



The Promised Land of Inclusive Peace: NGO Mediators as Norm Entrepreneurs of Inclusion

4.1 INTRODUCTION: THE PROMISED LAND OF INCLUSIVE PEACE

My conceptualization of the inclusivity norm draws from the *UN Guidance for Effective Mediation*'s definition of inclusivity: “the extent and manner in which the views and needs of conflict parties and other stakeholders are represented and integrated into the process and outcome of a mediation effort” (UN 2012). In this book, my analysis remains open to multiple interpretations of norms. These include, for instance, the “mediator’s mantra” of including all relevant armed actors at the table (including proscribed or politically sensitive actors) and/or the UN’s liberal cosmopolitan norm of including non-armed actors through increased modalities of participation and representation (Nilsson and Svensson 2023). I remain open to inductively understand how the inclusivity norm manifests in a given context (both positively and negatively) and include analysis on both interpretations of inclusivity.

Why do I focus on the inclusivity norm in this book? The normative imperative to make peace processes more “inclusive” has become central in contemporary peacemaking scholarship and practice, so much in fact, that inclusivity has been called “the new hype” (Paffenholz and Zartman 2019). The inclusivity norm is at the forefront of the normative turn in mediation research and practice, in which certain norms and values, many of them hailing from an explicitly liberal international basket of

rights-based norms, are increasingly seen as necessary for effective peace processes (Hellmüller et al. 2015; Turner and Waelisch 2021; Hellmüller et al. 2020). To resist the assumption that the more inclusive a peace process is, the more effective the outcome, my research remains open to instances where the inclusivity norm may have unintended consequences or have negative effects on the mediation process. I also focus on the inclusivity norm because, interestingly, two central strands of mediation literature (peace research literature and civil war termination literature) focus on inclusivity of relevant actors but bifurcate at *who* is deemed a relevant actor, as argued by de Waal (2017) along the lines of armed vs-non armed actors in a peace process. For instance, the exclusionary policies of proscription (Boon-Kuo et al. 2015) and other exclusive approaches to actors deemed as spoilers can be seen as diametrically opposed to a key “mediator’s norm” of talking to everyone (Garrigues 2015), no matter how beyond the pale they might seem (Haspeslagh 2021). The clashing normative interpretations and frameworks around inclusion—and by extension exclusion—in peace processes provide a rich field for understanding the different effects and outcomes of norm promotion efforts (Hellmüller 2020; Pring and Palmiano Federer 2020; Pring 2023).

Scholarly debates around “inclusion” are found in literature on civil wars over which armed actors should be included at the table or not—a debate that has at certain points been dominated by the concept of “spoilers” in peace processes (Söderberg-Kovacs and Nilsson 2011). However, in the last three decades, the growing debate surrounding the tension between inclusive and exclusive peace processes (Wanis-St. John and Kew 2008) has increasingly focused on the inclusion of civil society actors rather than the inclusion of those defined in debates over spoilers (Orjuela 2003; Belloni 2008; Zanker 2014; Hellmüller 2020). This shift in scholarship, in part a response to critiques of the elite and exclusive nature of peace negotiations, demarcates a departure in some major assumptions under which peace processes are conducted: peace processes that take place between elite, armed actors (more often than not, men) are not *enough*.

A growing body of empirical literature (Krause et al. 2018) focusing on the impacts of civil society inclusion in peace processes purports that civil society inclusion can result in more legitimate (Lanz 2011), implementable and durable agreements (Nilsson 2012). This focus on effectiveness means that peace processes must be inclusive of *non-armed* actors beyond the elite to be seen as legitimate, sustainable and durable. Despite these empirically based arguments, research on including civil society organizations is

at its core, normative, as it aims to broaden the proverbial and literal peace table past the elite and power-driven processes that characterized mediation processes during the Cold War:

