4. Focused literature review

This chapter provides a focused review of the literature that my study draws from and to which it seeks to contribute. I discuss my original theoretical insights in detail in chapter 9.3.

My study focuses on the integration of issues of violence against women into Amnesty International's work; that is, the spread of the norm that recognizes VAW as a human rights violation within a transnational network, both in the private and the public sphere and regardless of the agent behind this diffusion. Consequently, the study draws from the work of early and more recent constructivist IR scholars who argued that, in addition to material forces, norms also matter in international relations. They developed our knowledge on the diffusion of norms based on this insight.[1] The chapter begins with a brief introduction to the theories of social constructivism in IR (4.1). Section 4.2 explains existing theories on the emergence of international norms and shows that the agency of comparatively powerful norm entrepreneurs is commonly considered the primary driver of norm emergence. Section 4.3 addresses what we know about the influence of comparatively weak actors on norm diffusion. Section 4.4 then provides a short overview of the constructivist IR concepts of norm diffusion and norm dynamics. Finally, section 4.5 builds upon this by explaining my study's contribution: enhancing our understanding of how comparatively powerless actors within a transnational network can cause a new norm to emerge why norms decay.

---

1   Hoffmann 2010.

4.1   Social constructivism in International Relations

In the 1980s and the early 1990s, the so-called first wave of constructivist IR scholarship challenged the dominant neorationalist and neoliberal understandings of world politics.[2] By highlighting that the international system is not only steered by material forces but by ideas and beliefs as well, they set out to demonstrate that norms matter in international relations.[3] In doing this, scholars illustrated the important role non-state actors, such as NGOs and Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs),[4] play on the international scene. Defining norms as "appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity,"[5] early constructivist IR scholars developed their own "conceptual tool for operationalizing process of social construction."[6]

These early norm scholars distinguished ideas from norms. Whereas ideas were considered "beliefs held by individuals," norms were conceptualized as "intersubjective beliefs about proper behavior."[7] Consequently, empirical studies on norms focused on the reason and the ways "beliefs held by individuals"[8] were commonly accepted and gained normative status. Scholars like Katzenstein (1996), Finnemore (1996), Price (1997), and Risse et al. (1999) were interested in demonstrating how ideas and norms shape the interests of international actors and how a norm taken for granted by a community of states can spread to states outside of the community.[9]

In contrast to rationalists who are committed to a behavioral logic and who argue that states adopt norms because it "helps them get what they want,"[10] constructivists think that states adopt a norm mainly because they

---

2   Hoffmann 2010.

3   Finnemore 1996; Keck and Sikkink 1998.

4   Keck and Sikkink introduced the term 'Transnational Advocacy Network' in their groundbreaking book *Activists beyond boarders* (1998). These authors explained that in their networked composition, TANs are similar to other transnational networks, but they "can be distinguished from other forms of Transnational Networks by [their] members' shared principled ideas or values in motivating their formation" (Keck and Sikkink 1998, p.1).

5   Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, p.891.

6   Hoffmann 2010, p.5411.

7   Khagram et al. 2002, p.14.

8   Khagram et al. 2002, p.14.

9   Katzenstein 1996; Finnemore 1996; Price 1997; Risse et al. 1999.

10   Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, p.912.

perceive "the behavior to be good, desirable, and appropriate."[11] This depiction of the evolution of norms entails a "logic of appropriateness,"[12] whereby actors internalize norms because of their desire to conform to the behavior that the vast majority of the members of the social system they evolve in consider appropriate.

Early norm scholars "demonstrated that constructivism consisted of more than a metatheoretical critique of rational/material approaches and could indeed be used to structure rigorous empirical investigations across the spectrum of issues in international relations.[13] The first constructivist IR scholars succeeded in anchoring the constructivist approach in the study of world politics. However, they failed to recognize the possibility of a norm regression and had difficulties explaining normative change because of three factors. First, they conceived norms as static, meaning that the content of a norm remains the same during the process of diffusion. Second, they mainly treated norms as independent variables in explaining differing behavior or reaction. Finally, they defined diffusion as a linear process. In the 2000s, new constructivist scholars argued that norms are dynamic and their meaning experiences modifications over the course of diffusion.[14] As I detail later in this chapter, this conception allowed them to explain normative change and grasp the possibility of norm degeneration.

