

Global Strategies for Gender Equality: Comparing Quotas and Mainstreaming

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Abstract

The diffusion of international norms is a central research question in international relations. Informed by constructivism, prevailing models are marked by a crucial tension between a static internal view of norm content and a dynamic external picture of norm adoption and implementation. Because norms continue to evolve after they emerge, we suggest that a discursive approach offers a more promising way forward for theorizing and analysing the life cycles of international norms. We present a view of norms as processes, calling attention to both internal and external sources of dynamism. We illustrate this theory by tracing and comparing the life cycles of two global equality strategies: gender-balanced decision-making and gender mainstreaming. We find that these strategies emerged from two distinct policy realms, and after converging in the mid-1990s as partner strategies for gender equality, have subsequently developed largely separately from, and often in tension with, one another.

A central research question in international relations (IR) concerns the development and diffusion of international norms. Examples of such norms are diverse. They can encompass regulations associated mainly with domestic politics, like women's suffrage (Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan 1997), democracy (Harrison 2004), human rights (Clark 2001; Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999), labour standards (Hertel 2006), prohibitions against slavery (Ray 1989) and apartheid (Klotz 1995), and the creation of new state bureaucratic structures (Finnemore 1993; True and Mintrom 2001). They can also include norms governing inter-state relations, like the expansion of cooperative security (Acharya 2004), humanitarian intervention (Finnemore 2003), and election monitoring (Kelley 2008), as well as the restriction of war time plunder (Sandholtz 2008), the use of particular types of warfare like landmines and nuclear and chemical weapons (Legro 1997; Price 1998), and the hunting of endangered species (Bailey 2008; Epstein 2008).

While not an exhaustive list, the extent and variety of these attempted changes to state behaviour suggest that international norms play a crucial and growing role in domestic and world politics. At the same time, however, scholars have also noted that not all norms have their intended effects (Cortell and Davis 2000), retain the same content across countries and over time (Florini 1996), or share the same basic characteristics in terms of which kinds of norms are most likely to diffuse across the international system (Carpenter 2007). The complexity of these effects has led researchers to generate four main paradigms of norm diffusion centred on world cultures (Strang and Meyer 1997), norm cascades (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998), boomerang effects (Keck and Sikkink 1998), and spiral models (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999). Inspired by constructivism, these approaches confer an important role to ideas in international politics, arguing that norms form structures of their own which shape interactions among groups and

individuals, even as they originate in the initiatives and shared understandings of purposive actors (Reus-Smit 2005; Wendt 1999).

These two propositions of constructivism help account for both stability and change in the norms governing world politics. In the process, however, they also introduce a crucial tension that carries over into the literature on international norms, namely a relatively *static internal depiction* of norm content, juxtaposed against a comparatively *dynamic external account* of norm creation, diffusion, and socialization. Consequently, the four main models diverge significantly with regard to the latter, presenting differing views on the primary agents of change, the types of norms that spread, the relative importance of political and institutional environments, and the potential for reversal. Meanwhile, they converge on the former, offering a shared definition of norms as ‘things,’ described as standard behaviours (Axelrod 1986; Krasner 1983), legitimate behavioural claims (Florini 1996), and inter-subjective or shared understandings (Finnemore 1994; Joachim 2003). Therefore, although norms may be regulative, constitutive, and evaluative or prescriptive (Goertz and Diehl 1992), their boundaries are largely understood as absolute: norms are taught (Finnemore 1996), advocated (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Nadelmann 1990; True and Mintrom 2001), and internalized (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999). They may be contested, but in most accounts, tensions do not spring from within, but are instead the result of competition with other norms and would-be norms (Florini 1996).

This dominant approach to the study of international norms has been challenged by new studies, which acknowledge the complex processes at work as norms are adopted and translated into practice, but point out that norms themselves are dynamic (Sandholtz 2008; Van Kersbergen and Verbeek 2007; Wiener 2004). This work observes that norms that spread across the international system tend to be vague, enabling their content to be filled in many ways and

thereby to be appropriated for a variety of different purposes. In contrast to more fixed notions, this conceptualization views norms as ‘processes,’ as works-in-progress rather than as finished products. The ongoing potential for contestation means, in turn, that cooptation, drift, and reversal are constant possibilities (cf. March and Olsen 1989). At first glance, this reformulation appears to further complicate the task of accounting for norm creation and impact. We argue, however, that attending to the fluid and somewhat evasive nature of norms, ironically, offers greater analytical leverage for explaining why norms emerge and appear to diffuse rapidly, at the same time that they rarely achieve their intended aims.

Methodologically, this new lens requires adapting the constructivist framework to a more discursive approach to the study of politics. Like constructivism, this perspective acknowledges the importance of ideas in shaping political interactions and outcomes. However, in recognizing the ongoing constitution and reconstitution of norms, it confers a more active role to policy actors in identifying and giving meaning to various kinds of policy problems (cf. Bacchi 1999). More specifically, the focus here is on how norms get constructed and, in many cases, evolve over time (1) in response to continuing debates over their *internal* definition and (2) in interaction with the *external* normative environment, consisting of other norms that are themselves ‘in process.’ Although discourse analysis takes many forms, we employ a version known as ‘critical frame analysis’ (Verloo 2007), which acknowledges that not all actors have a similar ‘voice’ in defining problems and solutions (cf. Carpenter 2007). We also build on the insight that normative concepts are frequently linked to other political and policy goals, often through attempts to fix, shrink, stretch, and bend their meanings as a way to attain concrete policy gains (Lombardo, Meier, and Verloo 2008).

To demonstrate the advantages of a discursive approach, we explore the theory of norms as processes by examining and comparing the ‘life cycles’ of two policies which were viewed in the mid-1990s as partner strategies for gender equality: “gender-balanced decision-making” and “gender mainstreaming.” Recognizing that women and men are positioned differently in social, economic, and political structures, these strategies suggest that gender equality cannot be achieved without (1) the inclusion of women as policy-makers and (2) the consideration of the gendered implications of all public policies. The responses of member-states were immediate and far-reaching. Prior to the 1990s, about 20 countries had witnessed the adoption of quotas regulating the selection of female candidates to political office. Since then, however, more than 80 countries have passed policies to improve the number of women elected (Krook 2006, 312-313). Similar patterns are evident in the case of state bureaucracies for women. Before the 1990s, about 40 countries had established state-level agencies to address women’s issues in public policy. In the following years, however, similar structures were set up in 90 more countries (True and Mintrom 2001, 32). A long-term perspective reveals that while these two policy strategies converged in 1995, and are sometimes conflated with or substituted for one another (Lombardo and Meier 2008), they in fact have had distinct origins and subsequent trajectories with the UN system. Further, they have had widely divergent effects across the countries where they have been implemented (Krook 2009; Rai 2003).

A closer look at the ‘life cycles’ of these two policy innovations, therefore, presents an opportunity to generate a new framework for analyzing the emergence, evolution, and impact of international norms. In the first section, we begin by outlining the four models of norm diffusion informed by traditional constructivist approaches. Through a careful reading of key texts, we demonstrate that all four develop relatively dynamic accounts of how norms spread and are

internalized in various contexts. Yet, while there is interest in the debates leading to norm creation, changes in norm content cease to be a focus once attention has turned to questions of policy diffusion and implementation. In the second section, we argue against this static conceptualization and propose an alternative understanding of norms as processes. Inspired by a more discursive approach to policy analysis, we point to two sources of dynamism behind norm definition and development: (1) dynamics internal to norms, in terms of ongoing discussions over their exact definitions, and (2) dynamics external to norms, with regard to the broader 'normative environment.' Interactions between these two components, we suggest, have an impact on which new norms emerge, how their content shifts over time, and what effects they have in transforming existing political dynamics.

