Transcending a Western Bias

Towards a Decolonised and Entangled Perspective in Norms Research

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Abstract

In this introduction to the Special Issue, we suggest a decolonised and entangled perspective in norms research that transcends the Western legacies of global norms by taking into account the complex constellations and interactions within and between norms. We seek to move beyond the dichotomy of 'good' Western versus 'bad' non-Western norms without simply reversing it. We instead propose to integrate three dimensions into norms research: 1) revealing the ambivalences and ambiguities inherent to norms; 2) investigating plural actors as vectors of normative change; and 3) broadening the disciplinary realm of norms research. Our aim is to further develop the empirical and conceptual discussion of norms that moves beyond a Western bias without simply giving up on normative assessments of norms.

Tackling a Western Bias in Norms Research

This Special Issue is dedicated to exploring the increasingly complex, entangled, and fragmented normative dynamics of international politics amidst globalisation, norm transformation and a changing international landscape. It contributes to the body of norms research that is dedicated to tackling the "Western bias",[1] i.e., the tendency to revert to Western ways of thinking and academic knowledge production when studying the evolution, diffusion and contestation of norms. We suggest a dual perspective (decolonised and entangled) on norms in International Relations (IR) and International Political Theory as a way to advance norms research beyond a Western bias without simply giving up so-called Western norms.

First, our perspective is *decolonised* in the sense that it interrogates continuing colonial and hierarchical constellations and concepts regarding beliefs and ideas about norms and norm entrepreneurs, standards and patterns of appropriate behaviour, and social practices of promoting and contesting norms. Such a perspective involves decentring our research object: being more sensitive to the peripheries and thinking less from a Eurocentric vantage point. This requires critically reviewing the assumption that Western norms are always 'good' and that only they are the gold standard of global governance. It also entails escaping implicit cultural relativism or uncritically repeating and reifying anti-Western narratives and resentment. Decolonised research in this sense instead operates beyond pre-given binaries or dichotomies of 'good' and 'bad'.

Second, our perspective is *entangled* because we suggest thinking about world politics and their normative foundations in a more connected and interactive way, rather than based on cultural dichotomies or normative separations and divisions. Studying global norm transformations from an entangled perspective takes the complex constellations and interactions within and between norms from different world regions, actors and levels (local, regional, global) into account. It requires unprejudiced research on the 'whens', 'wheres' and 'hows' of normative connections, interactions and co-constitution.

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1   Young, 'Western Theory, Global World'.

Applying these perspectives to norms research, we define norms not only or primarily as formalised rules of behaviour in international treaties, as some authors do when dealing for instance with norm life cycles, or the emergences of norms and their decay, and how norms matter in comparison to material facts. Our understanding is much broader and resonates with critical IR that is interested in norms as both formal and informal rules of social behaviour, enshrined in (contesting) value systems and in the non-material systems of social order(ing).

IR norms research has recently acknowledged its Western bias and begun to integrate non-Western norms, actors, processes and institutions. This has led scholars to challenge and debunk earlier models and assumptions of linear norm evolution, which were often underpinned by normative understandings that resonate with Western perspectives, practices and values. Examples include the field of human rights[2] and constructions of a European identity.[3] Many of these studies addressed the contestation of (and threats to) the Western order caused by global power shifts and globalisation effects,[4] as well as counter-norms and illiberal pushbacks.[5] In short, they discussed the rivalry between different normative orders,[6] which is still framed as "the West vs. the rest".[7] Non-Western voices have long been overlooked, and conceptual innovations from non-Western regions remain under-represented in the academic discourse.[8]

In an attempt to deconstruct and thus decolonise the Western bias in norms research, scholarly attention has turned towards more inclusive ways of thinking.[9] These critical approaches resonate with postcolonial perspectives that focus on the inequalities of agenda setting power, material and other resources,

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2 Risse et al. (eds.), *The Power of Human Rights. International Norms and Domestic Change*; Finnemore and Sikkink, 'The Power of Human Rights. International Norms and Domestic Change'.

3 Checkel, 'Norms, Institutions, and National Identity in Contemporary Europe'; Checkel, 'Why Comply? Social Learning and European Identity Change'; Christiansen et al., *The Social Construction of Europe*.

4 Weber, *International Relations Theory. A Critical Introduction*.

5 Cooley and Schaaf, 'Grounding the Backlash: Regional Security Treaties, Counternorms, and Human Rights in Eurasia'.

6 Adamson, 'Global Liberalism Versus Political Islam: Competing Ideological Framework in International Politics'.

7 Hall, 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power'.

8 Trubina et al., 'A part of the world or apart from the world? The postsocialist Global East in the geopolitics of knowledge'.