... [...] the concept of civil society inclusion in peacemaking is thus threading its way through the discourses of academics, think tanks, national diplomats, international organizations and most important of all—civil society groups who clamor for a voice, a role, and even a seat at the negotiation table to work on ending the conflicts that have caused them so much suffering. (Wanis- St. John 2008, 4)

Debates on inclusion and exclusion in peace processes have prompted further research on frameworks for determining *how* inclusivity can be achieved (Paffenholz 2014), the role of inclusion in achieving political settlements (Bell and Pospisil 2017) and power sharing arrangements (Raffoul 2018) and how certain categories of non-armed actors, such as women and youth can be meaningfully included in peace negotiations beyond tokenization (Bell and O'Rourke 2007; Lorentzen 2020; Grizelj 2019). Scholars have also increasingly studied the dynamics of the inclusivity norm in and of itself, looking at how the norm of inclusion has been diffused through UN normative instruments such as the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (True and Wiener 2019) or legal frameworks (Kastner 2021). Despite more “ambivalent” (Holper and Kyselova 2021) takes on the interrogation of the multiple purposes of inclusivity that are not made visible in inclusivity discourse (Hirblinger and Landau 2020), on the whole, inclusivity is largely seen as a “good” norm that should be promoted in peace processes, influenced largely by the dynamics of the multilateral discourse of international organizations such as the United Nations, who heavily promote the “promise” of inclusive peace (UN and World Bank 2018).

But who then should be promoting this norm to the parties? In practice, the assumption is often that the third party, who is charged with making process-related decisions should be up to task. Consequently, the question who does get a seat at the proverbial table often falls under the auspices of the third party—the mediator. While it is widely acknowledged that the negotiating parties have ownership over the peacemaking enterprise writ large (Bercovitch and Rubin 1992), mediators “often have significant leverage over conflict parties, and as a consequence, they have a say as to who is included in peace talks” (Lanz 2011, 291). Therefore, as

the normative framework in mediation grows more explicit (Hellmüller et al. 2015, 2017) and crystallizes in debates over inclusion and exclusion, what role do mediators play in the promotion of inclusivity? Emerging research on the role of mediators in norm promotion shows that the inclusivity norm has been heavily promoted by mediators, for instance by the United Nations (Hellmüller 2020), promoted by regional organizations in their mandates (Pring 2017) and promoted by regional organizations and NGO mediators (Pring and Palmiano Federer 2020). Yet these examples show a more complicated picture: mediators often push back on the increasing imperative to include the inclusion agenda in their mediation strategies, while those supporting mediation processes from a distance (Hellmüller et al. 2015) tend to more explicitly advocate for increased inclusion. This dynamic also has implications for funding entities that outline the mandates for many mediators—mandates increasingly require a certain approach to inclusion for those projects they will consider supporting.

4.2 APPLYING THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: ASSESSING NGO MEDIATORS' NORMATIVE AGENCY

As discussed earlier in this book, scholarship and policy discourse over the last 25 years shows that the role of mediators has shifted from simply brokering cessation of hostilities and peace deals between warring parties to designing holistic peace processes that meet the needs of both armed and non-armed actors (such as civil society and women's organizers). Mediators are increasingly pressured, now explicitly in some mandates (Pring 2017) to promote the inclusive processes (inclusivity) norm in their interventions. In view of the increasing number of policy imperatives directing that mediators *should* promote inclusivity in mediation processes, as well as the increasing number of academic studies touting the effectiveness of inclusive processes in producing durable peace agreements (Wanis-St. John and Kew 2008; Paffenholz 2014; Nilsson 2012; Hellmüller 2019), how can we empirically understand an NGO mediator's normative agency in promoting inclusive peace?

We can do this by pulling the pieces together on NGO mediator's normative agency (framing, practices and power) to the idea of "norm localization" developed by International Relations and norm diffusion scholar Amitav Acharya in the early 2000s. Acharya argues that norms not only

spread, but are “localized” in a given context through the interaction of external norm entrepreneurs promoting a given norm and “local agents.” A local agent is neither entirely a norm entrepreneur nor a passive norm-taker, but a combination of both. They accept the norm through a process of reshaping and redefining the norm that makes it more “congruent” with an existing normative framework in the context. Acharya calls this existing normative framework a “cognitive prior” (Acharya 2004).