We then turn to our two empirical cases. In the third section, we explore the nature of quotas and mainstreaming as tactics for promoting gender equality and ask how the two came to be seen as partner strategies in Beijing. Tracing the origins and evolution of both policies in the UN system, we find that these strategies emerged from two distinct policy realms. In the fourth section, we examine their subsequent trajectories, noting that they have largely developed separately, and often in tension with, one another. Although each has been the focus of distinct advocacy networks and forms of expertise, the task of defining and translating each norm into practice has led to substantial slippage across the two concepts, to the degree that they are now often framed as alternative or hierarchical rather than partner strategies for gender equality. The comparison reveals, therefore, that the life cycles of international norms do not resemble linear models of norm emergence and diffusion; rather, these trajectories are often fraught with contestation and reversals as groups compete to identify, define, and implement these norms.

Norms as Things: Constructivist Approaches

IR theories aim to explain change and continuity in global politics. Constructivist approaches expand the repertoire of theoretical explanation by arguing that states behave in accordance with a “logic of appropriateness” and a “logic of material consequences” for their actions (March and Olsen 1989; Wendt 1994; Finnemore 1996). Yet, by claiming that standards of appropriateness – i.e. “norms” – determine political outcomes, they accord them the status of structures, albeit structures originating in the constructions of purposive actors (Checkel 1998). Thus, constructivism falls prey to the same weakness of realist and liberal theories in explaining structural change (Keck and Sikkink 1998). The result is that constructivist explanations of norm diffusion embody a curious tension, combining relatively dynamic accounts of norm creation and socialization in rapidly changing external environments with more static and unitary conceptions of the norms themselves. Despite important differences across the four main approaches to norm diffusion – world cultures, norm cascades, boomerang effects, and spirals of norm adoption – all four converge in this respect. A static conception is problematic, we argue, because it limits the ability to explain how and why norms change as they diffuse, why they travel so widely across borders, and why they often fail to attain their intended goals. Further, it overlooks the possibility that norms diffuse precisely because – rather than despite the fact that – they may encompass different meanings, fit in with a variety of contexts, and be subject to framing by diverse actors.

World Polity

The ‘world polity’ model of norm diffusion argues that nation-states are culturally-constructed and embedded in a world society that promotes cultural processes of modernisation, learning and imitation, and institutional and organisational isomorphism. According to this

account, international norms are universalistic world models that are exogenously created and “not strongly anchored in local circumstances” (Strang and Meyer, 1997: 156). Although authors in this vein acknowledge that “states, organisations, and individuals... contribute much to the content and structure of world culture,” and that “much world cultural change and elaboration occurs within transnational organisations and associations independent of lower-level units” (Strang and Meyer, 1997: 151), they are relatively vague in terms of how ‘world culture’ and international norms are themselves constituted. Instead, their main theoretical interest lies in explaining the enactment of norms in the form and content of nation-states. Observing striking similarities in many state organization and policies (cf. Finnemore 1996; Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan 1997), they focus on reasons for convergence, arguing that states comply as a means to increase or enhance their international reputation and identity as ‘modern’ states. For this reason, they “concentrate on the social-structural frame that organises, carries and diffuses world cultural models *leaving the content of the models aside*” (Strang and Meyer, 1997: 162; emphasis added). Yet, at the same time that these scholars subsume norms under the heading of ‘modernization,’ framing their content as relatively straightforward and unproblematic, they also recognize that there may be “rampant inconsistencies and conflicts within world culture” and “contradictions inherent in widely valued cultural goods” such as in notions of equality versus liberty (Strang and Meyer, 1997: 172). They do not expressly theorize this dynamism, however, embracing instead an essentially linear, one-way process of alignment to ‘modern’ international standards.

Norm Cascades

A second model of international normative change focuses on ‘norm cascades,’ or the occurrence of bandwagoning among states as increasing numbers of states adopt or internalise a

new international norm. According to this theory, international norms evolve in a patterned life cycle, whereby norms emerge, gain the acceptance of a 'critical mass' of states, and then diffuse across the international community, causing states to increasingly converge around a common set of principles and policy practices. The three stages are dominated by distinct actors and logics of behaviour. During emergence, the agency and persuasive capacity of norm entrepreneurs is crucial for clarifying what the content of the norm is and writing it into international rules and organizations. These processes can in turn create a 'tipping point,' after which comes the stage of acceptance. At this juncture, norm 'leaders' seek to socialize others to become norm 'followers,' employing a combination of pressures to gain norm compliance. Once conformity is widespread, the norm life cycle moves into a period of internalization, during which the norm becomes a taken-for-granted feature of domestic and international politics. This perspective, in contrast to the world polity school, recognizes that "norms do not appear out of thin air [but are] actively built by agents" (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 888). Yet, despite their interest in norm-building, these scholars expend few words exploring the origins and internal transformation of norms. Instead, they focus almost exclusively on the mechanisms and conditions under which norms have external influence on state and international politics. In so doing, however, they acknowledge that not all potential norms are created equal: some fail to reach a tipping point because they lack clarity, or more importantly, clash with existing national or international norms (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 895, 906-907). They therefore concede that "[n]orms never enter a normative vacuum but instead emerge in a highly contested normative space where they must compete with other norms and perceptions of interest" (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 897). All the same, despite their recognition that the "[c]ommon knowledge informing actors' calculations is not static nor is it just out there" (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 911), they do not

explore the contested space within and among norms and how it might result in the fluidity or evolution of norms themselves.

Boomerang Effects

Literature on ‘boomerang effects’ seeks to understand how norm diffusion occurs even when powerful states are recalcitrant by theorizing the impact that links between domestic and transnational actors have on national-level political change. This model focuses on three sets of political actors: civil society organisations, state officials, and transnational advocacy networks. Whereas civil society actors have traditionally directed most of their energies towards lobbying the state, this route to political change can be blocked if state actors refuse or are not responsive to these demands. Increasingly, however, domestic groups have been able to bypass the state to connect to transnational allies, who use the power of principled ideas and norms to lobby their own states or international organisations to put pressure on the recalcitrant state from the outside (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Through this boomerang effect, local activists gain access, leverage, and information that they would not have had on their own, thereby instigating dramatic changes in the scope and recognition of international norms. As these dynamics erode absolute claims to state sovereignty, they also contribute to the expansion and influence of transnational advocacy networks (TANs). The boomerang approach is thus primarily concerned with illuminating the role of TANs as political entrepreneurs by calling attention to their normative motivations and strategies for effecting change. In the process, however, this focus leads to under-theorisation of the dynamics of norm creation and neglect of the possibility of both hegemonic and subordinate norms (cf. Hertel, 2006). These authors, to be sure, observe that the formation of TANs almost inevitably entails struggles over the meaning and framing of norms: the challenge for campaigns

engaged in issue construction is that “strategic portrayal must work for the different actors in the network and also for target audiences,” with the result that “frame disputes can be a significant source of change within networks” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 8). Yet, this view is not the same as a dynamic internal depiction of norms. Rather, it is a recognition that the shape that a norm takes is dependent upon strategic bargaining within advocacy networks. Once a norm is created, it is no longer vulnerable to contestation: over time, it simply becomes part of the broader political culture (cf. Snow, 1998: 17).