9 E.g. Havercroft et al., 'Decolonising Global Constitutionalism'.

and the institutional setting and prominence of ideas and values between Western and non-Western contexts. This has sparked some profound discussions on decolonisation and the colonial past,[10] which illustrate how knowledge is the product of European colonial imprints and Eurocentric frames.

At the same time, critical perspectives on an assumed Western bias, as well as established perspectives in norms research, feature their own normative assumptions and presuppositions. For example, postcolonial theories, depending on their normative underpinnings, seek justice, emancipation, redistribution, equality or recognition. Anti-Western sentiments can also be used to legitimate ignorance about a supposedly Western understanding of human rights, democracy or the rule of law. Thus denouncing values as Western can fuel challenges to democracy or human rights by limiting them to only some parts of the world, thereby enhancing anti-Western populism and nationalism.[11]

Against this background, norms research faces the challenge of developing perspectives that deal with (and ultimately seek to overcome) a Western bias – while at the same time reflecting on normative positions inside, outside and, most importantly, *between* the dichotomy of the Western versus non-Western worlds. Norms researchers thus disclose and reflect upon the normative yardsticks they employ in a step towards contextualising and decolonising norms research,[12] and describe Western democracies' contribution to global norm transformations[13] without discrediting (presumably) Western norms of

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10   E.g. Adamson, 'Global Liberalism Versus Political Islam: Competing Ideological Framework in International Politics'; Bob, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics*; Epstein, 'Symposium: Interrogating the Use of Norms in International Relations. An Introduction'; Jabri, 'Disarming Norms: Postcolonial Agency and the Constitution of the International'; Steinhilper, 'From "the Rest" to "the West"? Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Western Bias in Norm Diffusion Research'; Acharya, 'Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders: Sovereignty, Regionalism, and Rule-Making in the Third World'; Acharya, '"Idea-Shift": How Ideas from the Rest Are Reshaping Global Order'.

11   See Mende, 'Are Human Rights Western—and Why Does It Matter? A Perspective from International Political Theory'; Sikkink, *Evidence for Hope: Making Human Rights Work in the 21st Century*.

12   See Hofius et al., 'Den Schleier Lichten? Kritische Normenforschung, Freiheit Und Gleichberechtigung Im Kontext Des Arabischen Frühlings. Eine Replik Auf Engelkamp/ Glaab/Renner, Ulbert Und Deitelhoff/Zimmermann'; Dunford, 'Peasant Activism and the Rise of Food Sovereignty: Decolonising and Democratising Norm Diffusion?'; Epstein, 'The Postcolonial Perspective: Why We Need to Decolonise Norms'; Mende and Möllers, 'Was sind Normen? Das reduktionistische und das konstruktivistische Normenverständnis im Dialog'.

13   E.g. Liese, 'Exceptional necessity. How liberal democracies contest the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment when countering terrorism'; Heller et al., 'The "Dark" Side of Normative Argumentation - the Case of Counterterrorism Policy'.

democracy. This helps to critically investigate and move beyond the dichotomy of apparently Western versus non-Western norms, and to pinpoint the blind spots of such a dichotomy. This process involves questioning the usage of terms such as 'Western' and 'non-Western', or 'Global North' and 'Global South', while acknowledging that they do highlight existing inequalities and shortcomings. Thus, it does not suffice to simply abolish these terms. Rather, it is key to avoid the pitfalls of a Western bias, on the one hand, and a simple reversal of the dichotomy between Western versus non-Western or 'good' versus 'bad' norms, with its slippery slope towards cultural relativism, on the other.[14]

Following this line of reasoning, this issue contributes to norms research by highlighting the need to create substantiated, fine-tuned, pluralist and entangled perspectives, as well as decolonised views of multifaceted normative trajectories and norm dynamics in global politics and how they interact. This entails studying the entanglement between apparently dichotomous sides, including their overlaps, mutual constitution and interactions, as well as their internal contradictions and ambivalences.[15]

We argue that norms research benefits from further conceptual refinement, in-depth multidirectional empirical analysis, and the application of context-sensitive methods to better understand and explain the full variety of global norm transformations. We address these needs by proposing three dimensions of decolonised and entangled norms research: (1) assessing the ambivalences and ambiguities inherent to norms, (2) investigating plural actors as vectors of normative change, and (3) broadening the disciplinary realm of IR norms research. These dimensions serve as the basis for transcending a Western bias without simply giving up on normative assessments of norms.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of recent IR norms research, including how it has contributed to a Western bias in the study of norms – and how it strives to overcome it. Section 3 details our three dimensions of decolonised and entangled norms research. Section 4 introduces the Special Issue's individual contributions, and discusses how each speaks to the three dimensions. Section 5 briefly concludes our introduction.

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14   Müller, 'In Search of the Global East: Thinking between North and South'; Mende, 'Are Human Rights Western—and Why Does It Matter? A Perspective from International Political Theory'.