We can apply this theory to mediation processes, nuancing the theory to allow for greater complexity and multi-directionality (Hellmüller et al. 2020). Acharya accounts for complexity in his concept of: “norm circulation.” Norm circulation is a combination of norm localization with his (2011) notion of norm subsidiarity.¹ Norm circulation importantly redefines norm localization not just as a one-way linear process in which a “moral cosmopolitan” norm entrepreneur promotes norms to a recipient. Norm promotion occurs as a circuitous loop. After norms are localized by local agents, this “local feedback” is sent back “to the wider global context along with other locally constructed norms and help to modify and possibly defend and strengthen the global norm in question (subsidiarity)” (Acharya 2013, 469).

Norm circulation allows for theoretical complexity in three ways. Firstly, norms have “multiple sources” (Acharya 2013, 466). In regard to the inclusivity norm, the norm is in of itself a product of diffusion within the mediation community, from an official text such as the *UN Guidance to Effective Mediation* to discussions about inclusivity at the Oslo Forum.² Secondly, “norms can have multiple agents or norm entrepreneurs.” This is important in tracing the path of a norm, especially when there are (as is now usually the case) multiple mediation actors working coherently or incoherently on a given context. Thirdly, after a norm is presented, it can be contested (Acharya 2013, 479), which does not necessarily weaken the norm, and can make it more legitimate and applicable. This is important when adapting a norm to fit a given existing normative framework. In a mediation process with two or more conflict parties, these parties may have different cognitive priors and this theory must account for multiple

¹Norm subsidiarity concerns “the process whereby local actors create rules with a view to preserve their autonomy from dominance, neglect, violation, or abuse by more powerful central actors” (Acharya 2011, 96).

²An annual high-level gathering of mediators hosted by the Centre for the Humanitarian Dialogue and the Norwegian government.

and concurrent processes of norm diffusion in different contexts. Therefore, adapting norm localization to mediation processes requires accounting for a diversity of sources, a multiplicity of agents, and a plurality of contexts (*ibidem*) that appreciates a broader framework of normative agency and the complexity of conflict histories.

I suggest that applying the concept normative agency to norm circulation theory is an important step in understanding just how NGO mediators are norm entrepreneurs of inclusion. If we take the starting point of viewing inclusivity as an “external” norm (and not a universal one!), NGO mediators easily take on the role of transnational norm entrepreneurs who interpret the inclusivity norm within their mandate and frame the norm to the negotiating parties based on their interpretation. The negotiating parties can then act as the local agents who build “congruence” by grafting and pruning certain elements of the norm to fit the norm into their existing normative frameworks. The power balance between the mediator and negotiating parties in a mediation may shape the outcome of the norm diffusion process: resistance, localization or displacement. This concept is depicted visually in the table below (Table 4.1).

NGO Mediators and Framing Inclusivity

The first step in assessing normative agency is all about “framing.” In other words, how do NGO mediators frame the inclusivity norm to negotiating parties? How do they describe it and how do they discuss it?

Table 4.1 Norm localization and normative agency applied to mediation processes

<i>Norm localization</i>	<i>Normative agency</i>	<i>Mediators and inclusivity</i>
Norm entrepreneur	Interprets and frames norm	Mediators interpret and/or frame inclusivity to negotiating parties
Local agents and Norm entrepreneur engage in congruence building	Interact through a set of social practices that reshape norm	Mediators and negotiating parties reshape norm through different practices during peace negotiations
Outcome of norm diffusion (resistance or localization)	Power dynamics between norm entrepreneur and local agents shape norm diffusion outcome	Mediators’ perceived legitimacy among negotiating parties shape the outcome of norm diffusion at critical points in negotiations