Spirals of Norm Adoption

A fourth model analyses the domestic impact of international human rights norms in relation to a ‘spiral pattern’ of transnational influence, or a five-stage process of socialisation driven in large part by the activities of principled-issue networks. Working inductively from observed similarities and differences across cases, the framework aims to identify the conditions under which international norms are internalized and applied domestically. These stages are (1) domestic repression, followed by activation of a transnational network, (2) state denial of the norm in question, (3) tactical concessions by the state on the grounds that ‘talk is cheap,’ (4) prescriptive status as the norm is institutionalised, and (5) rule-consistent behaviour. This model is inspired by the boomerang approach, but seeks to elaborate a more dynamic conceptualisation of its effects over time. Crucially, movement through these stages may be halted or reversed at any time. Consequently, the spiral model “does not assume evolutionary progress towards norm implementation (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, 1999: 34). However, while these scholars are careful to avoid assumptions of linear development, their focus on the spread and institutionalisation of human rights implies that such standards are pre-given, and in some language, ‘universal.’ Stated

slightly differently, they accept that human rights are contested through moral discourses which “challenge the validity claims of the norm itself” (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, 1999: 13). Further, they also recognize that ideas become norms through complex interactions between transnational actors, domestic groups, and governments that entail extensive processes of bargaining, dialogue, consciousness-raising, and persuasion. Yet, even though evidence from many case studies suggest that human rights norms are continually contested and locally adapted, the internal content of these norms ceases to be the subject of investigation once they become enter into a norm cascade. As a result, the spiral model on its own cannot conceive of how such discursive challenges might in fact alter the meaning of norms themselves.

Norms as Processes: A Discursive Approach

Despite their concern to understand dynamics of continuity and change in international relations, therefore, constructivist approaches to norm diffusion tend to treat norms as ‘things’ that remain fairly stable in terms of their content. While there is clear interest in norm creation, relatively little attention is paid in this literature to the “bloody processes” (Epstein, 2008: 11) that give birth to these norms. Instead, these accounts point more to a one-way process in which norms emerge and are then communicated and internalized, in most instances in what is viewed as a positive or progressive direction (cf. Carpenter 2007). However, attempts to resist or subvert these norms suggest themselves that norms are mediated by agents, who give these norms varied content and seek to link or separate them from others in the broader normative environment. For this reason, a discursive approach focused on norms as sense-making practices may offer greater leverage for analyzing patterns in their origins, adoption, and implementation in diverse contexts around the globe. Discourses shape what people *do* and who they *are* by fixing meanings, as well

as by opening various subject positions from which to speak and know (Connolly xxxx; Bleiker xxxx; Neumann xxxx). This perspective, in turn, highlights power as integral to the processes of social-construction, determining what can and cannot be said – and consequently, who can and cannot speak. In contrast, most constructivist approaches either excise power from accounts of norm diffusion or consider power to be external to norm creation, “treating it either as a material quantity or as located in institutions of the state” (Prugl and Locher, 2001: 113). However, norm internalization by its very nature requires silencing, as meaning is made precisely by demarcating that which is ‘beyond the pale’ or outside the limits of discourse.

A discursive approach therefore offers a number of important advantages over traditional constructivist frameworks for analyzing the diffusion and impact of international norms. Most crucially, it provides a set of tools for understanding how actors with varying degrees of status and power are shaped by, and in turn shape, the various norms governing political life. A focus on discourses, it is vital to note, does not mean that ‘everything is possible.’ Rather, agents are constrained not only by relations of power with one another, but also by the existing field of norms, cognitive frames, and meaning systems already available for making sense of the world (Schmidt 2008; Snow and Benford 1988). These intuitions are reflected in an emerging body of work on international norms, although the authors do not explicitly adopt a discursive approach. These studies take issue with the assumption that norms are ‘things’ that remain relatively static once they have been created. They argue that norms are often adopted precisely because they are vague, with the result that they may carry a range of meanings for the various actors involved in their adoption and implementation (Bailey 2008; Van Kersbergen and Verbeek 2007). This lack of precision often gives rise in turn to disputes over the definition of a particular norm (Sandholtz 2008), opening the way for multiple interpretations of what it is and how it should be applied in

practice (Wiener 2004). In this way, the same ambiguities that make a norm's diffusion possible may also lead to shifts and modifications in its content over time, producing varied effects when it is translated into practice.

We describe this approach as a view of *norms as processes*. This reformulation theorizes that norms are subject to ongoing attempts to constitute and re-constitute their meanings, even as they exert effects on patterns of social behaviour. Building on previous work on the active nature of norms, we identify two key sources of dynamism in norm life cycles: (1) dynamics *internal* to norms, namely the continuing debates over their definition, and (2) dynamics *external* to norms, as in the broader 'normative environment' consisting of other norms that may themselves also be highly contested. These internal and external components, we argue, interact to shape the origins and subsequent development of individual norms. More specifically, the debates surrounding one set of norms may give rise to new norms, while interactions with other norms may facilitate their broader resonance. At the same time, however, the external environment may inspire alternative interpretations of the new norms, as supporters and opponents struggle to flesh out their content. In other words, the dynamism of norms is a double-edged sword: it promotes the creation of new norms, but also increases the possibilities for advocates to 'lose control' of their meanings, and in turn, how new norms are implemented. Theorizing the nature of norms in this way, therefore, connects the emergence, evolution, and impact of international norms, explaining how they are created, why they spread, and what accounts for variations in their effects.

Internal Dynamism

The internal dynamism of norms refers to tensions within norms in terms of the potential for competing meanings, including more 'authentic' realizations, of the norm in question. These

give rise to conflicts over definitions that may lead to revisions of existing norms, and in some cases, the emergence of new norms. Importantly, these dynamics may move in several different directions: they may expand or deepen the norm, ignore or misunderstand the norm, and in the worst case, reverse or empty the content of the norm. These features are especially prevalent when it comes to international norms. As Antje Wiener (2004) observes, the successful signing of international conventions often depends on being imprecise: meanings of norms are often left intentionally vague because “detail is not necessarily conducive to agreement” (2004, 198). A related point is made by Kees Van Kersbergen and Bertjan Verbeek (2007), who note that norms are often adopted because they mean different things to different actors. While this maximizes the potential for consensus, it also complicates the task of determining what types of behaviour constitute a violation of the norm.

As a result, the acceptance of a norm may initiate rather than resolve struggles over its exact content. According to Wayne Sandholtz (2008), these debates arise in the nexus between theory and practice. On the one hand, there may be clashes between norms as they are framed in general terms and the specific demands of concrete experiences, at the same time that there may be conflicts between separate bodies of rules. On the other hand, disagreements over what norms mean may bring these conflicts to the fore, requiring greater clarification of norm content. From this perspective, normative change is the product of practical disputes that may be resolved in various ways over time, although not necessarily – and possibly even rarely – in a progressive fashion. The chances are high, therefore, that norms will not retain a single meaning, but shift over time in response to various interventions, potentially leading to a fundamental reformulation of the norm in question. However, moments of resolution are path dependent, with new

parameters introduced at each juncture that inspire additional struggles even as they set new constraints on the behaviour of policy actors.

Although few IR scholars adopt a discursive approach, there is evidence in the existing literature that lends support to this more dynamic conception of norms. A growing number of scholars recognize, for example, that the framing of norms is a highly strategic process. Policy entrepreneurs often define norms in ways that they anticipate will resonate with audiences, at the same time that adopters may endorse a norm without in fact altering their preferences, believing that ‘talk is cheap’ (Jacoby 2004; Payne 2001). This suggests that there are no ‘objective’ definitions of international norms; rather, they may be filled in a variety of ways at both the international and domestic levels. In global discussions, for instance, ‘human rights’ has been recognized as a core international norm since at least 1948 with the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, there have been later attempts to expand the meaning of ‘human rights’ to include women’s rights (Bunch 1990), economic rights (Hertel and Minkler 2007), and access to drinking water and essential medicines (Nelson and Dorsey 2007).