4.2   The role of norm entrepreneurs in the emergence of international norms

While the first and the second wave of constructivist IR Scholars disagreed on the nature of norms, both emphasized the role of norm entrepreneurs in the emergence of a new norm. For both, norm entrepreneurs' behavior plays a major part in norm creation. Most studies acknowledged that external factors, such as major crisis situations, could contribute to the emergence of new norms or to normative change by offering "windows of opportunities"[15]

---

11   Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, p.912.

12   March and Olsen 1989.

13   Hoffmann 2010, p.5412.

14   Sandholtz 2007; Wiener 2007; Hoffmann 2010; Krook and True 2012; Müller and Wunderlich 2013; Hughes et al. 2015.

15   Wunderlich 2013, p.27.

for actors' agency. However, they still stressed the pivotal role of norm entrepreneurs as powerful actors behind new norm genesis.

Constructivist IR scholars generally argued that the emergence of a new norm occurred because norm entrepreneurs succeeded in convincing a critical mass of actors to embrace the new norm.[16] Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) define norm entrepreneurs as "agents having strong notions about appropriate or desirable behavior in their community."[17] They explain that "new norms never enter a normative vacuum but instead emerge in a highly contested normative space where they must compete with other norms."[18] Except in the cases of ideas that are "intrinsically attractive and the social complexity is low enough such that all the agents can appreciate the attractiveness of the idea, the idea cannot become a norm without any entrepreneurial effort."[19] In contrast to the eradication of murder or cannibalism, which became internationally accepted as norms without any entrepreneurial effort, the recognition of VAW in the private sphere as a violation of human rights had a hard time finding international acceptance and cannot be considered intrinsically attractive, so as to emerge on its own without any actor's contribution. Indeed, as I have previously highlighted, the transnational networking and lobbying of the women's rights movement was key in recognizing VAW as a violation of human rights.

Scholars demonstrated that both individuals and collective actors can initiate norms. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) identified two cases of individual norm entrepreneurship: Henry Dunan who introduced the international norm of the neutrality of medical personnel, persons wounded in war, and noncombatants; and individual figures in the suffragette movement who led the international campaign for women's suffrage.[20] Johnstone (2007) demonstrated that the UN Secretary-Generals are very important in the generation of new international norms.[21] He explained that the Secretary-General can play the role of a successful norm entrepreneur "when he or she joins emerging normative trends – usually first promoted by a group of states or powerful non-state actors – rather than trying to generate new norms out of

---

16   Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, p.895.
17   Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, p.896.
18   Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, p.897.
19   Hoffmann 2003, p.15.
20   Finnemore and Sikkink 1998.
21   Johnstone 2007.

whole cloth."[22] Citing the example of the US presidents who, following WWII, created the "normative and institutional architecture"[23] of the UN, the Bretton Woods Institutions, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Johnstone (2007) explained that leaders of powerful states can also become norm entrepreneurs.

Other authors concentrated on NGOs and TANs and emphasized how these collective actors can cause a new norm to emerge. Focusing on environmental and human rights politics in the 1990s, Keck and Sikkink (1998) showed that transnational networks of activists could use a so-called "boomerang pattern" by putting pressure on both states and international organizations.[24] Some authors explained the success of norm entrepreneurship with entrepreneurs' use of organizational platforms to promote norms.[25] In these cases, platforms are either constructed for the purpose of promoting a specific norm (the NGO Red Cross in Henry Dunand's case) or a specific NGOs member of a broader TAN uses the latter as a platform to promote their ideas (such as the TAN on VAW).

Other authors have identified AI, and especially its headquarters, as a norm entrepreneur. Using a political approach to network theory, Lake and Wong (2009)[26] argued that AI's international network structure with a powerful central node, the International Secretariat, and a large grass-roots movement organized in national sections explained AI's prominent role in making individual claims to political and civil rights the dominant norm of the postwar human rights movement.[27] By concentrating on the early days of AI, they explained that AI's success "in setting the norms of human rights"[28] is a result of the IS's (as the central node of the network) ability "to control the content of the AI human rights agenda and […] to attract new adherents."[29] The authors further argued that "this staff-based office continues to possess broad authority to set the agenda for the network as a whole."[30] In this approach, the IS

---

22   Johnstone 2007, p.138.
23   Johnstone 2007, p.126.
24   Keck and Sikkink 1998.
25   Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, p.896.
26   Lake and Wong 2009.
27   Lake and Wong 2009, p.136-141.
28   Lake and Wong 2009, p.149.
29   Lake and Wong 2009, p.149.
30   Lake and Wong 2009, p.138.

represents the powerful node of the network and acts as a norm entrepreneur within the AI network.

Many constructivists use the concept of *framing* developed by social movement theorists, such as Snow et al. (1986)[31] and Tarrow (1999),[32] in an attempt to comprehend the successful promotion of norms. Framing refers to "the fact that the substantive content of particular issues in world politics is not simply inherent in the issue but is constructed by the participants involved."[33] Keck and Sikkink (1998) show that an issue's successful appearance on the international agenda depends on how it is framed, or on how the idea is packed and presented to make it persuasive for a larger public.[34] These authors emphasize the importance of framing when they demonstrate that women's rights TANs made women's rights part of the definition of human rights in the 1990s by using frames associated with the prevention of bodily harm. According to Payne (2001), norm entrepreneurs "frame an issue so that target audiences can see how well newly proposed ideas coincide with already accepted ideas and practices."[35] Framing is thus an important approach that norm entrepreneurs use to transform their ideas into commonly accepted norms.

4.3   Comparatively powerless actors' strategies for influencing norm dynamics

Even though they acknowledged that external factors can contribute to the emergence of new norms by offering windows of opportunities, most first- and second-wave constructivist norm scholars highlighted the pivotal role norm entrepreneurs (individual or collective actors) played in the appearance of a new norm. Only few researchers questioned this role. Hertel's (2006) study on two transnational advocacy campaigns in the 1990s is the most prominent example of such cases. The campaigns for child rights in the Bangladeshi garment industry and for the prevention of gender discrimination in Mexican border textile manufacturing pointed to two different ways through which comparatively powerless activists can alter

---

31   Snow et al. 1986.
32   Tarrow 1999.
33   Clark et al. 1998, p.25.
34   Keck and Sikkink 1998.
35   Payne 2001, p.43.

the content of a transnational campaign: blocking and backdoor moves.[36] Hertel differentiated the senders framing the campaign from the North from the receivers of the campaign in the South. The US Harkin bill[37] called for the boycott of the Bangladeshi garment export industry because these manufacturers employed child workers. Local activists were alarmed by the boycott and the related exclusion of children from the labor market, since the latter's participation was essential for the survival of numerous families in Bangladesh. They started to block the transnational campaign by "organizing their own press conferences and openly calling for the establishment of a local 'movement against the Harkin bill'"[38] Thus, local activists at the receiving end significantly hampered the campaign that harmed their specific interests by adopting the mechanism of blocking. As a result, the content of the campaign was significantly altered as "the central normative reference point of the Child Labor Coalition campaign moved from International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 138 to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a standard both Bangladeshi and American activists could embrace."[39]

In contrast to blocking, Backdoor-moves can change the content of a campaign without stopping or altering its substance. Two campaigns against pregnancy screening on women in Mexico illustrate how local actors at the receiving end can deploy backdoor moves. One of the campaigns was launched by Human Rights Watch and focused on women "employed in the export manufacturing plants along Mexico's northern border with the United States."[40] The second was a national-level campaign launched by feminist groups in Mexico City and concentrated on the situation of women in different economic sectors. Mexican activists on the US/Mexican border taking part in the HRW campaign used backdoor-moves to add economic and social rights issues to the overall campaign frame. In doing so, the local activists did not challenge the official frame of the campaign; rather, they brought topics that "resonated with their own priorities" in through the back doors.[41] While border activists framed their local campaign participation by

---

36   Hertel 2006.

37   The Harkin bill is a Child Labor Deterrence Act first proposed by Senator Harkin to the United States Congress in 1992, which called for the prohibition of importing products produced by Child labor. Wikipedia.

38   Hertel 2006, p.40.

39   Hertel 2006, p.50.

40   Hertel 2006, p.55.

41   Hertel 2006, p.83.

introducing their own human rights issues, the overall HRW campaign "did keep the focus on civil and political rights issues."[42] Thus, backdoor-moves did influence the Bangladeshi campaign's content but did not change it completely. In contrast, activists using the blocking mechanism significantly altered the content of the Mexican campaign.

Hertel (2006) thus shows that comparatively powerless actors participating in a transnational campaign can influence and alter the content of the campaign,[43] thus changing the content of a norm and influencing its dissemination. At the same time, the study demonstrates that comparatively weak actors might also significantly affect the emergence of a new norm. Similar to Hertel, my research challenges previous constructivist arguments of the importance of norm entrepreneurs as the unique actor responsible for giving ideas a normative status. It also contributes to enhancing our knowledge about the ways in which comparatively powerless actors within a transnational network are able to cause a new norm to emerge. At the same time, my findings allow a relativization of the headquarters' essential role as the principal norm entrepreneur within AI (as emphasized by Lake and Wong [2009]).[44]

4.4   Norm diffusion and norm dynamics

Constructivist IR scholars have not only explained the emergence of an international norm, they have also shed light on the process of diffusion. Early constructivist norm scholars, who perceived norms as static, singled out two models of norm diffusion. Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) 'norm life cycle' stipulated that norms evolve in a linear, three-stage process of norm emergence, norm cascade and norm internalization.[45] Shortly after, building on Keck and Sikkink's (1998)[46] "boomerang pattern," Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink

---

42   Hertel 2006, p.85.

43   Hertel 2006.

44   Lake and Wong 2009.

45   Finnemore and Sikkink 1998.

46   Keck and Sikkink showed that citizens are able to pressure their governments indirectly by appealing to citizens in other countries through TANs. TANs have commonly been referred to as networked actors composed of numerous smaller actors sharing the same values and discourse, exchanging information and services on a regular basis, and striving to influence political outcomes in principled issues. By documenting the

(1999) conceptualized norm diffusion as a five-step process and highlighted the interplay between the national and the transnational/international levels.[47] They explained compliance with human rights norms with the action of TANs that pressured states violating specific norms by using strategies of naming and shaming.[48] Based on a logic of appropriateness, both models follow a similar mechanisms of international norms diffusion. These mechanisms include coercion, persuasion, learning, and emulation.[49] Seeing norms as static, employing them mainly as independent variables in causal models of behavior or reaction, and defining diffusion as a linear process have meant that these two paradigms have neglected the possibility of norm-regression and have faced difficulties in explaining normative change. More recent constructivist scholars have criticized this progress-based explanation of norm diffusion for ignoring "the interactive aspect of norm dynamics."[50]

More recently developed research has argued for a more dynamic conception of norm diffusion. and the latest approach to the topic emphasizes that norms' meanings are modified over the course of diffusion.[51] Cases of norms that failed to be internalized or that have regressed have introduced the idea of normative contestation and challenged the aforementioned assumption of linearity. By inquiring when and where norms matter, and searching for the reasons and the ways through which norms change, these more recent studies have reconceptualized the relationship between actors and structure. They have thus placed the interaction between actors and their normative context in their very hearts.

These latest norm scholars have argued that states do not necessarily adopt norms because of transnational teaching that follows a logic of appropriateness. Instead, they comply with norms because of a dynamic process of socialization in which different normative systems are opposed to each other. Acharya (2004) explained that international norms are adapted to

---

existence and the functioning of transnational networks on violence against women, these authors have showed the pivotal role of activists in different countries working together on specific issues for the acceptance of women's rights as human rights (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

47   Risse et al. 1999.

48   Risse et al. 1999.

49   Wunderlich 2013.

50   Müller and Wunderlich 2013, p.24-25.

51   Sandholtz 2007; Wiener 2007; Hoffmann 2010; Krook and True 2012; Müller and Wunderlich 2013; Hughes et al. 2015.

local contexts by actors who manipulate and modify the content of norms so as to conform to the local context.[52] Similarly, Ba (2006) argued that norm takers are not passive; they take an active role during the socialization process and are therefore able to influence norms' meaning.[53] Wiener (2007) showed that norms and the meaning of norms develop through "interaction in a context."[54] Interested in the reasons behind "contestation of normative meanings beyond the state,"[55] Wiener (2007) saw norms as social constructs and argued that, in light of this, norms are also contested by default. Focusing on the contestation of constitutional norms within a community of norm adopters, she demonstrated that actors do not adopt a norm as a result of external influence. Instead, they interpret international norms, which allows the latter's transposition into concrete action at the domestic level. She explained: "It is through this transfer between contexts that the meaning of norms becomes contested as differently socialized actors, for example, politicians, civil servants, parliamentarians, or lawyers trained in different legal traditions seek to interpret them."[56] The social environment thus influences how actors interpret and implement norms and is pivotal for comprehending norm contestation and norm diffusion.

Similarly, using a discursive approach to the study of international norm diffusion, Krook and True (2012) conceptualized norms as processes, rather than things, noting: "norms do not necessarily remain stable once they have been constructed."[57] Focusing on two international norms - gender-balanced decision-making and gender mainstreaming - the authors argued that norms emerge and spread mainly because of two sources of dynamism. Internal sources had to do with the continuing discussions about the exact definitions of the norms among transnational activists and UN gender experts. More external sources come from "changes in broader normative environments."[58] The interaction of these sources of dynamism influence norm dynamics.

Even more recently, in their comprehensive study on the transnational dynamics of multilateral arms control norms, Müller and Wunderlich (2013) re-

---

52   Acharya 2004.
53   Ba 2006.
54   Wiener 2007, p.6.
55   Wiener 2007, p.2.
56   Wiener 2007, p.12.
57   Krook and True 2012, p.117.
58   Krook and True 2012, p.123.

jected the norm scholars' general belief in progress and criticized that "norm studies neglected the developments that occur after a norm has been established."[59] Also adopting a dynamic approach to the study of transnational norm diffusion, the authors investigated what happens once a norm has been established. They argued that contestation is pivotal to understand compliance and non-compliance.[60] Even internalized norms may "lose their taken-for-granted status, or eventually decay."[61] Norm dynamics are characterized by three phases: establishment, further development, and an eventual norm degeneration or decay. At each stage, structural and actor-oriented forces influence norm change. Therefore, like in Wiener's (2007) account, norm diffusion had better be conceived as a permanent process of negotiation, throughout which norm entrepreneurs have to continually work to further consolidate the norms and defend them against norm challengers. This process entails conflicts that influence how a norm evolves.

Using several case studies of international regimes governing arms control, Müller and Wunderlich (2013) demonstrated the pivotal role norm entrepreneurs play in a norm's change from its emergence to its regression. They argued that norm entrepreneurs, such as states, NGOs, and IOs, are "transmission belts for transforming structural challenges and changes into political action that results in norm development."[62] Norm change is thus primarily driven by norm entrepreneurs who can "initiate new norms, confirm, maintain, or strengthen a given norm, or alternatively change, amend, or replace it."[63]

By pointing to norms' dynamic character, this recent approach to the study of norms has highlighted the interplay of structures and actors in explaining normative change. According to these second-wave constructivist norm scholars, the reasons behind incomplete norm diffusion have to do with a norm's contestation by differently socialized actors, which occurs when the norm is transposed to another context, or with the norm entrepreneurs' incapacity to defend the norm against norm challengers.[64] While these studies acknowledge that the context and the norm interpreters' socialization

---

59 Wunderlich 2013, p.27.
60 Müller and Wunderlich 2013.
61 Wunderlich 2013, p.28.
62 Müller and Wunderlich 2013, p.351.
63 Wunderlich 2013, p.38.
64 Wiener 2007; Müller and Wunderlich 2013.

explain norm contestation and, therefore, norm decay, they come short of accounting for norm interpreters' power in terms of their access to decision-making processes. My study departs from this point and demonstrates that when norm contesters have a relatively good access to decision-making processes, norm contestation is more effective and the likelihood of norm diffusion decreases.

4.5   The study's theoretical contribution

My book offers two main theoretical contributions: first, by concentrating on the beginning of AI's interest in violence against women, I show that comparatively powerless actors within a transnational network are able to cause a new norm to emerge. My findings shed light on how this happens by illustrating the strategies of *parallel networking* and *analogous framing*.[65] Second, by emphasizing the preparation and the implementation of AI's first global thematic campaign (the SVAW campaign), I identify three main reasons for norm decay in the case of a transnational network: norms are contested by differently socialized actors; norm entrepreneurs cannot defend the norm from norm challengers; and the norm contesters' power in terms of access to the decision-making processes.

---

65   I refer to the concept of framing developed by social movement theorists such as Snow et al. (1986) and Tarrow (1999). Snow et al. 1986; Tarrow 1999.