Framing is based on two elements: how NGO mediators interpret inclusivity in their own normative socializations, as I discussed in the previous chapter, and how they communicate the inclusivity norm to negotiating parties. In the chapters that follow, I also look at how NGO mediators *discursively* frame inclusivity to negotiating parties.³ Discourse as a concept matters in this book, because it elucidates how mediators actually promote norms through communication, and reveals a central assumption that all mediation processes hinge upon: that finding common ground between conflict parties is possible because of the principle of *universality*. For instance, Habermasian discourse ethics reveals the deontological and universal nature of international peace mediation, and by extension, the liberal peacebuilding paradigm. The current normative framework of mediation is governed by universal “fundamentals” about how mediation should be conducted and the ideal outcomes. Therefore, discursive framing by mediation actors (the norm entrepreneurs in question) assumes that international norms are universal in nature and form part of a *gemeinsame Lebenswelt* (“common lifeworld”) in which the mediators help parties find this “common ground.” This assumption has been critiqued by skeptics, who posit that a common lifeworld may be difficult to back up in political reality. However, Deitelhoff and Müller’s (2005) attempt to operationalize Habermasian discourse theory in multi-lateral negotiations finds that while trying to transplant theory into empirics was problematic, “the obstacle of lifeworlds should not be overestimated” because “actors

³ Discourse is a theoretically loaded concept, and I harness it by focusing on a specific debate between rationalist and constructivist theorists around the early 2000s called the ZIB-debate. Risse (2000) provides one of the most comprehensive contributions linking the ZIB debate to constructivist theory on norms. In his article “‘Let’s Argue!’ Communicative Action in World Politics” (2000), Risse claims that central tenets of Habermasian discourse theory such as argumentation, deliberation and persuasion create a mode of social interaction distinct from rational approaches and strategic bargaining but that fit squarely in the realm of sociological institutionalism. This is relevant in mediation processes, where actors seeking an optimal solution for a commonly perceived problem (e.g. a mutually acceptable outcome between parties to conflict) can use deliberative argumentation as a way to find a common normative framework that can overcome collective action problems. This is where discursive framing comes in. According to Risse, when actors deliberate about the truth, they try to collectively figure out whether their assumptions about the world are correct, and particularly whether “norms of appropriate behaviour can be justified, and which norms apply under given circumstances” (7). Discourse therefore bridges the normative and empirical by connecting the realm of theoretical discourse to the realm of practical discourse (*ibidem*).

facing a breakdown in cooperation strive to create artificial lifeworld features” especially actors supporting the liberal paradigms:

the dominance of liberal democracies in the negotiation process, which share norms and beliefs, might also make a difference in supplying a reservoir of shared norms that can compensate for domestically rooted lifeworld certainties. (Deitelhoff and Müller 2005, 173)

Furthermore, and even more interesting for this book, they found that having an institutional structure with a normatively structured background was conducive to finding common ground, and that non-state actors such as NGOs, “who emerged as credible knowledge brokers or moral authorities” (Deitelhoff and Müller 2005, 176), willfully attempted to “reframe issues to resonate with broader understandings.” As such, discursive framing is a central concept to understanding the mechanics of norm diffusion and promotion in practice.

NGO mediators have framed inclusivity as a salient and central norm in mediation, evidenced by the growing number of prescriptive guidelines for mediators concerned with who gets a seat at the peace table (von Burg 2015). Inclusivity is described as a main recommendation of the MSN report on “Translating Mediation Guidance into Practice,” a document that also illustrates the epistemic power of NGO mediators who have put this policy document together and illustrate the different interpretations of the norm:

Inclusivity is essential, but not easily implemented: There is a strong and legitimate call for making mediation processes more inclusive, with regard to the inclusion of a range of actors (e.g. marginalized groups, women, religious actors, etc.) and with regard to the content of a peace agreement. However, mediators often face pressure to reach a minimum agreement quickly, especially when hostilities are ongoing. This can make it particularly difficult to reach more inclusive, and thus more complex, agreements. Proscription policies may also minimize inclusivity, and mediation actors should strive to find pragmatic means of overcoming these obstacles. Generally, it is more effective to convince the powerful actors sitting at the table of the benefits of inclusivity, as opposed to threatening or lecturing them, for example by quoting international standards that call for greater inclusivity. Inclusivity also entails efforts, outside the formal mediation process, to support dialogue between actors, so that they can better influence formal processes and sustain peace agreements once they are signed. (Alvarez et al. 2012, 6)

In this paragraph alone, inclusivity can refer to the inclusion of non-armed actors such as women, religious leaders and other marginalized groups, or equally, the inclusion of proscribed actors such as armed groups listed on terrorist lists. These are two very different interpretations of the norm but described in the same vein.

NGO Mediators and Social Practices Promoting Inclusivity

A second way to determine a mediator's normative agency is to look at "practices" and the specific *social* practices mediators use to promote the inclusivity norm to negotiating parties. The concept of social practices is relevant in understanding how the fields of norms and mediation are connected. In short, the concept of social practices acts as an important bridge between the theoretical world of norms and the material world of peace mediation. Adler and Pouliot define practices as "competent performances" (Adler and Pouliot 2011, 6).⁴ More specifically, they conceptualize practices as "socially meaningful patterns of action, which in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world" (Adler and Pouliot 2011, 4). Practices are an essential concept to studying norm diffusion in mediation processes as mediation processes are essentially a set of social and international practices in which actors (mediators, negotiators, mediation support actors, the general public) *perform* socially meaningful patterns of action to embody, act out or reify background knowledge and discourse (of norms, logic of appropriateness, social conventions, collective expectations of behavior, etc.) in the given locale.

Adler and Pouliot's treatment of practice in IR is helpful in forming my analytical framework on the role of mediators in norm diffusion in several ways. First, looking at mediation not only as a political process but also as a process made up of different sets of practice opens up avenues for new insights. The practice of mediation is largely *performance based*, with mediators taken on by the parties to skillfully perform certain practices to help bring the parties closer to an agreement. The practice of mediation is also *patterned*, where the notion of mediation (peace talks, negotiations towards a peace agreement etc.) reproduces similar behaviors with regular meetings. Furthermore, mediation is *competent* in a socially meaningful

⁴For difference between behavior, action and practice, see Adler and Pouliot 2011 (6).

and recognizable way based on certain *background knowledge* of both the mediator and the parties and the expectations of what a mediation process can and should be. Therefore, seeing mediation as an international practice provides robust groundwork on building mediation as a site of norm diffusion.

Second, looking at the actors that constitute these practices as a community of practice (Adler 2008) gives insights on the prospects of NGO mediators as norm entrepreneurs. Communities of practice are “intersubjective social structures that constitute the normative and epistemic ground for action, but they are also agents, made up of real people, who—working via network channels, across national borders, across every divide and in the halls of government—affect political, economic and social events (Adler and Pouliot 2011, 17). Autesserre’s (2014) *Peaceland* utilizes the concept of social practices to study the “everyday practices” of peacebuilders. Her empirical observations of the practices of peacebuilders in a range of contexts revealed how practices engender larger habits, narratives and perceptions of a given conflict context. For instance, Autesserre (2014) observed that different sets of practices, from helping a host country or population (writ large) to specific practices like reporting, collecting data on violence, following security routines and valuing expertise over local languages or interacting with local populations have intended and unintended consequences that affect the effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions. Looking at “the mediation community” as a community of practice can help reveal underlying habits, narratives and perceptions that may not be visible without this lens.