While sometimes this flexibility can be a resource for continued innovation, it can also present ongoing challenges for defining and institutionalizing a new norm. In campaigns to end the practice of whaling, early ambiguities regarding the bases for a ban – which spanned concerns about animal welfare, natural resource management, and the environment – created opportunities for powerful counter-frames linked to aboriginal and other types of cultural rights. As a result, the anti-whaling norm diffused across the international system, but because it was not embraced by actors in key whaling states, its effects were undermined (Bailey 2008). These events suggest that in the course of norm diffusion, domestic actors may reject the frames given

to an issue at the international level. However, there is also evidence indicating that processes of norm diffusion may entail active efforts to ‘translate’ norms for domestic audiences.

In a campaign against pregnancy-screening in factories along the United States-Mexico border, transnational activists framed the issue in terms of human and labour rights. Local actors did not dispute this frame, recognizing that it would give them access to substantial resources of foreign NGOs, but they grafted it onto the struggles of working women, casting it as a question of economic rights and social justice. At the same time, feminist groups in Mexico City argued that society should assume the costs of its own reproduction, and thus an end to pregnancy-screening should best be understood as an issue of women’s rights (Hertel 2006). While these three views might be understood as competing framings of the same policy problem, they can be seen as an attempt to maximize the appeal of a particular reform. Similar dynamics have been observed in discussions within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations regarding the norm of cooperative security, which gained the support of member states when activists ‘localized’ it by associating it with pre-existing norms (Acharya 2004). Together, these examples reveal that the content of norms is far from static, but rather subject to ongoing internal contestation.

External Dynamism

The external dynamism of norms is generated by the broader universe of norms-in-process, which offer a range of opportunities for inspiration, alignment, and conflict as new norms are formulated. In many respects, this ‘normative environment’ (cf. Florini 1996) helps explain how and why norms emerge and evolve and, indeed, take the specific forms that they do. As many scholars point out, norms resonate and spread when they ‘fit’ with pre-existing cultural values (Checkel 1998; Cortell and Davis 1996). However, as some recent work suggests, they

can also gain a foothold when they are linked or associated with other widely accepted normative ideas (Carpenter 2007; Kelley 2008). These possibilities for ‘matching’ and ‘bridging’ play a crucial role in the development and diffusion of international norms, accounting for why some potential norms gain momentum while others are largely ignored.

Implicit consistency with existing norms does not suffice: actors must explicitly draw connections between new ideas and prior normative frameworks (cf. Carpenter 2005). At the same time, the ability to make such links does not guarantee resonance or successful impact. External norms may themselves take on new meanings (cf. Nelson and Dorsey 2007), altering the opportunity structures for other norms and thereby increasing the chances for advocates to ‘lose control’ in terms of how norms are translated or implemented in practice. Further, the potential to link to other norms opens up the possibility that norms can be co-opted to purposes that undermine at least part of the meaning of the norm itself (Shepherd 2006). These features indicate that norms may develop and spread for both contingent and deliberate reasons, resulting in the ‘layering’ and ‘conversion’ of normative elements within the broader international system (cf. Thelen 2004).

Research on international norms does not typically use this language, but there is ample evidence in existing literature regarding the importance of the external normative environment for the fate of would-be norms. In terms of ‘matching,’ several studies observe that individual norms may be framed in a variety of different ways. The choice to attach its meaning to one norm rather than another is not inevitable or straightforward; rather, it is the result of decisions made by core actors, whether these are inspired by partial perspective, contingent events, or deliberate strategy. As such, while many meanings are possible in theory, only a small range of options are generally considered, depending on the other norms available. The specific shape of

this norm, in turn, affects the contours of the broader normative environment, influencing the opportunities for other norms to emerge. As a result, the universe of norms itself evolves over time, introducing new codes of behaviour that may prohibit once-acceptable state activities like the slave trade (Nadelmann 1990) or justify new courses of action like the use of force to defend human rights (Finnemore 2003).

Examples of matching are most obvious in instances where advocates are faced with a choice between two alternative frames and opt for one over the other. Attempts to ban the use of landmines could be linked to arms control discourse, but advocates have preferred to connect it to norms of civilian immunity (Price 1998). Similarly, concerns about child soldiers have been framed as a humanitarian question, rather than as a child labour issue (Carpenter 2007), while sex trafficking has been linked to violence against women rather than questions about women's economic rights (Ackerly and True 2006). While these choices can be understood as issues affecting vulnerable individuals (Keck and Sikkink 1998), they also tap into violations already recognized by transnational advocacy networks (cf. Bob 2002). Yet, the consequences of these rhetorical strategies may be perverse and even undermine the goals of the norms on which they are based. The tendency to equate 'women and children' with 'civilians,' for instance, has enabled international actors to carry out much needed humanitarian evacuations in war zones, but this has come at the cost of increasing the vulnerability of military-age male non-combatants, thereby contradicting the moral logic of the civilian immunity norm (Carpenter 2005).

Whereas 'matching' involves aligning the definition of a new norm with the content of a previously accepted norm, 'bridging' entails framing a new norm as consistent with or serving the goals of other norms. Opportunities for bridging depend largely on the universe of available norms, which may vary across countries and over time. As with matching, efforts to connect one

norm to another may transform the meaning of the norm in question, affecting not only outcomes of the norm once adopted but also the shape of the new normative environment. The possibilities for resistance, however, are higher in attempts to bridge as opposed to match norms, because the cognitive distance tends to be greater. In the case of issues like violence against women, bridging is a continual process: in addition to drawing parallels among diverse cultural practices inflicting harm upon women (Keck and Sikkink 1998), activists first framed violence against women as an obstacle to the accomplishment of equality, development, and peace, when these topped the UN agenda on women in the 1980s. In the 1990s, however, they linked it more closely to campaigns for human rights, as these grew in salience at the international level (Joachim 2003).

The choice of alliances is not always so clear, however. In debates over the need for international election monitoring, supporters argued that genuine and periodic elections, as verified by external observers, were a crucial guarantor of human and democratic rights. In contrast, opponents claimed that electoral monitoring was a clear violation of the norm of sovereignty. While the latter initially prevailed, the weight of sovereignty-based objections began to dwindle as humanitarian interventions grew more common, strengthening the view that democracy and human rights were basic entitlements (Kelley 2008). Because norms may be deployed strategically, however, their meanings are not absolute and, indeed, may even lead to cases of strange bedfellows. In recent years, for instance, efforts to link human rights standards with questions of social and economic development have gained new ground through appeals to state sovereignty on the part of poor governments against global financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Nelson and Dorsey 2007). The broader universe of norms, therefore, may create and foreclose opportunities for new norms to come forward and gain ground, in a range of anticipated and unanticipated ways.

Global Policy for Women: Origins and Evolution in the United Nations

The scholarship on international norms has focused less on how norms emerge than on explaining how norms spread across the international system. Yet, not all potential norms, including those that are consistent with existing values, gain salience (Carpenter 2007; Legro 1997). One possibility is that new norms surface when there is a conflict between the theory and practice of an existing norm (Sandholtz 2008), exposing its limits in relation to its internal definition or its continued ‘fit’ with the external normative environment (cf. Finnemore 1996). In other words, new norms emerge in the course of ongoing critique of other norms-in-process. While internal and external tensions are common to all norms, there are reasons to believe that this is especially true of the norm of gender equality. As many scholars have noted, gender equality is a slippery concept, not least because it consists of two parts, ‘gender’ and ‘equality,’ that are each highly contested (Lombardo, Meier, and Verloo 2008). Due to important variations in these two norms across myriad national contexts, the life cycle of the global gender equality regime has therefore been “a story of debate, contestation and dissent in norm development” (Kardam 2004, 91). One telling indicator is the fact that the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has now been ratified by 185 countries, or more than 90% of all UN member-states, making it the most ratified human rights treaty but also the one with the most reservations (cf. Mayer 1995). These patterns reveal that the meaning and implementation of gender equality provisions remain contingent upon ongoing struggles at the international and domestic levels (Kardam 2004; Zwingel 2005).

The UN has long played an agenda-setting role on women’s rights. Within the first year of its existence, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established the Commission

on the Status of Women (CSW), whose annual meetings play a core role in defining and elaborating UN policy on women and gender. In honour of the CSW's twenty-fifth anniversary in 1972, 1975 was declared International Women's Year, leading to the designation of 1976 to 1985 as the UN Decade for Women. During this decade, three world conferences on women were held in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, and Nairobi in 1985. Ten years later, a fourth conference was organized in Beijing. It produced a Platform for Action focused on twelve 'strategic objectives,' but also contained references to what can be viewed as two new 'mega-strategies' for achieving equality between women and men: "gender-balanced decision-making," which calls for the equal participation of women as policy-makers, and "gender mainstreaming," which highlights the need for a gender perspective in all phases of policy-making. Although states were quick to respond to these two innovations, their effects have been mixed: the vast majority of quota policies have produced mild increases or stagnation in the numbers of women elected (Krook 2009), while many mainstreaming programmes have retained an exclusive focus on women and, in some cases, served as a pretext to eliminate women-oriented policy initiatives (Rai 2003).

The discursive approach developed in this article proposes that existing norms may generate new norms (1) in the course of internal critique or (2) via the rise of new opportunities in the external normative environment. To analyze the origins of these two international norms, we examine the language in policy documents and discussions surrounding gender equality prior to the drafting and signing of the Platform for Action. This exercise reveals that policies to promote women's status before Beijing can be divided into two broad categories: (1) efforts to secure and guarantee equal political rights for women and (2) attention to the role played by women and gender in economic development. Yet, what is meant by 'political rights' and 'development' has

evolved over time, reflecting achievements in these areas as well as ongoing debates that have led to the adoption of more expansive definitions of what these norms should entail. Despite their distinct origins, policy initiatives in both of these areas began to converge in the late 1980s and early 1990s. While earlier strategies for women's empowerment had focused primarily on the developing world, emerging definitions increasingly took a global perspective, recognizing shortcomings in women's participation and gender policy in all member states. As a result, by the mid-1990s gender balance and mainstreaming came to be articulated as two prongs in a more comprehensive strategy for promoting gender equality at the global level.

Women's Political Participation

Concerns to promote women's participation in politics have long been central to UN gender equality policy. However, the exact definition of 'participation' has evolved over time. Initially this concept referred exclusively to the rights of women to vote and run for political office, but over the years, internal critique and changes in the broader normative environment have transformed it into a stronger demand for the right for women to hold political office at roughly equal rates as men. The focus on basic political rights for women was first raised in some of the earliest meetings of the UN. This was because at the time of its founding in 1945, only slightly more than half of its 51 members allowed women equal voting rights or permitted them to hold public office (United Nations 1995a, 8). At the insistence of female delegates, the Charter of the United Nations included the definition and protection of the "equal rights of men and women" among the goals of the organization (United Nations 1995a, 10). The following year, the General Assembly unanimously adopted Resolution 56 (1) recommending that all

member states adopt measures granting women the same political rights as men (A/RES/56(1), 11 December 1946).

Over the course of the 1940s and 1950s, the attainment of women's political rights dominated the attention of those actors inside the UN charged with developing policy on women. Beginning in 1947, the Secretariat conducted yearly surveys on women's political rights around the world, and from 1949, the CSW – inspired by the approval of the Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women in 1948 – began to press for a similar convention within the UN. Although many member-states opposed parts of the draft, especially the article on equal rights to hold public office, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women was adopted by the General Assembly in 1952, with 46 votes for, 0 against, and 11 abstentions. Yet, similar to what would occur with CEDAW many years later, more than 40 states parties said they reserved the right not to abide by some provisions (United Nations 1995a, 18). The earliest international meetings convened to support the work of the CSW were therefore a series of seminars on the 'participation of women in public life' held in Bangkok in 1957, Bogotá in 1959, Addis Ababa in 1960, and Ulan Bator in 1965, which were followed by two seminars on the 'civil and political education of women' held in Helsinki in 1967 and Accra in 1968.¹

By the 1970s, women in most countries had achieved the right to vote and hold political office on the same grounds as men (Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan 1997). Despite this progress, women continued to occupy a only small minority of all elected positions worldwide. Some observers began to express concerns that the formal rights to vote and hold political office were

¹ Seminar on the Civil Responsibilities and Increased Participation of Women in Public Life, Bangkok, 5-16 August 1957; ST/TAA/HR/1; Seminar on Participation of Women in Public Life, Bogotá, 18-29 May 1959, ST/TAO/HR/5; Seminar on Participation of Women in Public Life, Addis Ababa, 12-23 December 1960, ST/TAO/HR/11; Seminar on the Participation of Women in Public Life, Ulan Bator, Mongolia, 3-17 August 1965, ST/TAO/HR/24; Seminar on Civic and Political Education of Women, Helsinki, 1-14 August 1967, ST/TAO/HR/28; Seminar on Civic and Political Education of Women, Accra, Ghana, 19 November-2 December 1968, ST/TAO/HR/37.

not sufficient for women's voices to be heard in the political sphere. Delegates to the UN World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975 proposed an expanded definition of women's political participation in the World Plan of Action, noting:

“Despite the fact that, numerically, women constitute half the population of the world, in the vast majority of countries only a small percentage of them are in positions of leadership in the various branches of government. Consequently, women are not involved in decision-making and their views and needs are often overlooked in planning for development” (paragraph 57).

Delegates therefore called on governments to “establish goals, strategies and timetables for increasing with the decade 1975-1985 the number of women in elective and appointive public offices and public functions at all levels” (paragraph 62). Similar language was included in CEDAW, adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. Article 7 states that women should be ensured not only the right “to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies” (Article 7, section a), but also the right “to participate in the formulation of government policy and... hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government” (Article 7, section b).

By the end of the UN Decade for Women, a more elaborate section on “equality in political participation and decision-making” was included in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies. Both governments and political parties were urged to “intensify efforts to stimulate and ensure equality of participation for women in all national and local legislative bodies” (paragraph 86). The document asked governments to consider securing women's participation “through legislative and administrative measures” (paragraph 88) and called on parties to “institute measures to activate women's constitutional and legal guarantees of the right to be

elected and appointed by selecting candidates” (paragraph 91). In addition to their attempts to deepen the meaning of political participation through internal critique, delegates to the Nairobi conference also recognized new opportunities for norm alignment resulting from recent changes in the external environment. Linking women’s full participation to the goals of peace and human rights, they included text in the Forward-looking Strategies which argued that “women’s equal role in decision-making with respect to peace and related issues should be seen as one of their basic human rights and as such should be enhanced and encouraged at the national, regional and international levels” (paragraph 253). This discursive move added a new layer to debates about women’s participation, transforming it from an issue of access to a question of policy outcomes.

Discussions over the following decade led to further elaboration of what was understood as women’s full and equal participation. The Platform for Action signed in Beijing presented a series of more concrete definitions and solutions to the problem of women’s representation. To flesh out the meaning of participation, it included a specific target of 30% women (paragraphs 184 and 189), which it argued might only be achieved through the greater use of positive action in candidate selection (paragraphs 189, 192, and 194). To achieve these goals, the declaration called for a wide range of actors to encourage women’s active participation in all types of social, economic, and political decision-making, not only through the strategic use of positive action, but also through contributions to “public debate on the new roles of men and women in society and in the family” (paragraph 194, section e) and the development of “career advancement programmes for women of all ages that include career planning, tracking, mentoring, coaching, training and retraining” (paragraph 194, section g). Over the course of fifty years, therefore, discourses in the UN over women’s political rights have evolved from a strict focus on voting and eligibility to a more encompassing demand to include women as office-holders, a shift made

possible through efforts to deepen the meaning of political participation, as well as innovations in the external normative environment.

Women, Gender, and Development Policy

Another early mandate of the UN was promotion of social and economic development. This theme gained salience over the course of the 1950s and 1960s with growth in the number of new member states, most of whom were located in the developing world. The policy on women in relation to development has shifted over time in response to both internal critique – reflecting new ideas on ‘gender’ and ‘development’ – and changes in the universe of external norms. UN bodies initially approached gender equality questions through a paradigm subsequently known as ‘women in development’ (WID). Advocates of the WID approach argued that efforts to achieve social justice and equity for women would be more effective if they were “strategically linked to mainstream development concerns” (Razavi and Miller, 1995a: 6; Palmer 1992). Influenced by liberal feminist theories, they asserted that increasing women’s participation in the public sphere and formal labour market would improve women’s status by bringing it more in line with men’s traditional roles. In making their case, supporters combined arguments for equity and economic efficiency, but privileged the latter. As a consequence, the WID norm that eventually took shape involved an accommodation with economic development goals and policies and did not address persistent social and economic inequalities between women and men. As such, the main policy documents of the period, like the country reports of the International Labour Organization (ILO), did not consider the actual or potential impact of women’s paid and unpaid labour on mainstream development projects (Razavi and Miller 1995a). Instead, donor support was typically given for

small-scale income-generating women-only projects, which often reinforced women's economic marginalization and relegated them to secondary roles.

As the WID norm gained strength across the international community, however, it was subject to increased criticism from development practitioners, scholars, and activists in the global South. They contended that, in practice, this norm prioritized what development could get from women, rather than how development might serve women's needs (Goetz 1995; Moser 1993). On the basis of this internal critique, they began to articulate a new paradigm focused on 'gender and development' (GAD) to integrate greater awareness of political-economic power relations by substituting the word 'women' with the concept of 'gender.' Although these terms are frequently elided, feminist theory distinguishes 'sex,' the biological differences between women and men, from 'gender,' the social meanings given to these distinctions. The concept of gender, therefore, moves the focus away from binary opposites to a continuum of identities, at the same time that it replaces singular attention to women with a dual lens on the relative status of women and men.

Given its roots in development discourse, the GAD approach was also deeply informed by socialist feminist theories of women's subordination. More specifically, advocates argued that no amount of formal power in politics or the labour market would help to overcome a gender imbalance of power in the family and the household economy. For this reason, GAD stressed women's self-empowerment through bottom-up development involving women's NGOs, in contrast to WID attempts to harness women's labour for top-down economic development (Kabeer 1992; Razavi and Miller 1995a). The resonance of this new approach was aided by shifts in the external normative environment, with the introduction of concepts like 'sustainable development' and 'participatory planning' as alternatives intended to address failures of prior development and planning strategies. Nonetheless, this revised norm was only partly reflected in

the language contained in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, which used the term ‘women’ but also emphasized the importance of women’s involvement, stating that “effective participation of women in development should be integrated in the formulation and implementation of mainstream programs and projects” (paragraph 114).

In the years that followed, both the ‘gender’ and ‘development’ components of the GAD strategy were subject to further internal contestation. On the one hand, advocates continued to seek to rectify women’s marginalization by calling attention to gendered power relations. On the other hand, there was increased recognition that ‘development’ was not simply a question of economic change, and further, problems of women’s inequality were not restricted to developing countries. Over the course of the late 1980s and 1990s, therefore, there were growing efforts to extend the scope of UN development policy to other policy areas, including human rights and international security, at the same time that women’s status in developed countries came under greater scrutiny (True 2003). To capture these innovations, transnational activists coined the term ‘gender mainstreaming’ to describe a third paradigm of gender equality policy. This approach was defined in the Beijing Platform for Action as applying “a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively” (paragraph 189). Conscious of the shortcomings of earlier approaches, the Platform further stated that “strategies must be further developed to prevent inadvertent marginalization as opposed to mainstreaming of the gender dimension throughout all operations” (paragraph 308).

Interestingly, the first efforts to implement gender mainstreaming, both within and beyond the UN system, occurred inside multilateral development organizations like the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, and the ILO (Razavi and Miller 1995b). The

strategy quickly became a focus of transnational advocacy networks (True and Mintrom 2001). Crucially, however, the norm itself contained lingering ambiguities that were heightened by a frequent misfit between its theory and implementation. In particular, many development agencies adopted gender mainstreaming in their language, but in practice, continued to elaborate and pursue WID-type policy programs. A significant barrier, or source of ongoing tensions, has been lack of clarity over the term ‘gender.’ Abundant evidence suggests that states and international agencies did not – and often still do not – fully understand the policy implications of a shift in focus from ‘women’ to ‘gender’ (Baden and Goetz 1997). At the same time, many advocates of women’s rights contested the meaning of ‘gender’ and were wary of its potential to diminish the only recently achieved attention to women’s needs as a group. The result of these debates was substantial variation in policy implementation. While some organizations interpreted the norm of gender mainstreaming as requiring integration of gender issues into all of the activities funded or executed by an organization under the leadership of a devoted unit, others viewed it as diffusing responsibility for women and gender equality issues across the organization and diminishing the need for a specific women’s or gender unit. While the norm gender mainstreaming deepened and expanded the realm of gender equality policy in the UN system, therefore, its definition remained the subject of ongoing debate, even as it gained strength through connections to a range of other existing and emerging international norms.

Gender Advocacy and Expertise: Subsequent Trends in the United Nations

Research on international norms has mainly addressed the theoretical question of why and how norms diffuse across the international system. Most of its attention focuses on the dynamics of norm socialization and internalization, concerned to understand the processes by

which norms become embedded – or are resisted – in policy practices at the domestic level (cf. Checkel 1997; Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999). Implicitly or explicitly, these approaches assume that the norm itself does not change over time; instead, their analytical interest lies in the dynamics of learning, persuasion, and value change. Yet, as the examples above suggest, norms do not necessarily remain stable once they have been constructed: their content may be revised in the course of attempts to extend or challenge their meanings, or as a result of shifts in the broader universe of norms. This may stem from a search for greater theoretical clarity, but is more likely the result of trial-and-error processes in the nexus between theory and practice, as actors seek to transform abstract strategies into more concrete policy goals. Lingering ambiguities about norm content may also provide opportunities for norm opponents to insert alternative meanings that in effect undermine full application of the norm, especially in instances where outward opposition is not possible.

A discursive approach suggests that norms continue to develop over the course of their life cycle due to (1) ongoing internal critique and/or (2) shifts in the content of other norms-in-process. To probe the validity of this argument, we analyze the language in policy documents and discussions in the years following the Beijing conference. It becomes clear that despite their status as partner strategies for gender equality in the mid-1990s, equal participation and gender mainstreaming have diverged as they have been further theorized and put into practice within the UN system. Viewed separately, each strategy has evolved on its own terms through critical internal discussions. The promotion of quotas for women in politics has led to calls for recognizing greater diversity within the category ‘women,’ as well as efforts inside the UN to identify particular arenas of ‘decision-making’ over which the organization can exert its influence. The elaboration of mainstreaming, in turn, has entailed relying more and more on

professional ‘gender experts,’ at the same time that patterns of implementation have required further analysis to identify why this approach has not achieved anticipated changes in policy-making processes. Tracked side by side, however, it emerges that there is frequent confusion, and even competition, between the two norms: one is often reduced to, or subsumed under, the other. Initially, mainstreaming largely took precedence over quotas, but with time, women’s presence in political institutions has been increasingly used as a proxy for gender mainstreaming. As a result, the two-pronged approach identified in Beijing has now devolved into a more diffuse formula for achieving equality between women and men.

Women in Decision-Making

In the years following the Beijing conference, gender-balanced decision-making continued to be a core focus of UN gender equality policy. Campaigns to promote women in politics intensified, as did efforts to assess progress, through stronger language on the need for quotas and targets, attention to a greater range of barriers to women’s increased presence, and suggestions on other measures that might be employed alongside quota provisions. In line with these developments, new critical discussions emerged regarding the category ‘women’ and the scope and ends of ‘decision-making,’ spurred in part by attempts to link gender balance to other international goals like good governance and peace-building. Five years after Beijing, the UN General Assembly convened a special session to review and appraise progress on the Platform for Action (a set of meetings informally known as ‘Beijing +5’). In Resolution S-23/3, the Assembly observed that “the actual participation of women at the highest levels of national and international decision-making [had] not significantly changed since the time of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995” (paragraph 23). However, it also noted that women had

achieved a higher proportion of political positions in some countries, which it attributed to the introduction of “affirmative and positive action policies, including quota systems or voluntary agreements in some countries and measurable goals and targets” (paragraph 22).

These observations increased in number and specificity in preparations for the annual session of the CSW five years later (known also as ‘Beijing +10’). In late 2004, the Secretary-General presented a new report that assessed the changes made since 2000 and outlined a host of further actions and initiatives to be taken on the wide array of issues identified in Beijing. This document found that most countries reported some increase in women’s participation at various levels of decision-making but still “the most obvious trend [was] a continuing lack of equitable participation” (paragraph 327). In contrast to previous reports and declarations, it included more specific data on women’s representation in national parliaments (especially paragraphs 327-331), and for the first time, mentioned countries where women had achieved the office of president and prime minister (paragraph 329). It discussed a number of cases of quota adoption (paragraphs 336-343), but also described several non-quota-based strategies pursued around the world to promote women’s representation. These included public funding for political parties to promote women’s participation, promotion of women in internal party structures, leadership training for women (paragraphs 336 and 345), and awareness-raising among the public at large (paragraph 346), efforts spearheaded variously by parties, parliamentary committees, ad hoc coalitions, and research centres (paragraph 343).

In the course of these conversations, some UN policy language began to reflect greater awareness of gendered power relations. The Beijing +5 Resolution, for example, brought in a new emphasis on the role of men, arguing that “policy-making processes require the partnership of women and men at all levels,” and thus that “men and boys should...be actively involved and

encouraged in all efforts to achieve the goals of the Platform for Action and its implementation” (paragraph 58). However, more energy focused on recognizing diversity within the descriptive category of ‘women’ as a group. Attention to intersectionality was not entirely new. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies stated that governments should ensure that women, “including those from the most vulnerable, least privileged and most oppressed groups, may participate actively in all aspects of the formulation, monitoring, review and appraisal of national and local policies, issues and activities” (paragraph 92). However, discussions since Beijing have identified various groups of women who might be considered multiply excluded. The Platform for Action urged various actors to “assist women and girls, particularly those with special needs, women with disabilities and women belonging to racial and ethnic minorities to strengthen their self-esteem and to encourage them to take decision-making positions” (paragraph 197). It also emphasized the need to “encourage greater involvement of indigenous women in decision-making at all levels” (paragraph 192). The discussions at Beijing +5 singled out the barriers to indigenous women’s participation (paragraph 66) but also pointed to the need to enable “older women to be actively engaged...to assume a variety of roles in communities, public life and decision-making (paragraph 83).

A second set of internal critiques around the concept of ‘decision-making’ intersected with changing international norms regarding the role of women in post-conflict societies. Taking inspiration from cultural associations between men and war and women and peace (Skjelsbæk and Smith 2001), the UN Security Council in 2000 passed Resolution 1325, in which it urged member states to “ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels...for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict” (paragraph 1). It also directed the Secretary-General to “appoint more women as special representatives and envoys” (paragraph 3)

and “expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel” (paragraph 4). The CSW, for its part, made special mention of the need to promote women in decision-making in Afghanistan at its annual sessions in 2002, 2003, and 2004. During the Beijing +10 discussions at the CSW meetings in 2005, delegates extended the reach of this policy even further by passing Resolution 49/5 calling on governments to “involve women in all levels of decision-making in disaster situations, including in community-level welfare centres for displaced persons,” inspired by the December 2004 tsunami in South Asia. These interventions have expanded the reach of the gender balance norm to go beyond equitable division of formal political positions, such that it is no longer simply about fair access: women’s participation is now seen to serve a range of purposes like promoting democracy, getting rid of corruption, and healing societies torn apart by war.

In addition to making recommendations for member states, UN policy has also directed increasing attention to gender balance within the UN itself. Although the UN Charter stated in Article 8 that there be no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in the organization, women continued to be under-represented to a significant degree throughout the UN. In the late 1960s, women in the Secretariat organized a support network to focus on improving the status of women at the UN (United Nations 1995a, 25). The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies also included a clause stating that “more women should be appointed as diplomats and to decision-making posts within the United Nations system, including posts in fields relating to peace and development activities” (paragraph 79). However, it was not until the Beijing Platform for Action that these calls were linked to general concerns to promote women in decision-making. The Platform asked governments to “aim at gender balance in the lists of

national candidates nominated for election or appointment to United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and other autonomous organizations of the United Nations system, particularly for posts at the senior level” (paragraph 192, section j). In the years that followed, these calls grew more and more specific. In 2001, the General Assembly passed Resolution 56/126 asking for up-to-date statistics on the number and percentage of women in all organizational units and at all levels in UN system, which it followed with Resolution 57/180 in 2002 urging for stronger efforts to achieve gender balance within the UN system. The Secretary-General submitted reports to the annual meetings of the CSW in 2002 and 2003 on progress achieving this goal, which led the CSW in 2003 to issue a new call for a 50-50 gender distribution by 2015.

In the years since Beijing, therefore, there has been both sustained and detailed attention to the goal of gender-balance decision-making on the part of UN actors. In the Platform for Action, gender balance was justified as “a leverage function without which it is highly unlikely that a real integration of the equality dimension in government policy-making is feasible. [It] is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account” (paragraph 183). Accordingly, it has been linked to a variety of other international policy goals, with the anticipation that women’s participation will not only serve women, but also benefit society at large. Although gender balance is often seen as a crucial element to the success of gender mainstreaming, however, the more easily quantifiable nature of gender balance as a policy goal has led it to be seen increasingly as an end in itself, as well as on occasion, as a substitute or proxy for the more complicated task of gender mainstreaming. Reviewing CEDAW committee reports, for example, indicates that while gender balance and gender mainstreaming received roughly equal amounts of attention in questions and comments by CSW experts in 1997 and 2002, there were more questions and comments on

gender balance overall by 2007. Similarly, the two priority themes identified for the annual meeting of the CSW in 2006 exclusively addressed questions of gender balance. These patterns suggest that gender balance has not only emerged and spread as an international gender equality norm, but may also be becoming the primary strategy for women's empowerment, with crucial implications for the depth and nuance of mainstreaming strategies.

Gender Mainstreaming

In the period leading up to and immediately after Beijing, in contrast, there was a tendency for gender mainstreaming to be seen by the UN as an umbrella gender equality norm that incorporated women's participation, as well as gendered analysis of all public policies. In the years since, mainstreaming has evolved into a highly-specialized policy approach with a range of advanced techniques and methodologies associated with its implementation. All the same, its exact definition – in theory as well as in practice – continues to be subject to debate. Although mainstreaming remains ambiguous in terms of its policy prescriptions, particularly with regard to the goal of 'gender equality,' the main obstacle to its impact can be found in the opportunities for matching and bridging to other values in the external normative environment. In connecting it to such diverse goals as neoliberalism, peace-building, and human rights, the parameters of this norm have become increasingly diffuse, thereby losing a degree of its critical edge. In its early formulations, mainstreaming was intended as an 'agenda-setting' approach that transformed development and economic policy by bringing gender perspectives to centre-stage (Jahan 1994). However, much like the WID norm, mainstreaming has drifted over time into a more 'integrationist' approach, which includes gender concerns in mainstream policy-making without disturbing existing agendas. Most dramatically, the goals of gender mainstreaming have

been shrunk to fit in with neoliberal imperatives of a globalising economy and an international atmosphere that emphasizes security over ends like equality or justice. Mainstreaming policies, for example, have been increasingly promoted as a means for governments to achieve goals of growth and competitiveness and as a panacea in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction processes (Hall and True 2008; Radmani 2005).

As mainstreaming approaches for designing, implementing, evaluating, and measuring public policies diffused and were replicated across UN agencies and member states, the norm has largely empowered technocrats and gender experts, rather than the grassroots women envisioned by the original GAD paradigm. Yet, while 10 percent of UNDP resources in 1996 were allocated to the development of mainstreaming tools, and Resolution 51/69 was passed by the UN General Assembly calling on states to promote “an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective at all levels, including in the design, monitoring and evaluation of all policies,” the mechanisms linking mainstreaming to women’s empowerment were never explicitly spelled out. Although this lack of specificity facilitated norm acceptance, it also made the norm vulnerable to alternative interpretation by bureaucratic institutions and officials. The result was that the focus on changing policy processes in particular became an end in itself, with earlier efforts to change policy outcomes increasingly dropped from the discussion. A case in point is the 1997 ECOSOC resolution on gender mainstreaming, whose influential definition described mainstreaming as:

“the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic, and societal spheres so that

women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.”

In this statement, ‘gender mainstreaming’ was clearly articulated, but the meaning of ‘gender equality’ itself was left undefined. This lacuna opened the door for a range of different content, including the elision of mainstreaming and gender-balanced decision-making.

The implications of this possibility can be seen in efforts to connect mainstreaming to the remit of human rights and security policies within the UN system. In the human rights area, mainstreaming presented a practical methodology for UN treaty bodies² not explicitly focused on women’s issues to respond to the global movement claiming “women’s rights are human rights” that swept across the world in the 1990s. In 1998, the declaration on “Integrating the Human Rights of Women Throughout the United Nations’ System” called on these various bodies to “regularly and systematically take a gender perspective into account in the implementation of their mandates,” which was operationalised as collecting and using sex-disaggregated data in their judgments and considering both gender-specific violations of human rights and violations of the human rights of women as part of their investigations into racial discrimination; torture; social, economic and cultural rights; the rights of children; and the rights of migrant workers. In this schema, the norm of mainstreaming enacts changes to policy processes, but not necessarily to patterns of gender inequality, as originally intended by many advocates.

In relation to security policy, mainstreaming has made inroads into UN peace-keeping and peace-building missions through the mandate of Security Council Resolution 1325. Yet, a closer look at the language of this resolution is in fact reminiscent of earlier WID prescriptions.

² There are seven UN treaty bodies. With the exception of CEDAW, six committees are not explicitly focused on discrimination against women. They are the Committees on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Against Torture, the Rights of the Child, and the Rights of Migrant Workers.

Here, gender mainstreaming is proposed as the solution to redressing women's marginalization in negotiating and implementing peace and security in different local, national, and international contexts (Cohn 2008). While recognizing the importance of a gender perspective, and therefore the need for gender expertise in the planning of peace and security operations, 1325 focuses primarily on greater participation of women, as well as gender analysis and sex-disaggregated data and research, in peace-keeping and peace-building operations. However, an expanding transnational advocacy network has grown up around the resolution since 2000 and includes gender experts in the UN Inter-agency Taskforce on Women, Peace, and Security; a member-state group known as Friends of 1325; and women's NGOs (Barnes 2006). In countries like Congo, Kosovo, and East Timor, local women's organizations have worked very closely with the UN Gender Advisor and Gender Affairs Units within the peace-building missions to integrate gender perspectives and mainstream the concerns of women into all levels of the transitional and new governments. The UN thus remains a crucial actor in teasing out the contours and meanings of gender equality norms, introducing opportunities but also possible limitations in their effects.

As mainstreaming has grown more central to global gender equality strategies, it has also, therefore, become increasingly diffuse in terms of its specific content. The dual focus on gender balance and gender mainstreaming introduces important tensions, to be sure, between a norm focused on equal participation and a norm informed by expert analysis. Yet, there is also no practical UN guidance as to how to implement gender mainstreaming given limited resources. As a result, the mainstreaming norm may mean very different things across diverse UN missions. In a post-conflict peace-building operation, there is likely to be minimal state administration; as such, in these instances officials may focus simply on increasing women's participation in decision-making processes. By contrast, development programs in a state with an established

bureaucracy may have greater capacity for applying gender analysis to government policies. In the case of gender mainstreaming, therefore, the dynamics of practical implementation form a crucial part of the landscape of internal norm contestation, at the same time that they introduce a number of new and varied opportunities for alignment in the external normative environment.

Conclusions

Approaches to the study of international norms in IR have been informed primarily by constructivist frameworks. Whether grounded in the world polity, norm cascades, boomerang effects, or spiral models of norm adoption, these studies are limited by tensions between agency and structure in constructivist accounts. As a result, we argue, they combine a static internal view of norm content with a dynamic external picture of norm diffusion and implementation, which leads them to converge on the former but diverge on the latter. In this article, we suggest that a discursive analysis offers a more promising way forward in terms of theorizing and analysing the origins and subsequent trajectories of international norms. Building on recent contributions to the literature on norms, we present a new conceptualization of norms as processes – rather than as things – which we propose will provide greater leverage in understanding why norms emerge and appear to diffuse rapidly, at the same time that they rarely achieve their intended aims. We argue that there are two sources of dynamism that must be taken into account: (1) dynamics internal to norms, generated by continuing debates over their exact definitions, and (2) dynamics external to norms, stemming from changes in the broader normative environment, which consists of other norms that may themselves be contested. Interactions between these two components, we suggest, have an impact on which new norms emerge, how their content shifts over time, and what effects they have in transforming existing political dynamics.

To illustrate this theory of norms as processes, we trace and compare the life cycles of two global equality strategies: gender-balanced decision-making and gender mainstreaming. We find that the former has roots in earlier UN policies on women's political rights, while the latter emerged from early economic development programs focused on women, and later gender, and development. Despite these distinct origins, the two norms converged in the mid-1990s, when they were framed as partner strategies, with one focused on women as policy-makers and the other on the gendered implications of public policies. Following this moment, however, the two policies again began to take different paths, developing on occasion in tension with one another. Through internal critique, the norm of gender balance has expanded to include acknowledgment of diversity among 'women' and a number of different realms of 'decision-making.' The norm of mainstreaming, in contrast, remains ambiguous in both theory and practice, enabling its content to be filled – and often reduced – in the course of implementation processes. At the same time, they have both intersected, albeit in different ways, with changes in priorities and definitions in the external universe of norms. Crucial opportunities for elaborating the content of both norms have come in the course of attempts to align them with discourses on human rights, peace and security, and even neoliberalism. These similar points of contact have led to the collapsing of these two norms on occasion, with one norm being subsumed under or put in the service of the other. These debates and interactions have resulted, at the present, in the transformation of the two-pronged approach identified in Beijing into a more diffuse formula for achieving equality between women and men.

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