15   Müller, 'Beyond a binary approach: Contradictions and strict antinomies'.

Norms Research with and beyond a Western Bias

IR norms research has extensively explored how norms affect international relations. Scholars in this field have articulated sophisticated approaches that take material and rational interests into account, as well as the implications, meanings and constitutive effects of ideas, norms and identities in international politics (most of them embedded in regimes and institutions or in domestic politics).[16] Most studies in this literature agree on what constitutes 'good' (i.e. normatively desirable) norms, and that norms evolved linearly based on norm compliance and constitution. This strand of norms research has mostly focused on so-called Western norms and norm entrepreneurs, i.e. on norms and agents that constitute and promote Western standards of appropriateness in an international and globalised context.

Several norms scholars have begun to question this Western bias incrementally.[17] They challenge the teleological assumption inherent in norms research as well as the colonial and post-colonial roots of the current international normative and legal regime. To overcome this bias, scholars increasingly engage with overly 'Eurocentric' or 'Western-centric' positions in norms scholarship, which has generated three major shifts in norms research.

First, researchers advocate understanding norms as processes, rather than fixed entities,[18] which are constantly being contested and (re-)negotiated.[19] Thus, norms are perceived as subject to reinterpretation in concrete historical and political contexts instead of simply being reproduced in a local context.

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16   For a recent overview, see Lantis, 'Theories of International Norm Contestation: Structure and Outcomes'; Sandholtz, 'International Norm Change'.

17   Adamson, 'Global Liberalism Versus Political Islam: Competing Ideological Framework in International Politics'; Bob, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics*; Epstein, 'Symposium: Interrogating the Use of Norms in International Relations. An Introduction'; Hofius et al., 'Den Schleier Lichten? Kritische Normenforschung, Freiheit Und Gleichberechtigung Im Kontext Des Arabischen Frühlings. Eine Replik Auf Engelkamp/Glaab/Renner, Ulbert Und Deitelhoff/Zimmermann'; Jabri, 'Disarming Norms: Postcolonial Agency and the Constitution of the International'; Steinhilper, 'From "the Rest" to "the West"? Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Western Bias in Norm Diffusion Research'; Acharya, 'Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders: Sovereignty, Regionalism, and Rule-Making in the Third World'; Acharya, '"Idea-Shift": How Ideas from the Rest Are Reshaping Global Order'.

18   Krook and True, 'Rethinking the Life Cycles of International Norms: The United Nation and the Global Promotion of Gender Equality'.

19   Wiener, *A Theory of Contestation*; Wiener, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations.*

This has led to new empirical research foci, such as the dynamics and effects of norm regress.[20]

In a second shift, scholars have begun to take a more decentred perspective and to look at how actors from the Global South – or the 'non-Western' world – engage with global norms. Studies now more frequently highlight how weak actors from the peripheries often exercise normative agency, act as norm entrepreneurs, and reinterpret and contest existing (or advance alternative) norms, thereby contributing to the normative constitution of the global order.[21]

Third, researchers scrutinise how actors from the Global North (or the 'Western' world) actively pursue and engage with norms that are perceived as illiberal, repressive or problematic.[22] For instance, they demonstrate Western resistance to supposedly universal global norms and legal frameworks following significant shifts in political practices in Western liberal democracies after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.[23] This research reveals the embeddedness of 'bad' norms within the Western world, and thus the plurality and ambiguity of what are perceived as Western norms.

The global order(s) are undergoing an epoch-making transition that is revealing the centrifugal forces of the 'Western' world and the emancipatory ambitions of regions and actors from the 'non-Western' world. Examining these new

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20   Rosert and Schirmbeck, 'Zur Erosion Internationaler Normen'; Panke and Petersohn, 'Why International Norms Disappear Sometimes'.

21   Adamson, 'Global Liberalism Versus Political Islam: Competing Ideological Framework in International Politics'; Acharya, 'How Norms Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism'; Acharya, 'Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders: Sovereignty, Regionalism, and Rule-Making in the Third World'; Bettiza and Dionigi, 'Beyond Constructivism's Liberal Bias: Islamic Norm Entrepreneurs in a Post-Secular World Society'; Hofius et al., 'Den Schleier Lichten? Kritische Normenforschung, Freiheit Und Gleichberechtigung Im Kontext Des Arabischen Frühlings. Eine Replik Auf Engelkamp/Glaab/Renner, Ulbert Und Deitelhoff/ Zimmermann'; Steinhilper, 'From "the Rest" to "the West"? Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Western Bias in Norm Diffusion Research'; Bloomfield, 'Norm Antipreneurs and Theorizing Resistance to Normative Change'; Jose, 'Not Completely the New Normal: How Human Rights Watch Tried to Suppress the Targeted Killing Norm'; Jose and Stefes, 'Russian Norm Entrepreneurship in Crimea – Serious Contestation or Cheap Talk?'; Müller and Wunderlich, *Norm Dynamics in Multilateral Arms Control: Interests, Conflicts, and Justice*; Wunderlich, *Rogue States as Norm Entrepreneurs: Black Sheep or Sheep in Wolves' Clothing?*; Tourinho, *The Co-Constitution of Order*.