NGO mediators use epistemic knowledge production practices such as training, research, capacity building and advising negotiating parties to promote inclusivity. Many of the knowledge products that NGO mediators produce (e.g. manuals, guidelines, toolkits and policy briefs) about what inclusive peace looks like and how it can be achieved often explicitly promote the inclusion of non-armed civil society actors such as women, youth and other identity groups, evidenced in the sizable body of academic and policy literature on the role of NGO mediators as epistemic communities (Convergne 2016a, b; Lehmann-Larsen 2014; Whitfield 2015; Stenner 2017). Haas (1992) describes epistemic communities as “a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue area” (3). His description echoes “practice” literature in IR. While members can come from a variety of disciplines and

backgrounds, they “share normative and principled beliefs which provide a value-based rationale for the social action of community members” as well as “causal beliefs” derived from their analysis of practices leading or contributing to a central set of problems in their domain (*ibidem*). Importantly, epistemic communities share notions of validity and a common policy enterprise” (*ibidem*). Convergne (2016b) applies this conceptualization to the world of mediation in her study of the expertise production of NGOs: “a distinctive feature of mediation at the UN is its reliance on expertise-based nongovernmental actors such as specialized NGOs, think tanks and research centers, individual scholars, consultants and experts” (137). These NGOs comprise an epistemic community on mediation who share a homogenous conception of peace.⁵ The normative dimension of NGO mediators’ epistemic nature is also clear. Faget (2008) writes that the UN is influenced by a community of peacebuilding scholars who emphasize the root causes of conflicts. This community uses the production and dissemination of knowledge as a form of intervention and influence on policy makers and stakeholders to conflict.

The identity of many NGOs as hubs of knowledge production and technical expertise on an array of topics is evident when looking at how NGO mediators describe themselves in public facing fora. For instance, the Berghof Foundation’s mission to create space for conflict transformation is realized through “knowledge, skills and resources available in the areas of conflict research, peace support and peace education” (Berghof website, 2018) while CITpax is explicit about the normative and “action-oriented” nature of their think tank activities related to diagnosis and research: “it seeks to change the reality of conflicts in the pursuit and attainment of peace” (CITpax website, 2018). Inter Mediate cites training and expertise sharing as part of its core activities: training to prepare parties for “effective participation in negotiation” and sharing lessons learned and its experiences of past peace processes (Inter Mediate 2018). Newly established NGO mediator European Institute of Peace (EIP) explicitly cites knowledge tools as a core part of its identity, as it “connects expertise and shares knowledge and lessons on European mediation” (EIP website, 2018).

NGO mediators employ a range of epistemic practices. The first is “capacity building,” which consists of trainings, bespoke workshops and organizational learning on different topics in peacebuilding and

⁵ Usually a liberal peace, see Richmond 2018.

mediation. The second is “advising,” in which NGO mediators conduct individual coachings or directly give technical advice to individuals or smaller groups of stakeholders. The third is “research,” in which NGO mediators conduct conflict analysis, develop codes of conduct and develop practical guides and manuals that frame important issues in mediation, or assess peace mediation as a field. The fourth is “knowledge transfer or knowledge support,” conducted through “exposure trips” or “study tours.” Exposure trips refer to NGO mediators taking negotiating parties or conflict stakeholders to post-conflict or post-agreement contexts to glean from comparative experiences. These trips may also include international “resource persons” sharing expertise in the form of “lessons learned” from other peace processes. There are many examples of NGO mediators using these epistemic community practices as entry points or as a form of mediation itself. For instance, Convergne (2016b) details UN Special Representative of the Secretary General Ahmedou Ould Abdallah relying on International Alert “to organize and fund study trips and workshops in South Africa, in an effort to familiarize Burundian representatives with the tenets of post-apartheid cohabitation” (140). NGO mediators who conduct mediation support play a big role in these “knowledge management” practices. Lehmann-Larsen (2014) explains that ideally, such activities could include: briefings of new staff, debriefings, lessons-learned exercises, evaluations and case studies, dissemination of best practices through guidance notes, and guidelines and other publications (13). These items can be independent of a process or “tailor-made” based on requests from the field. