout the European Community

since the 1970s was ‘a direct consequence of EC level judicial and legislative activity. Whereas in other policy areas, established national policies have become progressively “Europeanized”, the EC was a major catalyst in the generation and extension of national sex equality laws to protect the rights of working women’ (Mazey 1998: 131). The wide range of gender equality directives, Treaty stipulations, Commission Action Programs and rulings of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) made EU level gender equality policies ‘one of the most far-reaching and influential areas of EU competence’ (Cram 2001: 603). Through thousands of mobilisations over the past 50 years, women have called on EU institutions to defend their rights to equal participation and non-discrimination, thus using EU-level norm engagement for domestic struggles for policy reform.

Gender equality as a normative framework can harbour many, at times conflicting or contradictory, policies. Such malleability notwithstanding, it is prescriptive in that it lays out a vision for societal change that is widely acknowledged, but not necessarily collectively understood in the same way or accepted in all its features (see Chapter 1). It is also constitutive, as it has been codified in Directives and rulings by the ECJ. It developed in three phases and iterations: First in the 1970s with a focus on equal opportunities and treatment and supported by the Equal Pay Directive (1975) and the Equal Treatment Directive (1976). This focus was complemented in 1999 by allowing positive action measures by way of Article 141 of the Amsterdam Treaty. At the same time, gender mainstreaming was introduced. Central to the first two iterations of the norm is its deep roots in the Community’s social and labor market policy. Equal opportunities and positive action both were intended to guarantee labor market access and advancement and not equality as an overarching human right. As an ECJ ruling in 1989 specified, Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome and equality directives of the 1970s were ‘a move towards the realisation of equal treatment of men and women, not in general terms, but solely in their capacity as workers’ (Achterberg ruling, *op. cit.* Jacquot 2015: 53). Gender equality was conceptualised as part and parcel of an overall orientation towards unified markets, flexible European work forces, and a competitive business environment. The heart of gender equality was the ‘paid employment nexus’, which, combined with the ‘constraints of member-state cultural and political diversity...greatly narrow the space for EU policymaking’ (Ostner and Lewis 1996: 193).

With the introduction of gender mainstreaming, proponents of gender equality in the Commission hoped to introduce a more comprehensive principle that would cut across policy making domains and governance levels in EU member states. Gender mainstreaming signalled a departure from a sole focus on advancing women in the labor market. Operationalising gender mainstreaming, however, proved to be an indeterminate project that resulted in ambitious, yet ambiguous and often contentious implementation practices. In effect, the gender equality norm morphed from being too focused on labor market participation to becoming too generalised and vague within the gender mainstreaming strategy.

While there always existed a sizeable ‘gap between norms and reality’ (Jacquot 2015: 5) in EU gender equality policy, gender mainstreaming has made this gap more visible across policy fields and member states. Scholars and activists see in particular the last decade of gender equality activism as one of inconsequential and vague engagement (Ahrens 2018; MacRae 2010; Lombardo et al. 2009). They point to the fact that a massive pay gap remains (17% on average in the EU), that violence against women has not been effectively combatted, or that in almost all EU member states women do not hold even close to 50% of parliamentary seats—the average across EU member states being 30% in 2017.⁷ Many see EU gender policy at a crossroads, as it has become more and more acceptable to refrain from actively promoting gender equality norms and instead retreat to a more passive antidiscrimination language (Hubert and Stratigaki 2016).

Recent institutional shifts of the EU-level gender unit as well as changes in the makeup of the EU Parliament and its FEMM committee dampen the public image of strong EU gender norm engagement. While the move of the Commission’s gender equality unit from DG Social and Employment to DG Justice was supposed to broaden the profile of the gender unit, in effect, it seems to weaken its mission (Ahrens 2018). The EU Parliament, moreover, has been hosting stronger ultra-right and anti-gender voices since its last election in 2014, with 7.1% of the German vote alone going to the Alternative for Germany (AfD), in addition to Geert Wilder’s Freedom party and many other right reactionary forces. The ‘gender rubbish’,⁸ as EU Parliamentarian Beatrix von Storch from the radical right AfD never tires to repeat, is considered by the far right a waste of European taxpayers’ money. Public mobilisations against gender norms in politics are on the rise.

Thus, the narrative of the EU as a successful gender equality norm entrepreneur needs a rewrite. What appeared to be active and committed norm diffusion across policy domains and multilevel governance arenas, produced uneven results, with some policy domains being more receptive than others as well as gender equality retrenchment in some member states. The idea of top-down norm diffusion turns out to be just as ‘simplistic’ within the EU as Susanne Zwingel has proclaimed it to be in the international arena of CEDAW (Zwingel 2012). Even though hard and soft law measures signal the Union’s efforts in reaching member states and their citizens, pathways of travel of gender equality norms in the EU are not just paved by EU institutions. Norms are constructed, reshaped and internalised in a multidirectional and polycentric process (van der Vleuten et al. 2013) that depends just as much on socio-economic, political, and cultural legacies in EU member states, on stakeholder advocacy in national and transnational venues, and on media framing, as it does on institutional and policy input from Brussels. But whereas the influence of gender equality networks and experts in policy circles is well documented (i.e. Cullen 2014; Lang 2013; Agustín 2008), we know little about the processes by which the EU tries to involve citizens directly in shaping the gender equality norm. Arguably the only format for such engagement is the public consultation.

THE EU PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON GENDER EQUALITY 2015

The EU’s 2015 ‘Public Consultation on ‘Equality between women and men in the EU’ (EUC 2015a), was launched in April 2015, following a ‘Forum on the Future of Gender Equality in the EU’ that brought together 250 stakeholders in a two-day debate about the outlines of future gender equality foci. The consultation was available in all 23 EU working languages. Citizens had three months, until 21 July 2015, to provide input.

The target groups, as spelled out by the Commission, were: ‘Member States; social partner organisations; civil society organisations with an interest in gender equality issues, violence against women, and/or social issues; equality bodies; and other organisations or individuals’.⁹ Commissioner Věra Jourová emphasised that the Consultation was intended to ‘show the way forward, by gathering sound evidence and examples of concrete actions’ (EUC 2015c: 7). Consulting the public is presented as delivering ‘a baseline against which to measure progress’

that informed the Strategic Engagement 2016–2019, which was released four months after the consultation period ended (*ibid.*: 9). We thus have three data sets available to gauge norm engagement with regard to diffusion and travel: The original raw consultation data,¹⁰ the EUC report with an aggregated analysis of the consultation, published in October 2015 (EUC 2015b), and finally the resulting Staff Working Document ‘Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016–2019’ (EUC 2015c) that outlines EUC priorities for this period.

In order to gauge citizen input on the gender equality norm as well as EUC uptake, we focus on the 3488 *individual* responses to questions posed by the EUC. Comparing the three available data sets will illustrate how the EUC attempts to frame and curate the gender equality norm, the formal and substantive challenges to the normative framework it provides, as well as the uptake from ‘listening’, i.e. how it utilises the input of the consultation.

Curating the Norm

The consultation questionnaire that was available online between April and July 2015 consisted of 12 questions, each assessing particular aspects of the EU gender equality norm. The first four questions asked respondents to judge the current strategic priorities of the EUC and in particular if these priorities should be continued or if there were other inequalities between women and men as well as other constituencies that require more attention. Questions 5 through 8 asked for prioritisation of actions in the main areas of EU engagement, i.e. labor market, care work and gender based violence. Questions 9–11 focused on gender mainstreaming, asking about better integration of a gender perspective in specific policy fields, strategies of mainstreaming, as well as the major partners for it. Question 12 allowed for additional comments. In 10 out of the 12 questions, citizens were allowed to identify their top two priorities from a range of 9–16 choices offered. Write-ins under a category of ‘other’ were possible for all questions, but used only by a small fraction of respondents.

4888 individuals and organisations responded to the consultation online, of which 71.2% were unaffiliated individual citizens and 28.8% were made on behalf of organisations (EUC 2015b). This is not a particularly high response rate to a consultation. Around the same time, the Consultation on EU copyright policies had over 11,000 responses, a

little less than half from individuals. And a public consultation on investor–state relations within TTIP, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, received nearly 150,000 replies.¹¹

In and with the consultation, the EUC provides a particular framing of gender equality by way of highlighting some substantive aspects of the norm over others, some central actors over others, and some action items over others. Frames are used ‘to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient...in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation...’ (Entman 1993: 52). Assessing the main body of the consultation, three policy areas appear key to EUC gender equality: The norm is articulated in the context of labor market, violence against women, and care policies, thus arguably by selecting established, time tested, and less controversial aspects of the norm. Alternative or other frames that inform current public debates on gender equality are curiously absent from the consultation, such as religion, prostitution or anti-genderism.

The actors that the EUC puts forth as needing ‘more focused attention’ to ensure gender equality are primarily those targeted in the policy fields above. Leaving aside the 32% who responded ‘none of these groups’ (we will address their input in the next section), respondents were allowed to pick two out of the following targets for action (Fig. 9.1).

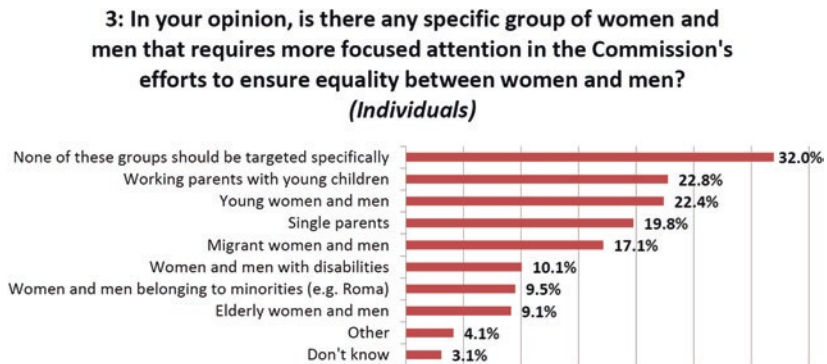


Fig. 9.1 Individual submissions to public consultation on gender equality 2015: Groups requiring more focused attention

Limiting the responses to two in a majority of the closed-ended questions has a pronounced reinforcement and stratification effect. While the former might have been intended in order to unearth clear policy priorities, the latter is less desirable in terms of identifying complex target priorities. Whole groups of actors, such as the elderly, migrants and citizens with disabilities are being artificially made marginal. An intersectional perspective is missing from the questionnaire. The construction of answer options thus is productive in two ways: It unpacks gender equality in a particular way and, in the process, reaffirms social hierarchies. As Towns argues ‘...norms do not simply generate a more homogenous society of like units – they simultaneously help differentiate and hierarchically order actors. Homogenising and stratifying tendencies are mutually implicated in norms’ (Towns 2012: 189).

The consultation also asks for specific policy fields in which a gender perspective should be better integrated, again limiting responses to two (Fig. 9.2).

Curation, in particular the limit to two responses and the sequencing of answer options, results in a booster effect for the traditional EU focus on ‘employment/social’ and ‘education’, while marginalising fields such as ‘asylum & migration’ or ‘development’. Since gender mainstreaming actually applies to *all* these policy fields, it is even more interesting that we see a reification of already existing priorities. Thus, much of the consultation produces an echo of where the EU already is most visible

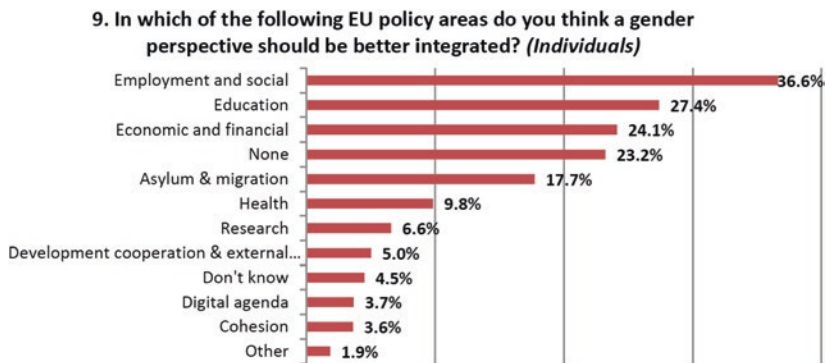


Fig. 9.2 Individual submissions to public consultation on gender equality 2015: Better integration of gender perspective in specific policy areas

to citizens in terms of promoting gender equality instead of showcasing a possible urgency of actions in many other and different policy fields. Curating the gender equality norm thus to some degree results in reifying the status quo in terms of policies, targets and actors.

Challenging the Norm

Formally, the consultation is intended and used to inform current and future policy. The normative orientation for actions that it purports to receive from the responses, so the assumption fueling the public consultation process, should be taken seriously and should provide EU policy making with legitimacy. However, there are at least two caveats to the legitimacy of norm engagement in this particular consultation. One is the question of representativeness, as the overwhelming majority of respondents come from Western European member states (Fig. 9.3).

If we combine the five largest submissions from member states, that is from Germany, the UK, Italy, Austria, and Spain, more than 85% of the individual responses originate in these Western member states, whose inhabitants make up for a combined 51.7% of European citizens. Most tellingly, participation rates in those countries hit hardest by the financial crisis in the early 2010s are quite low. Did women's organisations in these specific Western member states mobilise their constituencies more

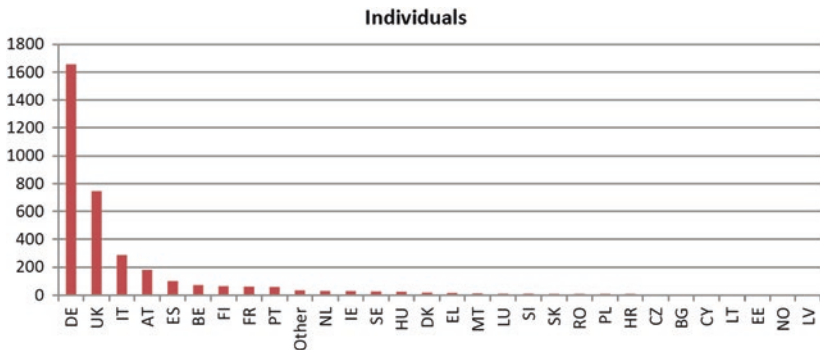


Fig. 9.3 Individual submissions to public consultation on gender equality 2015 by country (*Source* EUC 2015b [It is unclear why Norway was included in the consultation results, bringing the number of countries up to 29 in this figure])

effectively than those in the East or in the South? Do equality norms have higher acceptance in Germany than in the Netherlands? Nowhere does the report on the consultation address or critically engage with the imbalance of submissions and the resulting lack of representativeness of the results. To what degree such imbalances influence the EUC's perceptions regarding the salience of outcomes remains unclear.

A second, not formal, but substantive challenge to the norm put forward in the consultation is that, among the 3488 individual responses, more than 20% were submitted by German anti-feminist individuals. These 720 responses exhibit a common framing as they mostly use identical phrases, pointing to a common source of mobilisation. They note that gender equality has gone too far and that there does not need to be any further emphasis on advancing women, translated as 'the mission for equality between men and women is accomplished' (EUC 2015a) or 'please do not spend any money on this topic'. Individuals added, for example, that 'positive discrimination should be forbidden' and that the EU should 'move on to important issues' (ibid.) To all the questions in which the consultation is asking contributors to prioritise specific gender equality policy, this group responds negatively with 'none'. In effect, every fifth respondent to the consultation is a norm challenger. German anti-feminists have hijacked the consultation. These responses also signal the situatedness of norms in particular contexts. Moreover, in the German case, the prominent role of the AfD¹² as well as other vocal anti-feminists might have inspired more organised activism than in other countries.

In the EUC evaluation report on the consultation, the fact that these individuals responded negatively to the norm itself is mentioned, however only in passing. Their impact on the distributive range of responses to specific questions is obvious in the tables and figures but ignored in the interpretative sections of the report. The norm challengers are not acknowledged, neither is their problematic impact, namely that their responses skew the overall consultation results. What is even more puzzling is that we find no active critical engagement with the articulation of an anti-gender norm in the evaluation report. If the consultation is intended to provide a platform for critical norm engagement, if the modus of 'listening' would inform the EUC's treatment of the consultation process, active critical engagement with this rising anti-gender sentiment might have been warranted.

Normative Uptake

Commission uptake from the consultation appears to be limited. In the abstract, the public consultation was supposed to provide the EUC with information on how citizens understood, evaluated and in the future wanted gender equality policy designed that would in turn inform Commission policy. Since, however, the consultation was curated to reaffirm existing EU policy priorities, it is not surprising that the EUC apparently learned relatively little from it. Four months after the consultation closed, the Commission put forth the ‘Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016–2019’ as a Commission staff working document only, defying the majority of organisations that explicitly had asked for a new *formal strategy* for gender equality with spelled out budget implications. Staff working documents in the EU do have mostly technical character. They neither gain the visibility of soft law measures or directives nor do they present roadmaps for member states and spell out budgets for specific actions. The document thus falls clearly in line with what Petra Ahrens calls ‘retrenchment’ of EU gender equality policy and ‘the end of gender equality policy programmes as previously known’ (Ahrens 2018: 2 and 244).

The working document 2016–2019 refers to the 2015 public consultation exactly in two places of the 27-page dossier, namely in the foreword and introduction, where the Commission emphasises that 94% of the organisations that replied ‘consider the priorities laid out in the current strategy still to be valid for future engagement’ (EUC 2015c: 4), and, secondly, when referring to the Barcelona targets and a future consultation on work–life balance (ibid.: 10 and 22). The term ‘continue’ or ‘continue to’ appears 59 times in the document, signalling that public acceptance of the road travelled and the priorities staked out previously is high. Rhetorically, the Commission uses the consultation thus as affirmation and echo chamber, while also signalling future uptake of results in the next consultation on work/life balance policy.

In sum: With the public consultation process, the EUC curates the gender equality norm in a way that reifies existing priorities, sidelines challenges and challengers and minimises critical uptake. Instead of opening up debate about skewed participation and lack of representativeness, the report on the consultation glosses over these issues. Any stretching and bending of the norm is inhibited by formal elements of the questionnaire (the 2 responses limit) as well as by ordering of options and neglect of alternative answers.

CONCLUSION: PUBLIC CONSULTATION AS NORMATIVE ECHO CHAMBER

European Union officials and units, faced with questions about their democratic legitimacy, have committed to feeling the pulse of EU publics and actively engage with EU citizens on norms and ensuing policy priorities. The public consultation process reflects the Commission's attempt to increase public outreach beyond interest groups, experts and professional civil society actors. This chapter interrogated consultations as a vehicle for engagement with the gender equality norm. We identified two normative dimensions that are at work in the consultation process: one the communication norm itself with its focus on 'listening' to European publics; two, the substantive engagement with particular norms that are embedded in or central to a consultation, in this case the gender equality norm. We asked how the 'listening' norm is inscribed in the architecture of the consultation, how the substantive norm is put up for debate, and if and how engagement with the norm is taken up within the EUC policy process.

The analysis provided evidence that both the specific architecture and practical process of consultations pose challenges to the idea of 'listening' and critical norm engagement, resulting in a reification of existing EU-level norms. The form of the consultation inhibits deviation and lacks a focus on inclusiveness and representativeness. The way in which the EUC unpacks the gender equality norm focuses on established frames such as labor market and work/life balance subthemes. This, combined with formal limits to possible answers, tends to produce an echo chamber instead of critical norm engagement. The few normative challenges that appear in the consultation come out of specific domestic political environments on national and subnational levels and respondents' preconceived collective frames, thus situating the responses to consultation in particular contexts. This situatedness of norms is, however, neglected in the 'uptake' and output of the consultation.

As Fejerskov and colleagues state in the introduction to this volume, norms are never free of power relations because they signal control. In the case of the public consultation on gender equality, the EUC exhibits control over frames as well as actor preferences and ensuing policy agendas. Ignoring what Susanne Zwingel has called the 'nonlinear dynamic of norm production' (Zwingel 2012: 116) the EUC sidelines the validity and potential significance of anti-feminist German respondents or the

fact that responses from East Central European countries were scarce, again calling listening and learning in question. Ironically, the EUC utilised the consultation as a vehicle for diffusing specific kinds of norms and for renewing a kind of ‘pro forma’ legitimacy, rather than for critical norm engagement. The EUC thus is on par with the diffusion paradigm that remains still relatively unchallenged in the European Union norm literature (see also Fejerskov et al. 2019).

In his recent speech on the future of European integration, French President Emmanuel Macron has called for a stop on ‘being afraid of the people’¹³ and for emboldening Europeans with a new set of involvements that transcend what he called current ‘yes and no’ options to EU-level proposals. Only if EU institutions design public consultations with larger spaces for citizen voice; if they ask where citizens see the major roots of gender inequalities in their respective local and national environments or fields of activity; if the EUC does not shy away from critical norm engagement and not whitewash the conflictual voices within the consultation process, can consultations be more than echo chambers for predefined policy initiatives.

NOTES

1. https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations_en?field_consultation_status_value=open&field_core_policy_areas_target_id_selective=All (accessed January 12, 2018).
2. EU glossary “democratic deficit” at http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/democratic_deficit_en.htm.
3. For early attempts see Fishkin (1991).
4. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-03-122_en.htm.
5. Details are available through the Commissions website at https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/contribute-law-making/participate-law-making-process_en (access January 2, 2018).
6. Assuming that knowledge about an open or upcoming consultation is transmitted to citizens via national and subnational interest groups and media.
7. World Bank data base of women in parliaments at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS> (access January 20, 2018).
8. Beatrix von Storch, German AfD EU Parliamentarian, in the EU Parliament debate, March 15, 2017, access at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7flxzkACbQ> (February 1, 2018).
9. http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/gender-equality/opinion/150421_en.htm.

10. The raw response data were made available to our research team upon request to DG Justice in February 2016.
11. see trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2015/january/tradoc_153044.pdf (access January 13, 2018).
12. The Alternative for Germany won 7.1 of the German votes in the European Parliament elections in spring 2015.
13. <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/initiative-pour-l-europe-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-pour-une-europe-souveraine-unie-democratique/> (access December 14, 2017).

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CHAPTER 10

Deeds Not Words: The Marginalising Effects of Global Gender Equality Norms

Lata Narayanaswamy

INTRODUCTION

The very idea that ‘gender and development’ is itself understood as an identifiable development discourse, with associated and recognisable norms embodied in global-level agreements such as the MDGs and the SDGs, is an enduring victory of the tireless work of feminist development theorists and practitioners since the 1970s. The prominence of messages around gender equality embodied in these goals represent decades of contestation and adaptation of development norms that underline powerful shared ideas around the type of society for which we might collectively strive.

This collection of essays comes at a crucial time, when questions around how ‘progressive’ social justice ideals such as gender equality become actualised in practice are increasingly coming to the fore. The findings from the GLONO project that underpin much of the scholarship in this book, led by the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), inspire critical reflections on the machinations of norm

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establishment, engagement and proliferation. As the introduction to this collection argues, norms themselves are frequently discussed in the literature as static entities with their own subjectivities and identifiable boundaries. The departure into a consideration of ‘situated norm-engagement’, whereby ideas and those individual, groups and institutions that engage with them are all part of fluid and dynamic subjectivities, must therefore consider not just the dynamics of the ideas that underpin these situated norms, but how the codification of these ideas affects the dynamics. How ideas are codified and communicated is as important as the substance of the ideas that ultimately gain purchase as ‘gender norms’ in global development discourse and practice. I argue in this chapter that the fixed-spaced representation of an identifiable ‘gender norm’ that this book seeks to challenge is itself a function of what I have called elsewhere ‘dominant ways of knowing’ (2017), underpinned and proliferated by certain professionalised modes of communication that have become integral but largely invisible, taken-for-granted mechanisms of dominant knowledge systems.

This chapter explores the professionalisation of development communications, a process that in turn shapes the diffusion of gender norms in development discourse and practice. This professionalisation results in the privileging of modes of information consisting of books, reports, conference papers and pamphlets, and modes of dissemination such as book launches, conferences and expert training. The presumption that actors in the Global South in particular have the capacity to privilege the voices of those on the margins and thus offer subversive counter narratives to mainstream development that might ultimately diversify global gender norms is undermined by this professionalisation. The analysis argues that these modes of engagement reinforce the primacy of the written word and associated forms of literacy alongside the tendency for English to be the ‘language’ of development and the form in which ideas are codified and thus legitimised, with implications for our understanding of what constitutes global gender ‘norms’ and any concomitant exclusion in gender and development discourse and practice. The chapter begins by reflecting on the emergence of a ‘gender norm’, rooting this at least partially in the hegemonic tendencies of development discourse and practice that are underpinned by professionalised modes of information and communication proceeds that have become invisible elements of how we ‘know’. The empirical discussion draws on data from a larger study looking at the knowledge practices of a network of

women's NGOs. This study highlights contradictory commitments to create space for the voices of marginalised women whilst relying heavily on the English language to engage in modes of communication including printed reports and conferences as part of their routine functions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of this professionalisation for how we understand the dominance of fixed-space approaches to prevalent 'gender norms'.

REFLECTING ON THE 'GENDER NORM'

Gender and development, initially a subversive response to the gender-blindness of mainstream development, has itself become a transnational discourse and has, as a result, generated its own elite elements (see for example, Alvarez 1998; Amadiume 2000; Monasterios 2007). There is thus a need to reflect on the diffusion and translation of global norms around gender and development. A key aspect of the argument I put forth in this chapter, and which I have rehearsed elsewhere (Narayanaswamy 2016), is that spaces of dialogue and contestation, including anti-hegemonic engagement presumed to derive from actors and spaces located in the Global South, are silenced by the professionalisation of gender and development discourse, with implications for our understanding of the relative inclusivity/exclusivity to different individuals/groups occupying diverse discursive and/or geographical locations. This silencing is partly the result of the tendency to exclude, as the Sangtin Writers (2006) have suggested, those people, particularly women, on the margins who most often suffer the starkest material consequences of (gender-blind) development shortcomings. Whilst the hegemonic tendencies of development are intimately and historically bound up with processes of professionalisation, as I discuss below, the implications of these processes for how we perceive gender and development discourse and practice have not been sufficiently explored in the literature.

In my previous work (Narayanaswamy 2014, 2016, 2017), I have thus critiqued this top-down tendency, highlighting concerns around how ideas move in the realm of gender and development, echoing concerns raised by the postcolonial literature (see Spivak 1988; Mohanty 1991), and bringing together a range of scholarship and empirical evidence that points to a 'disconnect' between feminist development mobilisation at the global and local level. This 'disconnect' is

typified by global conferences and resultant declarations emerging from Women's World Conferences and annual UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meetings, and the so-called 'grassroots' mobilising from which many of these forms of feminist engagement claim to draw both their motivation and legitimacy. The concern in this previous work has been to highlight concerns around the elite capture of Southern feminist priorities in diverse developing country contexts, where some capitulation to the instrumentalisation of gender norms that serve the interests of global development and elite feminist ideals is evidenced.

But if we accept that norms themselves are always subject to a certain degree of contestation, then whose 'norms' are 'the norm' and how do they become so? And why might professionalisation matter? To unpack this further, we need briefly to revisit arguments about the nature and dominance of development's 'frame'.

HEGEMONY, PROFESSIONALISATION AND NORMS

The hegemonic tendencies of development as both discourse and practice, whilst arguably continually contested, are a constant feature of development's intellectual landscape. Escobar (1995: 40) suggested a relational element to this hegemony, where the idea of 'development' draws legitimacy from a constellation of international organisations alongside ideas about modernity that then determine 'what can be thought and said'. Shades of being more or less 'developed', as Pigg (1992) reminds us, is a tendency not strictly limited to conventional North-South divides; development has been taken up as a frame, a label, a language used to reflect communal beliefs about perceived, relative alignment with often aspirational notions of 'modernity'. Pigg's (1992) critical reflection on the uptake of the idea of *bikas* as the local word for 'development' in Nepal is instructive. It signals both the primacy of English as the language that frames the proliferation of development as an idea—'for *bikās* comes to them with its English language labels firmly attached' (ibid.: 503)—as well as the hegemony of the idea of development-as-modernity and social progress that seems to promise so much, making it a laudable objective of national planning priorities and processes. These 'development' goals reflect a familiar menu of shared purposes:

States subscribe to remarkably similar purposes – economic growth, social equality, the political and human rights of the individual ... As these models gain a taken-for-granted or rulelike status, it becomes advantageous for organizations to comply in at least symbolic ways. (Strang and Meyer 1993: 491)

Development also continues to be characterised as an imagined end-state not only for countries or regions, but as an aspirational quality that may be ascribed to particular individuals or groups. Kothari (2005: 427) builds on Escobar's concerns around 'modernity', drawing on Parpart (1995) to suggest that a prevailing belief exists that some people are more developed than others, 'embodied in the ideas and practices of the professional'. These 'professional people' represent one manifestation of 'development': 'elites are already in the future because they are more *bikāsi* (developed), while villagers remain in the past or at best an inadequate present' (Pigg 1992: 501). Sharing physical or geographic space is not necessarily meaningful; Strang and Meyer (1993: 489) highlight research that suggests that 'structurally equivalent actors—individuals whose relations to all others are similar—influence each other more than do directly connected actors'. The 'cosmopolitan' elite of Pigg's (1992: 506) Nepal find more recent echoes in Baillie Smith and Jenkins' (2011) 'transnational cosmopolitanism' that they argue is validated through a range of mechanisms including financial and language capacity facilitating travel and networking in transnational 'spaces' such as international conferences. It is a reality reflected in a range of scholarship, such as in Mawdsley's (2004: 85) observation of India's middle classes:

... a transnational class of people who are bound up in the cultural and economic transactions of contemporary globalization, and who have more in common and closer social relations with parallel classes in South Africa, Australia and the USA than with the parochialized 'have-nots' of their own nation.

What is important about this set of observations for the present analysis is to identify a set of transnational movements of people, ideas and values from which an identifiable 'gender' norm might emerge. Samarasinghe's (2014) work offers some intriguing insight here in relation to the proliferation of gender norms in development. In trying to understand how 'gender' as an idea maps onto the work of women's rights organisations

in Sri Lanka, she shares her anecdotal experience of querying classmates in her 'Women's Development' class whose first language is not English about how 'gender' is translated in their native language. In all 17 cases, her peers told her that the local word for 'gender' simply translated into 'sex'. Reflecting the reality on the ground in the Sri Lankan context in which she undertook her fieldwork, she is further confronted by a real concern amongst female respondents engaged in women's rights work who are variously supporting women to gain elected office or run their small businesses. Local translations of 'gender' into Sinhala become the 'male/female social concept', and her respondents shared real worries about the 'deflection' of attention from hard won gains by women in terms of confidence and visibility.

Samarasinghe draws attention to the pressure from donors who fund these local NGOs to use the language of 'gender', with one of her respondents also suggesting that the 'Colombo Ladies'—the local terminology that Samarasinghe (2014) suggests is used to refer to 'the more educated scholars and feminists who are based in the main metropolis of Colombo'—are welcome to use the word 'gender' but they will continue to use 'women' in their local work. The imposition of the language of 'gender' on to the work of local Sri Lankan women's rights activists reflects Laurie et al. observation (2005: 484) 'that local indigenous knowledge must first be professionalised (ordered and systematised) so that it can be circulated and shared', a process that 'is intimately bound up in transnational development discourses and networks'. Taken together, these reflections clearly point to the potential proliferation of 'gender' as a dominant 'norm' underpinned by both Northern and (local) elite feminist machinations in line with my own research in this area (discussed above).

Taken together, these theoretical and empirical insights draw our attention to the transnational cosmopolitanism that substantively underpins the dominance of development's frame, the broad spatial, linguistic and discursive mechanism through which development as an idea is sustained and from which development 'norms' emerge, wherein 'gender' is a key referent. The idea that there can be such a quantifiable, identifiable entity as a 'gender norm' relies on a range of stakeholders validating a particular set of ideas in a range of contexts as 'gender norms' that demands, amongst other things, the use of the term 'gender' itself which, as Samarasinghe's work highlights, is not unproblematic. The MDGs established 'gender equality' as a development 'norm'

(along with the targets it set around, for instance, primary school enrolment), a process that has accelerated with the acceptance and proliferation of the SDG targets and their much wider range of goals that highlight gender norms as a particularised and aspirational form of positive ‘development’. The notion of gender equality as a universal and aspirational goal, encapsulated in SDG5, could be argued to be an extension of Strang and Meyer’s ‘remarkably similar purposes’ for, at least, ‘symbolic purposes’.

In my view, however, this view only partly explains how certain ideas about gender have come to be understood as norms. If we are to understand the nature of norm creation, proliferation and uptake, what I hope to highlight in this chapter is that HOW ideas are captured and communicated as norms is as important as the dominance of the ideas that underpin norms themselves. What is the actual mechanism by which a certain idea becomes a norm? To what extent might these processes shape or indeed constrain any perceived norm creation process itself? In citing the work of Goetz (2015) on bureaucratisation, women and development, I have noted that what results is that ‘only certain articulations of knowledge are validated’ (Narayanaswamy 2016: 2160), where legitimacy is achieved not just by alignment with dominant and/or depoliticised, technocratic discourses, but concretised through particularised ‘ways of knowing’ embodied in the written formats in which dominant knowledges are recorded, validated and proliferated. It is to interrogating this overlooked element of the ‘professionalisation’ of (gender and) development discourse and practice that this analysis now turns.

What Matters Is Not Only What You Say but How You Say It ...

To challenge the idea of a fixed-space norm, we need to have an understanding of the mechanisms that both generate and sustain the idea of an identifiable, fixed development and/or gender norm in the first place. For Kothari, development’s hegemony is embodied in the ‘key figure’ of the ‘expert’:

This production of the “professional” development expert, identified as such not solely because of the extent and form of their knowledge but often because of who they are and where they come from, legitimises and authorises their interventions by valorising their particular *technical* skills. (Kothari 2005: 426; my emphasis)

She goes on to suggest (2005: 439) issues became ‘technicalised’ and ‘subject to regimes of professionalisation with institutionalised forms of knowledge, analytical skills, tools, techniques and frameworks’. These skills were, and continue to be, disseminated through ‘training schemes and courses of study, producing professional “experts”’. This focus on ‘technical expertise’ echoes Ferguson’s (1994) concerns in his book *The Anti-politics Machine*. Ferguson’s concern highlights a related and persistent problem; that is, that ‘development’ is increasingly understood as a technocratic exercise that creates a machine for ‘reinforcing and expanding the exercise of bureaucratic state power’, underpinned by deliberate and sustained attempts of staying outside of or above ‘politics’ and thus rendering ‘development’ as a neutral and predictable change process. Inevitably, navigating technical change processes necessitates the deployment of experts: ‘Expatriate consultants and “experts” swarm in the capital city of Maseru, churning out plans, programmes and, most of all, *paper*, at an astonishing rate’ (Ferguson and Lohmann 1994: 176; my emphasis).

Hidden amongst the concerns arising from these professionalised, apolitical tendencies is the actual nuts and bolts of HOW this professional, technocratic, bureaucratic system is maintained and proliferated. These authors point to ‘paper’ and ‘technical skills’ and ‘churning out plans’ as part of this development machinery. A key concern then is to understand both how ideas are codified and thus legitimised. Here the literature points tangentially to the ways in which professionalised engagement has itself become a norm, with implications for how we understand inclusion/exclusion in development practice. Samarasinghe herself unwittingly highlights this in her recounting of her informants’ words on the nature of their concerns around the use of the term ‘gender’:

These newly constructed words/phrases may be useful when writing *reports*. But as far as our work is concerned our focus is on ‘women’ and if the Colombo Ladies (*Colomba Nonala*) want to use the new concept for their *reports* let them do it. (2014: 33; my emphasis)

It is not simply that the ‘Colombo Ladies’ support (or are pressured by donors to support) the ideas being proliferated by donors about the importance of ‘gender’—what this passage highlights is HOW this idea becomes entrenched i.e., through the writing of *reports*. Samarasinghe’s

interviews with other NGO activists echo the findings of the managerialist tendencies of NGO work in a range of developing country contexts (see Mawdsley et al. 2002) with its emphasis on logframes, tick-boxes and rankings and other measures that have little relevance to the local context. Yet these paperwork exercises are also exercises in professionalisation, formalising and thus narrowing the forms of communication deemed legitimate by Northern development practice norms. The result in Samarasinghe's field study appears to suggest that gender norms AND the use of report writing as a communications norm both potentially limit engagement with the counter-concern about what an emphasis on gender might mean for local-level women's rights work.

And the filling of forms and writing of reports are part of a broader trend in what Baillie Smith and Jenkins (2011) have termed the professionalisation and 'cosmopolitanism' of global civil society. In their work they raise concerns that there is a trend towards networking undertaken through conferences, meetings, book launches and other events that at least partly represent a professionalisation of development practice that has the effect of narrowing the inclusion of voices from the Global South to those transnational, cosmopolitan and technocratic elites able to engage in development's hegemonic discursive frame, itself constituted by these transnational activities.

A key element underpinning this professionalisation, embodied in the conferences and book launches that are proliferated through new ICTs and peer-reviewed publications worth noting is the dominance of English. This is a concern that I have also problematised extensively in my other work (see Narayanaswamy 2017), but it is worth reflecting specifically on this question of HOW information is being communicated for the purposes of this analysis. Although materials in other languages are increasingly available, the dominant language of development is still English. The use of the English language and its particular idioms, grammatical uses and meanings suggest that only those who speak this language are likely to be able to communicate and use information produced in it, effectively, limiting its utility. We see this in Nabacwa's (2002: 45) work in Uganda. She cites the work of a campaign to raise awareness of a *Domestic Relations Bill*, arguing that 'newspapers and English have been used as a major means of communication for the campaign [yet m]any women cannot buy newspapers and cannot read English' (Nabacwa 2002: 45). The literature is clear that English is an elite language and so creates systematic exclusion in terms of who

is ‘allowed’ to participate. This type of inclusion and exclusion, Stone argues, characterises the operation of networks that are key to the operation of Baillie Smith and Jenkins’ ‘transnational cosmopolitanism’:

Networks systematise knowledge generated by diverse individual and organisational knowledge actors and impose a rationality that gives precedence to a particular conception of knowledge - usually of a codified, technocratic, secular, westernised variety. Participation is informally restricted and regulated through boundary drawing discourses by the network to exclude or devalue indigenous or protest knowledge that does not conform to techno-scientific criteria. (Stone 2005: 99)

The creation, proliferation and uptake of a particular ‘norm’ depends, therefore, not only on the power of a message but in how it’s communicated. The legitimacy of certain types of information—that which is codified and systematised in a way that may be understood and taken up in professionalised contexts—is therefore central to norm diffusion. The empirical evidence considers the challenges this professionalisation creates.

UNPACKING PROFESSIONALISATION AND GENDER EMPIRICALLY

The empirical research cited here is part of a larger study that set out to examine the changing nature of information as it moved between one gender information intermediary based in the North—the Gender and Development Knowledge Service (GDKS—a pseudonym)—to a number of intermediaries and user groups based in the South, in this case, in the city of New Delhi in India. In order to interrogate the functionality of these supply-side information systems investments, I conducted a qualitative, multi-site ethnography, consisting of interviews, (participant) observation, and extensive documentary analysis between October 2006 and June 2009. Some elements of the data were more recently updated in August 2015, reflecting the exponential and unexpected proliferation of new types of mobile media, including mobile telephony and the concomitant ease and reduced cost of accessing rapidly evolving social media and supporting platforms (Sanou 2015). This has resulted in more diverse uses of new ICTs, reflected in the online engagement of all the organisations being studied here, all of which have more dynamic

websites that now include social media elements such as YouTube channels, Twitter feeds, Facebook pages and blogs. This update maintains the internal consistency of the narrative emerging from the original field study and associated documentary evidence and analysis, whilst acknowledging important changes in the communications landscape.

In addition to ascertaining what people did with the information made available by GDKs, the findings were further triangulated through an in-depth study of the knowledge work of 17 women's organisations, including NGOs, research centres, and units within large, mainstream Indian development NGOs on GDKs' mailing list in New Delhi. The mailing list included NGOs engaged in a diversity of issues including women's political rights, employment and economic rights, women's sexual and reproductive health, women's empowerment, consciousness-raising, education and literacy, social policy and women's rights, governance, democracy, and participation. All 17 mission statements articulate commitments to develop, promote, and disseminate increased volumes of information to support activities such as education, awareness-raising, advocacy, conscientisation, training, and capacity building. Of central importance across these statements is a commitment to mobilising marginalised women's voices, to improving women's self-awareness and reliance and ultimately to achieve poor women's empowerment. The organisations ranged from small NGOs housed in a two-bedroom flat, to mid-size NGOs occupying an entire house, through to large, internationally recognised research centres providing research and consultancy services on women, gender, and development in India. The data analysed in this chapter draws on the findings of this triangulated collective case study to look specifically at the oral and written dissemination practices undertaken by these 17 organisations.

Professionalised Communications as the 'Norm'

The empirical analysis highlights two main findings in relation to professionalisation and the proliferation of gender norms. The first is that there is a tendency to privilege dominant ways of knowing that necessitate the 'technical' skills Kothari and Ferguson ascribe to development experts and technocrats. This technical expertise depends on producing reports, books, pamphlets and the written word more broadly to communicate for training, education and advocacy purposes, circumscribing attempts at developing more nuanced, situated approaches to norm engagement.

The second finding is that this professionalisation is also embodied in the pervasive use of the English-language, with implications for the language and idioms in which ideas are articulated even as we seek to understand norms as something that are fluid rather than fixed.

Firstly, given the emphasis that the mission statements of these organisations place on poor women's 'voices' and the potential for more situated approaches to gender 'norms', what is most striking in analysing the modes of information and communication used by these organisations is the narrow emphasis placed on basic literacy as the basis for communications strategies, effectively excluding semi-literate groups. The data revealed that some limited oral dissemination occurs with 'people at the field level' who are identified by all but three organisations as key target groups. These organisations communicate with the 'grassroots' through action research, campaigns and events, self-help groups, peer educators and formal and informal education and training. Whilst these sound like forms of engagement that are oral and/or performative in nature, in fact these are underpinned by the production and dissemination of pamphlets, booklets, training manuals and newsletters geared towards grassroots partners and marginalised constituents in both urban and rural areas. These organisations also disseminate their research through the production of books, reports, journals, working papers, newsletters, websites and online discussion boards that are disseminated as part of professional training, seminars, workshops, conferences, email and print mailing; these efforts are mainly subsumed under commitments to awareness-raising and advocacy, particularly in relation to the media, other partners and policymakers.

Privileging the printed word as a means of disseminating information in the hopes of facilitating a knowledge creation process for marginalised groups is problematic. Those groups less likely to benefit from information presented in a heavily textual format are those either with limited access to basic education and thus low levels of literacy, or those groups that privilege alternative (e.g.: oral) information archiving and exchange practices, a point emphasised by one key informant:

... they [Indian women's movement] were reaching out to people through other ways ... including the printed word. In India, for instance, so many, many women are non-literate, to rely only on the printed word itself would be a limitation.... (Research Fellow, Research Organisation)

Privileging the printed word as a primary means of communicating with partners, clients or beneficiaries necessitates both a verbal and written functionality in a common language as a prerequisite for participation in dominant knowledge systems. Access to new ICTs also raises similar questions around the underlying pedagogies of learning and written language that the use of these technologies entails (see Castells 2001; Warschauer 2003). Yet all of these organisations disseminate copious amounts of information in a range of print and electronic formats, with a notable emphasis on websites, blogs, books, reports and training manuals that showcase their research about women. A key informant who is a retired Indian civil servant lamented the futility of efforts tied up with the demands of professionalised forms of communication for goals such as poor women's empowerment:

The dissemination unfortunately in India has a different lopsidedness, because not all people are educated. If you take women as a target group in their 40s, some states, such as Kerala have 100 per cent educated, but you have some states where 15-20% are educated. Any amount of information you are producing is of no use. Even if you disseminate, how many people or what percentage of women are using it? What percentage of women have the access? It is not the dearth or lack of information – India has plenty of information – plenty so much that even we find it difficult to handle. So I will never say there is a lack or dearth of information ... but otherwise, even whatever is reaching, how much is being used? The rural population in India is 70% and the educated people within this may only be half, what will they do? And even the educated people, after reading what are they doing? Awareness is coming up, but how much each educated woman is sharing what she has gained? ... You may be doing plenty of work in Delhi, maybe state capitals, maybe even district headquarters, nothing is lacking here, NGOs are all working, but beyond district, what is happening? There's a big gap. And even if you are reaching, how much are you giving woman to woman, person to person contact, because uneducated women need this...

Secondly, a mixture of languages is also represented in their work, but the dominance of English is what stands out most starkly. Drawing on the documentary analysis, what became clear is that oral and written communication in original or translated Hindi is used to connect with, as well as collect data from, marginalised groups at the grassroots. By contrast, written and oral communications in English are used primarily at

the level of policy or decision-making, including conferences, seminars and for advocacy purposes. Professional training is largely conducted in English, as is the vast majority of written communication, including reports, books, papers and pamphlets, with no translation of materials from Hindi or other local language into English being done.

There is a tendency in the literature to posit that this professionalisation—evidenced by the privileging of the written word and the extensive use of English—exists as a binary; that the professionalisation is happening simply at the global level and in ways that simply dominate or universally exclude the voices of those people based in the Global South beyond the ‘cosmopolitan’ (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011) or transnational elites (Mawdsley 2004) capable of functioning in global, elite spaces dominated by Northern stakeholders. And to some extent in my own field study this is true, with the pressures of upward accountability to donors as embodied in the serial production of logframes and reports all raised as key concerns by informants based in bilateral organisations, INGOs and Indian NGOs. But a more subtle form of exclusion resulting from the professionalisation of communication was also evidenced operating within this Southern context that reflects important variations on concerns around professionalisation and codification of ‘Southern’ or ‘indigenous’ knowledge expressed by Laurie et al. (2005).

I attended the launch of comic books designed to inform young people about HIV/AIDS and sexuality hosted by a large INGO and invited guests from a wide range of bilateral organisations, INGOs and local Indian NGOs, most of whom were the implementing partners for the project. The comics themselves were commissioned and created by a consortia of local and regional organisations underpinned by bilateral funding. Implementing partners were local health NGOs and youth groups tasked with disseminating the comics to young adolescent men in slum communities. I was a participant insofar as I was seated at a table with other invitees, but I sought to try as much as possible to simply observe the dynamics of knowledge production and dissemination being performed through this lunchtime event. The discursive space that was created demonstrated how the professionalisation of communications and the dominance of the English language as an increasingly fixed ‘norm’ in development practice constrains the space for contestation and dialogue around the nature and function of ideational ‘norms’ and whose ideas count within this. The event opened with a speech delivered by a senior figure from a large government-funded health agency, and this was followed by small group work designed to

collectively develop strategies on how to optimise the distribution and uptake of the comics.

What became clear was that language became the key dividing line. The target audience for the comics was adolescent men in slum communities, so the comics had been produced in Hindi (which in itself presupposes literacy of course). Not surprisingly then, the community-level partner NGOs who were being charged with implementing the dissemination strategy were also primarily Hindi speakers with only a basic comprehension of English. At the launch, however, no facility was made for real-time translation; the keynote speech, all the promotional material, the roundtable discussions and dissemination strategies were being discussed and formulated in English. Reflecting the Hindi-speaking majority amongst representatives of the implementing partners, when given an opportunity to speak, these participants spoke exclusively in Hindi and clearly did not have a functional level of English. Without real-time translation, little dialogue was possible amongst some of the smaller working groups, leading to stilted discussions and a clear lack of involvement from many of the Hindi-speaking partners. When the working groups reported back on their preliminary discussions, two representatives from different implementing partner organisations began a spirited discussion in Hindi about differing perceptions and experiences of sexuality amongst their adolescent male and female constituents. Without a real-time translation facility, however, there was no opportunity for elite donor and NGO representatives to actually respond to the concerns that these two community-based partner representatives were voicing around differing experiences of sexuality and how these were informed by dominant development paradigms. An opportunity for situated norm engagement was clearly missed.

This book launch could have been an opportunity to create a mutually dialogical space where community-based partner NGOs voiced their own concerns about the work they were being asked to undertake in relation to global dialogues around managing the spread of HIV/AIDS and how these understandings map on to local gender norms. As partners to a large INGO, it may also have been an opportunity to share broader concerns as well as views from the field around their on-going work with youth and sexuality and the extent to which initiatives like the comics being launched seriously address information gaps and concerns arising out of their community work, thereby bringing these views to decision-makers. This observation echoes the Sangtin Writers' (2006)

identification of exclusionary discursive practices on the part of elites that limit their capacity as community workers to link their own knowledge to the wider terrain of development discourse and practice. At this book launch, no meaningful space was created for Hindi-speaking community workers to reflect on the extent to which their knowledge of local information needs and views either supports or challenges the paradigm for change or the appropriateness of the (dominant) gender norm underpinning information initiatives such as comic books.

What this comics launch highlights forcefully is that the capacity to craft alternative narratives to either incorporate, modify or indeed challenge global gender ‘norms’, however contested, is severely constrained by professionalised communications practices—those all-important ‘technical skills’—that privilege the English language and the printed word, a process occurring not just at the transnational level but being mirrored within Southern contexts. Amongst these case study organisations, the vast majority of research, writing and dissemination remains in English and is not disseminated, translated or altered for further distribution downwards, nor is any local/Hindi language material, publication or woman’s voice being meaningfully translated into English to ensure that grassroots views are reaching upwards into wider decision-making fora as part of developing more nuanced approaches to diverse gender norms. The collective effect of this is to create two separate communications worlds—an elite one that relies heavily on the written, English-language world, and another where ideas are shared in local/regional languages and mainly orally. If local ideas are to be legitimised, we see local NGOs translating and adapting for dissemination into the English-language policy worlds. This is not to suggest ill will nor that these are not laudable efforts; rather, it suggests that the legitimacy of ideas masquerading as fixed gender ‘norms’ that are proliferated by global-level goals such as the SDGs rely not just on the power of certain ideas but on the modes of communication through which they are proliferated. Conversely, if gender norms are to be understood as fluid rather than fixed, the space in which this fluidity is to be explored is itself constrained by this professionalisation.

A final anecdote from my empirical study reveals the persistent and frequently contradictory tensions around how we understand ‘norms’. Where we seek out ‘alternative’ knowledges that might help to shape a more nuanced, situated understanding of norm creation and proliferation, the aspirational quality of ‘development’ and all that it promises

continues to shape this engagement. This emerged in my discussions with one respondent whose NGO provides training in beauty and other courses for young women. These young women insisted that their certificates of completion or diplomas were provided in English, despite the fact that these young women were unable to read or speak English. It suggests that, like Pigg found in Nepal, the use of English retains an important associative power with notions of progress and development. Here the awarding of a formal ‘certificate’ is rendered more credible or legitimate, as the use of English signifies a kind of elite status as compared to one awarded in Hindi, judged perhaps to be backward or inferior. Whilst the fluidity of ideational norms such as ‘gender equality’ continue to be subject to dynamic conceptual and theoretical challenges, we need to pay more attention to the communications processes by which these norms are made dominant, where professionalised communications ‘norms’, from conferences to English-language beauty certificates, appear to exist largely unchallenged.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND PROFESSIONALISATION?

So why does it matter that gender and development discourse and practice rely so heavily on the English language in its written and professional oral forms as a way of expressing this expertise? Whilst we may acknowledge its aspirational qualities, it matters because it represents a manifestation of the ‘disconnect’ I have discussed in my previous work (2014, 2016, 2017), with women’s NGOs on the ground claiming to be working with local women or representing local voices, themselves admitting that they engage largely in written (or professionalised spoken) outputs that are codified to a transnational, professional standard in order, ironically, to be validated as ‘local knowledge’. Indeed, the empirical evidence here reinforces Laurie et al.’s (2005) observation that ideas become legitimised for proliferation in transnational spaces only once they are codified in the hegemony of development’s frame. The expression of what may potentially be described as ‘local gender norms’, for instance, must necessarily be mapped first on to the global ‘gender norm’ if it is to be legitimised. This process is then further reinforced by the ways in which this ‘local knowledge’ is codified—perhaps through a blog, website or report disseminated in English. These practices warrant reflection with particular reference to the bureaucratisation and associated depoliticisation that both reflects and reinforces this disconnect that

is embodied in the role of the ‘gender expert’, and the various organisational forms of civil society in which these ‘experts’ operate. In other words, our collective struggle to either identify or establish the ways in which gender norms might be understood as more fluid and dynamic are constrained because the ways in which this fluidity might be captured are, ironically, themselves quite fixed and rigid.

Professionalisation prevents more dynamic processes of dialogue in which we might gain an understanding of the situated nature of norms in terms of both the dynamic contexts in which they are formulated, through to how or why they might matter in those places to which some norms are either directly or indirectly shared or disseminated. Processes by which certain ideas become dominant or silenced, and/or adapted, interpreted, translated and ultimately taken up are themselves shaped and indeed constrained by processes of professionalisation. A ‘situated’ approach to thinking about norms must take account not only of the context in which ideas exist or the ways ideas interact to form new ones, but any holistic understanding of norms as ‘situated’ must take into account the ways in which ideas are codified if the messy reality of norm establishment, proliferation and uptake is to be fully understood. What this chapter has demonstrated is that professionalisation, itself an increasingly unchallenged norm in development practice, reinforces the tendency, as described in the introduction, to ‘fix’ the idea of norms as entities that have an intrinsic agentic capacity. Yet how ideas are codified matters; the launch of high-profile reports, books, conferences or websites imply that a certain legitimacy around a so-called global norm is likely to take shape. Even where ideas may, as the empirical research in this chapter has highlighted, themselves emerge from so-called local contexts, these are not legitimised and thus accepted as part of discursive spaces in development until they are codified, notably in English, in ways that are professionalised and thus acceptable as information to be entered into academic/practitioner knowledge processes. In the rush to codify and proliferate new ideas in a development framework preoccupied with supporting and/or enabling the agency or empowerment so often sought for and with women in the Global South, no space or time is afforded to question the codification processes themselves. By effectively ‘fixing’ the norm through these widely accepted forms of professionalised codification and communication, the space is thus constrained to interrogate amongst a wider range of stakeholders both why AND

how certain ideas around gender become norms, what that norm may or may not represent, how people are interacting with, experiencing or interpreting these norms or why they may or may not be important for shared concerns around gender equality and social justice.

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Conclusion: Situated Norm Engagement and Beyond

Lars Engberg-Pedersen and Adam Fejerskov

A situated approach to the understanding of how norms influence social processes and how actors engage with global prescriptive norms emphasises five central points. First, norm engagement is political: power and politics are intrinsic elements of such engagement, since prescriptive norms nearly always address the distribution of resources, rights and influence. Secondly, prescriptive norms often address deeply embedded values reflected in taken-for-granted norms and practices. This inhibits the influence of global norms and emphasises the need to recognise the gap that may exist between policy formulation, where global norms are often heeded, and policy implementation and daily practices, which may have to negotiate a multitude of diverse concerns. Thirdly, actors seek to make sense of global norms in light of their particular contexts, histories and contemporary situations. This entails reformulating norms and highlights the fact that actors are neither rational nor cultural dopes

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only pursuing appropriate lines of action. Rather they seek to make sense of the norm given the particular situation in which they find themselves. Fourthly, and in line with the political nature of norm engagement, actors seek to influence others' interpretations of norms as much as they seek to diffuse, adapt or translate a normative idea into a given situation. Global norms are not the point of departure of normative influence, just a temporary reference point in an ongoing political struggle at multiple levels. Fifthly, an actor's engagement with a norm easily changes over time, emphasising that the opportunity structures in a given situation significantly influence the results of norm engagement. Norms are never cast in stone.

In this final chapter, we bring out some of the core findings from all the chapters and relate them to the above points that characterise the situated approach to norm engagement. The core challenge is to understand the relationships between norms, actors and contexts when all three are seen as dynamic and as influencing each other. We end by discussing the prospects for global norms and gender equality.

POWER, POLITICS AND EXCLUSION IN NORM ENGAGEMENT

As norms are perceived and constituted through social relations, they influence and are influenced by the distribution of power. Seeing norms as dynamic, intersubjective constructs necessarily implies that they enter into, support, strengthen or undermine forms and systems of power. Fundamental to the study of norm engagement is how and in what form norms are expressed, by whom and towards whom, and with what purpose. In that sense, power both constitutes and produces practices and social relations (Howarth 2010), making every norm-related process full of power and domination. The construction of global norms is strongly associated with domination, exclusion and inclusion, when states, experts and interest groups contend over the ability to define and delimit norms in deeply political processes, including certain ideas while excluding others. This is the case no matter whether engagement with norms occurs at the national, regional or global levels of interaction. In processes of furthering or attempting to institutionalise norms (whether specifically in organisations or more abstractly in forms of global governance), these may easily be used as weapons in battles of domination and agenda setting. In organisations, conflicts of subjective interests are common when employees meet and contend over norms. A typical tactic is to structure

the terrain of argumentation so that gender equality becomes a vehicle for other political interests or ambitions, or, vice versa, is linked to other well-established goals in order to acquire legitimacy. Thus, norm engagement is influenced by actors' power to force certain practices through in situations of normative conflict, but it is also about the power to make others to have the motivations one wants them to have (Lukes 2005).

Power is thus intrinsically linked to questions of inclusion and exclusion. Not all actors necessarily have *access* to discursive or communicative processes of norm engagement, as exclusion is an inherent feature of meetings, bureaucracies, media and reports, whether these are in the highly institutionalised context of the UN or in the somewhat more anarchic structures of Indian civil society. What is interesting in the Indian context is not only the power struggles between actors who are influenced by global norms that are intended to be emancipatory and others who defend local gender-discriminating norms, but that individual norms, whether global or local, are strongly contested internally and often limited by an unequal level of ability to define and interpret what they are and what they are not, despite any ambitions to ensure *equality* in their further projection. As discussed in the book, this begs the question of whether global norms that in themselves are characterised by inequality of influence and of contributions from different groups to define their nature, can hope at all to function as progressive ideals of social justice.

Just as access can be shaped by powerful actors, so too can these actors choose to establish the rules of the game of norm engagement in such ways that they include certain interpretations, ideas and views and exclude others without necessarily formally limiting access in the first place. In theory, the public consultations organised by the EU provide any European citizen with the ability to express her viewpoint on a particular political subject. Yet, the form of communication and the boundaries of inputs are framed by EU bureaucrats who decide what questions to pose, where and in what form answers can be provided, as well as the answers that will be included in policy formulations. Such bureaucratic measures and procedures act as strong techniques of power, drawing lines of inclusion and exclusion that may not be obvious to everyone. These techniques may relate to the legitimacy of certain forms of knowledge, reflecting current power relations, with knowledge and power being interweaved in systems that shape identities and norms (see Foucault 1977: 27).

ABSENCE AND PRESENCE OF NORM ENTREPRENEURS

Norm competition is a given in almost any context in which there is no very strong coherence of thought and shared values between actors. As has been discussed throughout this book, norms are strongly related to concerns as different as life experiences, professional training, political cultures and organisational forms, all of which provide avenues for contention. Moreover, norms enter into battles for attention, resources or influence, with any eventual blending (of e.g. security and gender equality) signalling a hierarchy in which one norm dominates over the others. Yet, this book also describes instances in which global gender-equality norms may be absent or not given much attention, and not necessarily as a result of fierce competition with other norms. In Uganda, the dual settings of a highly professionalised environment of a microfinance institution and rural communities share a similar lack of engagement with global gender-equality norms. Whereas the first milieu seems to push its official advocacy of gender equality aside in favour of practices associated with scientific logics and methodologies of quantification, the absence of gender equality discourses in rural communities seems to revolve around the lack of norm entrepreneurs. In the latter case such discourses not so much outcompeted as perhaps forgotten, silenced by some, who fail to respond to the main concerns of those who should benefit from them. In any case, this indicates the necessity of having committed actors to take global norms from policy to practice in environments characterised by deeply embedded values and taken-for-granted practices of gender discrimination.

A related question is which actors can legitimately define which norms should be pursued in any given situation. Belonging to a particular society typically provides norm entrepreneurs with some legitimacy to engage with global norms in that setting, but many development organisations will favour certain norms over others in interventions and activities outside the society in which they are primarily rooted. We may very well question what legitimacy such actors have, and if they in fact have any *right* to promote strong norms of gender equality in contexts where communities have decided that other norms are more important in more or less democratic ways. Does the strong sense of a positive transformation for women and girls that is inherent in norms of gender equality justify the use of power to silence other norms? This question is all the more pertinent as the voices of marginalised women and girls are more often than not absent from global gender equality norms.

NORMATIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND RESONANCE

If there is one thing that this book documents again and again, it is the importance of context for engagement with norms. One particular argument is that global gender-equality norms that significantly challenge deeply embedded values and taken-for-granted local gender norms will be met with substantial resistance and therefore rarely bring about the change desired by global norm entrepreneurs. If, on the other hand, there is only a minor discrepancy between the two sets of norms, local actors may engage positively with global gender-equality norms and change their practices accordingly, even though the change will be merely modest. The consequence of this argument is therefore that, where gender inequalities are deeply embedded in norms and practices, global gender-equality norms are not likely to have much impact. In other words, global efforts to advance gender-equality norms are relatively unimportant in situations where they are most needed.

While this argument is supported in several chapters in the book—both inside organisations where mandates, structures and identities may significantly circumscribe the influence of gender-equality norms and outside organisations where normative environments are at odds with gender equality—it is also an argument reliant on certain assumptions that cannot be generalised. First, normative environments are not always uniform. Even in environments with hostile opposition to gender equality, actors and practices may exist that challenge gender-based discrimination. Women's organisations, femocrats, parents wishing all the best for their girls, and other individuals often criticise norms that marginalise individuals. Moreover, in most contexts widespread practices may point in different directions. For instance, women may dominate local trade, even though female circumcision and child marriages of girls are common practices. Secondly, the argument assumes that normative environments always evolve gradually. This is often the case, and the institutional literature refers to 'path dependency' cutting across even disruptive moments of social change. Nevertheless, norms and normative environments do change and sometimes much more profoundly than most would expect. Whereas women were barred from political influence all over the world 150 years ago, there is not a single country today that upholds formal institutions making political influence a prerogative of men. Also, in the short run, significant normative changes may, of course, be due to powerful political pressure, but they could

also be related to the saying that a norm constitutes ‘an idea whose time has come’. Smaller cumulative normative changes or increasing discrepancies between existing norms and social change, such as between the norm that women should be housewives and the substantial demand for labour in Western countries during the 1960s, may pave the way to new ideas and significant normative change. Thirdly, the argument assumes that normative environments are the decisive factor influencing engagement with norms. The situated approach proposed here suggests that this might not always be the case. Political and economic changes, combined with particular constellations of actors, may disrupt existing norms and enable global gender-equality norms to influence social change thoroughly. All in all, while recognising the general importance of the resonance of global norms with the normative environment, it seems necessary for future research to try and disentangle this issue, given the ambiguities and changes to normative environments and other given factors that influence engagement with norms.

BROADER CONTEXTUAL CHANGE

A particular issue raised by some of the chapters in this volume is the need to explore further the relationship between normative environments and broader contextual change. Looking at the development of global gender-equality norms over time, three observations stand out. First, it was only during the 1970s that gender equality became an important international normative concern despite attempts to promote it throughout the post-WWII period. Secondly, global gender-equality norms have developed and changed over time, with new topics emerging and complementing existing norms, not always in an entirely coherent manner. Thirdly, after two very productive decades that reached their climax in the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, the subsequent period has been characterised by much less mobilisation and elaboration of the issue in international forums. Thus, taking the international community as an example, it seems that broader contextual change has stimulated and limited the development of gender-equality norms. While specific normative ideas, such as gender mainstreaming and sexual and reproductive health and rights, have emerged and been adopted internationally through the interaction of many different actors in a particular normative environment, broader contextual changes may accelerate or diminish these efforts.

However, we know relatively little about which contextual changes are important, how they influence norm engagement and how normative activities may influence broader contexts. One suggestion is that, when contextual changes directly address or have implications for inequalities, they are likely to influence the room for manoeuvre of gender-equality norm entrepreneurs. In this volume, three broader contextual changes of this sort have been mentioned, though the mechanisms whereby they exert their influence remain unexplored. First, decolonisation during the 1950s and 1960s and the call for a new economic world order in the 1970s created a focus on economic inequalities between societies. This may have paved the way for concerns over other inequalities, including notably gender inequalities, and the latter were actually strongly influenced by the former, as some discussions—for instance at the UN World Conference on Women in Copenhagen in 1980—were characterised by a deep cleft between participants from the South and North respectively, the former being concerned about poverty and economic development, whereas the latter focused on political and other inequalities between men and women. In any case, the take-off of the production of gender-equality norms in the 1970s may have been stimulated by this increased discussion of global inequalities.

Secondly, neoliberalism has been mentioned, both in this book and elsewhere, as a particularly constraining factor on the production of gender-equality norms. This economic ideology challenges efforts to reduce gender inequalities in at least two ways. One is its attempt to reduce the state and to dismantle social policies that are important in relieving women of the many burdens of childcare, housekeeping, etc. Another is the attempt to reduce all social issues to contractual relations between individual consumers and producers in the market place. In neoliberalism there is no such thing as inequalities, only individuals who may differ in their ability to fit into the market, but who all benefit from leaving it to the market mechanism to set the value of goods and services. If anything, inequalities are good, it is said, because they provide incentives to do better. With its gradual ascent to the top of economic policies and public-sector organisation during the 1980s and 1990s, neoliberalism may have been an important factor circumscribing international initiatives to promote gender equality after the Beijing conference in 1995.

Thirdly, populist nationalism and its inclination towards conservative family values, on the rise in many countries, may now take over from neoliberalism in constraining efforts to achieve gender equality. Cultural

elites, emancipatory ideas and transnational networks and activities are not likely to be favoured where populist nationalism dominates, and this will probably reduce the effectiveness of global gender-equality norms. However, there are, of course, always different competing tendencies pulling societies in different directions. The recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals constitute one such tendency exemplifying what has been observed in this book, namely that global norms may also affect broader contextual changes. Social change and the relationship between normative environments and broader contextual changes may therefore come down partly to the vigour with which norm entrepreneurs and other social actors push particular ideas.

THE STRONG INFLUENCE OF ORGANISATIONAL HISTORIES, MANDATES AND IDENTITIES

Though new and fluid organisational forms have emerged in recent years, just as notions of radical change, disruption and disorder are all around, stability and inertia are the defining characteristics of many organisations, including several of those studied in this book. The organisational identities, values and logics that shape the creation of an organisation exert a strong influence without determining subsequent organisational behaviour. Thus, organisational choices, discourses and practices of gender equality often vary greatly across organisations that have different conceptions of what is legitimate knowledge, values, etc. A non-governmental organisation created with an ethos of social mobilisation and collective decision-making is likely to set itself on radically different paths of action than a hierarchical state bureaucracy construed to handle the public finances.

A case in point is the EU, which has been analysed in several chapters. The EU wishes to be seen as a strong normative actor pursuing human rights and democratic values throughout its policies and activities. However, while fairly quick to adopt the principle of gender mainstreaming in the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1997, the EU has dealt with this norm in a most uneven way. It has never really materialised in trade policies and agreements, whereas it has been taken seriously in some areas of development cooperation, but not in others. Likewise, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security” was only taken up fairly late by the EU in its security policies, although it had previously promoted the issue in international forums. These

points raise several issues. First, large organisations like the EU are not uniform, and although their original mandate significantly impels their ability to address a question like gender equality, subsequent institutional changes may open up some opportunities and close others. Secondly, policy fields differ and can be defined more or less narrowly, all of which circumscribes efforts to let global gender-equality norms influence them. Thirdly, as analysed in detail in the book, networks of norm entrepreneurs both within and outside these large organisations are necessary to attract significant attention to a norm like gender mainstreaming. Though the norm may be highlighted in policy statements, it requires a tremendous effort to change day-to-day implementation in old bureaucracies whose deeply embedded values and taken-for-granted norms do not include gender equality. Fourthly, norm engagement may be directed as much towards the international level as towards organisations' own practices and constituencies. Organisations may differ in terms of their need to legitimise themselves in relation to global norms, but regional and internationally oriented organisations are often very concerned about their reputations among their peers.

THE PROSPECTS FOR GLOBAL NORMS AND GENDER EQUALITY

The thinking about norm diffusion has been characterised by the fundamental idea that, once a norm has been established internationally, it will sooner or later be adopted in all corners of the world. In this book we have questioned this suggestion, arguing that the particular situations in which actors find themselves will shape how they engage with global norms. Nevertheless, one might argue that this is a question of the long run versus the short run. In the short run, engagement with norms may differ and depend on the particularities of different social, political and economic contexts, but in the long run differences will be evened out partly due to the continued pressure exercised by global norms, partly by actors observing that the norms are being adopted elsewhere. However, this prompts some questions. First, how long is the long run, and when has the long run been too long for the argument to continue to be upheld? Secondly, are global norms really so strong that they can change the world? Are they immune to other changes taking place, and do they not sometimes wane due to lack of support? Such questions challenge the 'long-run' argument, and taking the analyses of longer-run changes

in this book seriously, it seems that global gender-equality norms are not heading for a situation in which they prevail in all the world's countries.

One point is that global gender-equality norms themselves appear to change over time. In particular, their degree of radicalism has grown from a perspective of protecting and including women in the 1960s to a confrontation with structures of gender-based discrimination and marginalisation in the 1990s. Subsequently, their radicalism has somewhat shrunk so that, in the current era, international organisations often perceive gender equality to be less a goal on its own and more an instrument that can be used to stimulate economic growth and poverty reduction. Another point has to do with how actors engage with global norms in different societies over time. Despite the remarkable continuity of the political regime in Russia in the last twenty years, the political environment for gender equality has been turned on its head in this period. From a cautious welcome to global norms of gender equality, a nationalistic ideology emphasising traditional family and religious values has gained ground and significantly challenged ideas about equal roles and opportunities for women and men. This change to the political environment in Russia has not occurred in response to discussions of global gender-equality norms, which are rather the victims of the collateral damage of specific political and religious interests. This indicates, first, that there is no inevitability about the diffusion of norms and that political changes may completely undermine efforts to promote the ideas embedded in global norms on gender equality. Secondly, several chapters in this book suggest that these norms do not always respond to the needs and concerns of those whom they are supposed to benefit. More mundane needs, such as securing a living, may override the norms, which may not respond to the situation-specific concerns of marginalised groups. This helps to explain why global gender-equality norms do not find a foothold or go into reverse in particular situations.

One may accordingly get the sense that the hidden message of this book is rather gloomy with respect to the potential of global gender-equality norms to influence social processes around the world. If all the efforts invested in international meetings and negotiations do not produce strong, progressive norms capable of making a clear difference, if contingent constellations of actors, broader contextual changes and organisational and institutional factors significantly shape how norms are expressed in particular situations, and if many of those who suffer the most from discrimination and marginalisation are effectively excluded

from influencing political discussions about gender equality, one may start wondering whether it is worthwhile concentrating attention on the production of and engagement with global gender-equality norms at all. Do these norms actually make a difference? The short answer is yes, they do, but they are completely dependent on actors being determined to engage with and promote them.

First, several chapters in this book demonstrate how regional and other organisations have taken up these norms and, to some extent, changed their policies and practices. While they do so in different ways and more or less seriously, they cannot avoid paying attention to gender equality if they want to remain legitimate organisations. There is little doubt that international agreements and conventions play an important role in this process, as actors inside and outside the organisations repeatedly refer to them. The chapters also demonstrate that numerous institutional and organisational barriers have to be overcome to make gender equality an integrated, central concern in organisational practices. Without global gender-equality norms, the pressures to do so would in most cases have been considerably weaker. Secondly, global norms constitute a rallying point for actors, including women's movements, femocrats, gender-focussed NGOs, concerned politicians and others who are seeking to advocate gender equality, raise new issues and acquire inspiration for their activities in different societies. In recent years, women's organisations have managed to draw attention to unpaid care and domestic work, and this has now become one of the targets of the SDG 5. Thus, in terms of unifying interested actors and stimulating intellectual exchange, global gender-equality norms play an important role. Thirdly, where actors are firmly committed to combatting gender inequalities, global norms provide them with a helping hand, this perhaps being the decisive perspective to put on global gender-equality norms. They do not diffuse or travel, but they may constitute one among several arguments that committed actors can use to further gender equality. And sometimes they are detrimental to the cause, as in situations where nationalistic, anti-global ideas prevail. The struggle for gender equality ultimately takes place in individual societies, and global norms will often, but not always, contribute to legitimising such struggles.

Accordingly, expectations regarding what global gender-equality norms can do should be lowered, but that is not to say that they are irrelevant. Progressive global norms put pressure on powerholders who care about the views of their peers, and this supports steadfast actors in

their struggles to change deeply embedded practices of discrimination. A considerable challenge, however, is to ensure that global gender-equality norms respond to the needs and concerns of marginalised women and girls, and not just to the views of their well-meaning, but elitist representatives. Without such a match, global norms may very well exert influence, but not of a kind that will address the conditions of those who suffer the most from gender-based discrimination.

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