22   Bob, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics*; Bob, *Rights as Weapons: Instruments of Conflict, Tools of Power*.

23   McKeown, 'Norm Regress: US Revisionism and the Slow Death of the Torture Norm'; Heller et al., 'The "Dark" Side of Normative Argumentation - the Case of Counterterrorism Policy'.

spaces and actors has given norms research a better understanding of the normative dynamics of global politics and advanced a more global perspective. But analytical positions and frames for a decolonised view of the practices and study of global politics are still, as Bohman would say, coming of age.[24] Yet we do not envision a closed and self-contained final destination. Rather, we aim to support the opening up of perspectives by taking account of current disruptions in global politics as well as colonial legacies.

Norms research is now exploring how the interplay between alternative understandings of social norms and legal frameworks contributes to the dynamic (re-)constitution of the global normative and legal structures.[25] Indeed, most of these works move beyond a simple distinction between 'good' and 'bad' norms, or 'Western' versus 'non-Western' norm promoters.[26] Yet it remains to be seen whether this progress will disrupt the 'Western' cognitive frame, under what conditions, and the effects and implications of such a disruption.

Decolonised and Entangled Norms Research

Postcolonial theories point to the problem of a Western bias that constructs a dichotomy of 'good' Western versus 'bad' non-Western norms, based on colonial images of the so-called civilised Western and the presumably non-civilised non-Western world to legitimate the exploitation and subjugation of the latter

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24   Bohman, 'Survey Article: the coming of age of deliberative democracy'. Also cf. Havercroft, 'Decolonising Global Constitutionalism'.

25   True and Wiener, 'Everyone Wants (a) Peace: The Dynamics of Rhetoric and Practice on "Women, Peace and Security"'; Wiener, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations*.

26   See Hofius et al., 'Den Schleier Lichten? Kritische Normenforschung, Freiheit Und Gleichberechtigung Im Kontext Des Arabischen Frühlings. Eine Replik Auf Engelkamp/ Glaab/Renner, Ulbert Und Deitelhoff/Zimmermann'; Sikkink, *Evidence for Hope: Making Human Rights Work in the 21st Century*; Draude (ed.), *The Agency of the Governed in the Global South. Normative and Institutional Change*; Mende, 'Are Human Rights Western – and Why Does It Matter? A Perspective from International Political Theory'; Stimmer, 'Beyond Internalization: Alternate Endings of the Norm Life Cycle'; Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 'Things We Lost in the Fire: How Different Types of Contestation Affect the Robustness of International Norms'; Hansel and Reichwein, 'A Dangerous Responsibility: Back Towards a New Authoritarian Interventionism?'; Wiener, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations*; Wunderlich, *Rogue States as Norm Entrepreneurs: Black Sheep or Sheep in Wolves' Clothing?*.

by the former.[27] To avoid a dichotomous reversal of the Western bias, however, we also employ an entangled perspective that acknowledges the contributions of norms such as human rights and democracy, while at the same time taking their potential adversarial effects or misuse into account and not excluding the progressive achievements of non-Western countries. To thus elaborate a decolonised and entangled perspective that takes the complex constellations and interactions within and between norms as well as the above-mentioned disruption of taken-for-granted cognitive frames into account, we propose three dimensions of norms research and explore their conditions.

The Ambivalences and Ambiguities Inherent to Norms

In our first dimension, we identify ambivalences and ambiguities within norms and scrutinise paradigm(s) in global constitutional settings relating to Western, non-Western and globalised norms to transcend a Western bias. The long-held focus on normatively desirable, linear norm evolution and compliance does not capture the complex global, regional and local developments taking place around the world. Normative understandings are also multifaceted within the 'Western' and 'non-Western' worlds, and subject to manifold interpretations, contestations and applications even among actors who share more or less similar political and legal frames.

To illustrate this point, we closely examine the idea of human rights. Although notoriously characterised as a Western norm, the idea of human rights has numerous sources in non-Western ideas, religions and cultures. In contrast to positions that, for instance, refuse to acknowledge the norm of individuality in non-Western norms, we acknowledge that norms of personhood and individual moral agency – as well as norms of universal tolerance, individual liberty, persons as rights holders, religious freedom and the protection of minorities – have a long history in Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, Mandarin, Brahman and other non-Western traditions.[28]

Human rights have also been the subject of highly controversial discussions and contestation *within* the West. For example, the *French Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* from 1789, one of the main predecessors of

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27   Hall, 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power'; Said, *Orientalism*.
28   Sen, *Development as Freedom*, pp. 227ff.; Joas, *The sacredness of the person: A new genealogy of human rights*; Chan, 'A Confucian perspective on human rights for contemporary China'; Sharma, *Hinduism and human rights: A conceptual approach*; Othman, 'Grounding human rights arguments in non-western culture: *Shari'a* and the citizenship rights of women in a modern Islamic state'. For a more detailed overview, cf. Mende, 'Are Human Rights Western—and Why Does It Matter? A Perspective from International Political Theory'.

the contemporary human rights regime, was opposed by critics like Burke and Bentham, who rejected the idea of universal human rights.[29] From a contrary perspective that sought to extend rather than reject universal human rights, feminists criticised how the French Declaration excluded women,[30] while others underlined the importance of solidarity, community and group rights.[31] Far from resenting human rights as being Western, a Haitian delegation travelled to Paris to (unsuccessfully) negotiate the inclusion of an anti-slavery clause in the French Declaration when Haitian revolutionaries fought to end slavery and ensure the political participation of people of colour in 1792.[32] This demonstrates how the problem of Eurocentrism in human rights lies in its exclusion of the non-Western world,[33] and not simply in a non-Western rejection of Western norms. While the latter also exists, there is neither a homogenous non-Western nor a homogenous Western perspective on norms such as human rights.

Tracing these ambivalences and ambiguities within norms and normative systems and critically questioning whether certain norms are genuinely Western also allows us to identify overlaps among and interactions with norms that at first glance do not seem to belong to the Western paradigm.

Plural Actors as Vectors of Normative Change

We suggest mapping and illustrating the dynamics of norm diffusion in light of shifting global order(s) and political contexts in a second dimension. The rise and decline of many actors in global politics is reshaping the international normative order(s). Non-Western as well as non-state actors that actively engage in international normative discourses have emerged on a global scale; they have introduced new norms and norm-related practices. These actors range from authoritarian states like China and Russia to new non-Western

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29 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to That Event*; Bentham, *Rights, Representation, and Reform: Nonsense Upon Stilts and Other Writings on the French Revolution*; see also Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen*, p. 22; Welsh, *Edmund Burke and International Relations: The Commonwealth of Europe and the Crusade against the French Revolution*.

30 De Gouges, *Déclaration Des Droits De La Femme Et De La Citoyenne*; Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*.

31 Vincent, *Human rights and international relation*, pp. 25–27.

32 Bhambra, 'On the Haitian Revolution and the Society of Equals', p. 5; Buck-Morss, 'Hegel and Haiti'.

33 Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', p. 24; also cf. Bell, ed., *Ethics and world politics*.

regional organisations[34] and local activists and movements from the Global South.[35] Western actors have also advanced major normative shifts over the last 20 years. The 'Global War on Terror' following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, for instance, has triggered a profound shift in Western foreign policy priorities from spreading democracy and human rights towards securitisation[36] and a reduction in the scope of norms.[37] Changes in the global conditions – i.e. in the international context in which norms operate – equally cause them to change substantively. Such changes can also come in the form of a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which has created an 'exceptional' situation[38] comparable to the shock of 9/11, as has the Russian war against Ukraine. Such disruptive events trigger global crises with incalculable effects, reminding us of the fragility of what passes for normative consensus: it can quickly crumble when faced with extreme challenges. The pandemic, for instance, has required actors to take unprecedented decisions to keep national health systems working, severely restricting civil rights and liberties.

There are many examples of how global power shifts have affected international normative discourses and orders. One is the regional integration dynamic observed worldwide and the formation of new 'post-Western' regional organisations by mostly authoritarian states. It seems as if regions have become powerful sources and instruments of norm contestation and global reordering.[39] Another example is the emergence of new interpretations of international law and norms promoted by non-Western actors. Russia and Saudi Arabia, for instance, adopted the language of 'humanitarian intervention' to justify and legitimise their military engagements and use of force in Ukraine and Yemen in the name of minority protection vis-à-vis the international community. These cases show that there is a distinctively authoritarian practice of entering

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34 Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*; Ambrosio, 'Catching the "Shanghai Spirit": How the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Promotes Authoritarian Norms in Central Asia'.

35 Draude (ed.), *The Agency of the Governed in the Global South. Normative and Institutional Change*; Dunford, 'Peasant Activism and the Rise of Food Sovereignty: Decolonising and Democratising Norm Diffusion?'; Holzscheiter, 'Affectedness, Empowerment and Norm Contestation – Children and Young People as Social Agents in International Politics'.

36 McKeown, 'Norm Regress: US Revisionism and the Slow Death of the Torture Norm'; Heller et al., 'The "Dark" Side of Normative Argumentation - the Case of Counterterrorism Policy'.

37 Moe and Geis, 'From liberal interventionism to stabilisation: A new consensus on norm-downsizing in interventions in Africa'.

38 Bogdandy and Villarreal, 'The Role of International Law in Vaccinating against Covid-19: Appraising the Covax Initiative'.

39 Farrell, *Global Politics of Regionalism*.

debates about international human rights and intersubjectively shared norms such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Yet, authoritarian states are embedded in normative structures in an equally complex way as democratic states. Both types of regimes use international norms to justify interest-driven power politics and economic or geopolitical purposes and ambitions.[40] At the same time, their international political behaviour is anchored in ideational sets of meanings about appropriate political order and rightful rule, which stem from individual countries' cultural and ideological heritage. From a decolonised research perspective, the question arises: whose interests are these regimes pursuing, and whose normative demands and interpretations do their policies represent?

In sum, prior research has demonstrated that the universe of norm entrepreneurs transcends prototypical good international citizens and Western do-gooders. In fact, norm advocacy may arise from multiple ideological backgrounds, as analyses of Islamist norm entrepreneurs aptly demonstrate,[41] and even assumed norm breakers may engage in norm entrepreneurial activities.[42] A more recent strand of norms research has therefore advocated acknowledging the "agency of the governed" when engaging with supposedly global norms.[43] This literature emphasises that norms researchers must engage in a "global multilogue"[44] – i.e. a meaningful global conversation that includes all affected stakeholders. Examples include the normative agency of apparently weak or marginalised actors who are usually excluded from formal norm negotiation processes but nevertheless challenge global norms that were created for their well-being, such as indigenous peoples,[45] peasant activists[46] or working children.[47] Finally, new regional entities in the form of new (non-Western)

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40   Hansel and Reichwein, 'A Dangerous Responsibility: Back Towards a New Authoritarian Interventionism?'.

41   Adamson, 'Global Liberalism Versus Political Islam: Competing Ideological Framework in International Politics'; Bettiza and Dionigi, 'Beyond Constructivism's Liberal Bias: Islamic Norm Entrepreneurs in a Post-Secular World Society'.

42   Wunderlich, 'A Rogue Gone Norm Entrepreneurial? Iran within the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime'; Jose and Stefes, 'Russian Norm Entrepreneurship in Crimea – Serious Contestation or Cheap Talk?'.

43   E.g. the special issue edited by Draude, *Third World Thematics – a TWQ Journal*.

44   Wiener, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations*.

45   Steinhilper, 'From "the Rest" to "the West"? Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Western Bias in Norm Diffusion Research'.

46   Dunford, 'Peasant Activism and the Rise of Food Sovereignty: Decolonising and Democratising Norm Diffusion?'.

47   Holzscheiter, 'Affectedness, Empowerment and Norm Contestation – Children and Young People as Social Agents in International Politics'; Benedix this issue.

multilateral organisations have emerged. These actors mediate member states' interests as well as new norms between the global and local levels,[48] and seek to influence actors, norms and rules beyond their membership.[49] However, upon closer inspection, the outcomes of the ongoing normative struggles and transformations are anything but clear. The entanglements with (and influences of) global and local norms in the Global South likely differ by case, which calls into question whether the construction of a Global South (or Global North, for that matter) is academically and empirically applicable.

Norms research therefore needs to tackle questions such as: what actors are we talking about? What are their contestatory claims? What are the processes and practices by which these claims are created, contested and applied? Which normative principles guide (and which social practices influence) these actors' understandings of the global order? How do norms that emerge in various political and social settings interact with established global scripts and Western norms? How do 'non-Western' norms mirror and challenge the latter, and with what mechanisms of legitimation? When analysing plural actors as vectors of normative change, decolonised and entangled norms research can address these questions by taking a closer look at the plurality of actors, including long-overlooked norm promoters and contesters, and examining the substance of the norms these actors introduce into global politics.

Broadening the Disciplinary Realm of IR Norms Research

Third, a decolonised and entangled perspective benefits from empirically pluralistic and in-depth approaches that expand research methods and subjects. Because knowledge production on norm dynamics requires research frames and methods that break up (or at least critically question) disciplinary dogmas or axioms in terms of epistemology and ontology, this inhibits us from seeing and understanding global norm dynamics in a centred and interconnected way. Looking beyond traditional norms research to learn from other disciplines allows us to capture the ambiguities, various sites and multiple dynamics of norm evolution, promotion, and contestation from a global perspective, and to better understand how norms affect the diverse actors involved in these processes. This helps us avoid thinking in terms of division and difference, but instead in relations and connections.

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48   Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*.
49   Ambrosio, 'Catching the "Shanghai Spirit": How the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Promotes Authoritarian Norms in Central Asia'; Aris, 'The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: A Eurasian Security Actor?'; Van Hüllen, 'Just Leave Us Alone: The Arab League and Human Rights'.

Decolonised and entangled perspectives on norms research can thus integrate multiple research approaches and methods initially located outside the disciplinary boundaries of IR. Some of these have already accommodated more recent research on norms. Practice approaches provide evidence of the concrete and contextualised "empirical access points"[50] for norm change and norm transformations.[51] Critical and human geography can uncover the interregional connections of norms beyond spatial reifications and trace their entanglements through multiple levels of analysis.[52] Historical perspectives can trace the pathways and encounters of different norms over time.[53] Innovative approaches that apply the concept of mediation to their empirical studies can shed light on interconnections, interactions and entanglements between dimensions that at first glance appear to be dichotomous. Interpretive approaches provide the possibility of engaging with plural actors, norms, and their interactions in single-case and small-n comparative studies.[54] Research methods that integrate positivist and interpretive approaches can benefit from the strengths of both strands and exploit their overlaps.[55]

In sum, we do not suggest there is a fixed corpus of approaches and methods that are applicable to the decolonised and entangled study of norms. Rather, we point to a rich body of research approaches and methods that not only include qualitative and quantitative, interpretive and explanatory, positivist and post-positivist accounts, but are also able to bridge disciplinary gaps and divides.

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50 Bueger, 'Pathways to practice: praxiography and international politics', p. 383.

51 True and Wiener, 'Everyone Wants (a) Peace: The Dynamics of Rhetoric and Practice on "Women, Peace and Security"'.

52 Bank et al., 'Die "Politics of Scale" in der deutschsprachigen Politikwissenschaft: Warum sich eine breitere Diskussion des Konzepts lohnt'; Lambach, *Space, scale, and global politics: Towards a critical approach to space in international relations.*

53 Jensen, *The Making of International Human Rights: The 1960s, Decolonization and the Reconstruction of Global Values. Human Rights in History*; Sikkink, *Evidence for Hope: Making Human Rights Work in the 21st Century.*

54 Klotz and Lynch, *Strategies for research in constructivist international relations*; Schwartz-Shea and Dvora, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes.*

55 Mende, 'Extended Qualitative Content Analysis: Researching the United Nations and Other International Institutions'.

Applying Decolonised and Entangled Perspectives in Norms Research

The articles in this Special Issue present studies that contribute to decolonised and entangled perspectives in norms research in the three dimensions discussed above by interrogating the ambivalences and ambiguities of the Western frame in IR norms research, engaging with transformations of the global order(s), and employing research methods beyond the traditional boundaries of IR to explore non-Western norm entrepreneurs as well as the interstice of norms and contestation practices by multiple actors.

Carmen Wunderlich's article builds on recent studies that focus on non-Western or 'authoritarian' norm entrepreneurs and highlights the limitations of academic discourse which seems to be wedded to a particular notion of what 'ideational commitment' means and from whom it must emanate. Such an understanding risks lauding some forms of norm entrepreneurship as 'genuine', while dismissing other cases as strategically motivated. Linking the literature on norm entrepreneurship with norm contestation theory, the paper resonates with our first dimension in norms research and argues in favour of 'demoralising' the concept. Decoupling it from normative biases has several analytical advantages: first, it reveals the full repertoire of norm entrepreneurial action (from cooperative to confrontational). Second, it shows how relative the normativity of norms can be in different contexts. Third, this shifts attention to contestation as the *modus vivendi* of norm entrepreneurship and to the political nature of norm dynamics.

Birsen Erdogan's article contributes to our first and second dimension of norms research. It illustrates that state security actors that are deemed liminal in a classical West/non-West distinction can become central to changing the landscape of international and regional (normative) order. The article investigates the role of intersubjective and situated meanings and norm contestation for militarised humanitarian interventions from a critical perspective. Erdogan explains and critically evaluates the IR literature on humanitarian interventions, the R2P doctrine, and the emergence of norms. The author discusses Turkey's misuse of the R2P norm in the context of the war in Syria through strategies of discursive norm contestation. The article starts with the assumption that an emerging norm is a contested concept in the sense of Wiener's norm contestation approach that generates disagreements among states about its meaning, implementation, and implications. The article goes on to argue from a Laclaudian post-structural perspective that the relevant actors within the Turkish foreign policy discourse interpret the post-Arab Spring crisis as a window of opportunity in three senses. First, according to Erdogan, these

actors use the crisis to construct (in)security issues, and to dislocate and rede-
fine Turkey's role and identity as neither a Western nor non-Western power,
which increases its ability to create an alternative order. Second, the actors
exploit the crisis to contest and reinterpret the R2P at the domestic level and
in line with Ankara's ambitions of becoming a regional hegemon in the Middle
East. Finally, the author argues that Turkey aims to renegotiate the R2P norm
in relation to its own (and others') identities. By reconstructing the Turkish
government's changing behaviour during NATO's Libya intervention and the
Syrian war, the article shows that the R2P has come to serve the hegemonic
project to reorder the region in which Turkey is embedded, and that Turkey
is a key security player in an unstable and volatile environment. The author
concludes that critical approaches provide useful tools to help understand the
role of identity, changing foreign policy narratives, and power constellations
in world politics.

Nadine Benedix's study connects with more recent research on how gov-
erned or marginalised actors engage with the global constitutional order,
tying in with all three of our dimensions. Analysing how working children in
Bolivia discursively shape their subjectivity in such hierarchical processes,
the author situates normative claims and contestatory practices by working
children in Bolivia within the broader context of unequal power hierarchies.
The analysis reveals how the working children's norm contestation emerges
in narrative practices which are embedded within a hierarchical normative
and material reality. In this sense it is their being governed and being excluded
from processes of norm negotiation that ultimately shapes how working chil-
dren approach the global constitutional order. Benedix argues that it would be
short-sighted to dismiss their normative claims as mere criticism of how the
global ban on child labour is implemented in Bolivia. According to the author,
their norm contestation should instead be interpreted as agency claiming
that is inherently intertwined with their positionality in processes of norma-
tive ordering, which is in turn shaped by postcolonial hierarchies. Within the
contractions produced by international child labour governance and broader
economic inequalities, working children in Bolivia subjectivate themselves
from a position of normative exclusion. Through practices of mitigation, they
appropriate a distinct social position for themselves from which they con-
struct themselves as active subjects shaping social environments. Benedix's
study reminds us that norm researchers need to pay careful attention to the
power-imbued context in which they (and their objects of inquiry) are situated
when analysing how 'governed' actors interact with normative orders.

Etienne Höra contributes to our second proposed dimension of entangled and decolonised norms research by investigating how China as a norm entrepreneur promotes and contributes to 'green', i.e. climate and sustainability friendly global norms. Using China's Belt and Road Initiative as an example, Höra examines China's domestic political practices and how they shape the country's engagement in the construction of international norms. After Joseph Nye famously asked what China (and Russia) "don't get about soft power,"[56] Höra argues that the question to ask now is what we don't get about China. Integrating area studies and authoritarian regime research, Höra identifies China's norm entrepreneurship, particularly in its slogan politics as well as in open and vague normative formulations, which contrasts with the self-understanding and perception of the Chinese leadership as a strong and goal-driven norm promoter combined with a strictly hierarchical political organisation. At the same time, China reproduces many of the mistakes that 'Western' norm promoters have made in the past. The author concludes with an insight that runs through all the articles as well as the spirit of the Special Issue: his example shows how diverse yet entangled the normative underpinnings of global politics are.

Finally, Regina Heller contributes to the third dimension of entangled and decolonised norms research. She looks for analytical approaches that can overcome theoretical and conceptual problems and divides in the entangled fields of IR and Eurasian Studies when studying Eurasian regionalism. She starts by observing that Eurasia's role and position in the world is poorly defined and only partly understood. She attributes this situation to implicit assumptions about regional and global structures that essentialise Eurasia as a region and create normative divides. Heller argues that the socio-spatial framework of scale as developed in the human geography can help come to a de-essentialised and more connected understanding of Eurasia and its location in the world. From the perspective of scale, Eurasia is a contested, constructed and contentious political geography where powerful actors apply spatial practices and use the notion of region to further their political interests. Scale does not operate within *a priori* meta-categories of space and region, which helps researchers avoid reification traps and better understand the sometimes highly ambivalent normative substance that materialises within Eurasian spaces.

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56   Nye, 'What China and Russia Don't Get About Soft Power. Bejing and Moscow Are Trying Their Hands at Attraction, and Failing – Miserably'.

Conclusion

This Special Issue contributes to decolonised and entangled norms research. We propose three dimensions to broaden, multiply and deepen our subjects of research as well as our understanding of complex norm transformations and entanglements. They enable us to zoom in on the plurality of actors and norms beyond the macro level, emphasising the meso and micro levels, which opens up new perspectives in order to investigate international structures and forms of organisation, historical trajectories and voyages, and potential connections between old and new norms and norm entrepreneurs in global politics. They allow us to identify the interactions and interstices between the different levels and actors of norm transformation. Moreover, they help us learn more about the constitutional quality and conflictive (or even cooperative) effects of interactions at such interstices and interfaces.[57]

In proposing these three dimensions, we are not suggesting that there is only one way of conducting norms research. Quite the opposite is the case: taking into account the plurality of approaches, actors, practices, contexts, dynamics and methods, as well as drawing on the ever-advancing discussions in norms research, opens up further perspectives on the normative underpinnings and effects of global norms and politics.

Acknowledgments

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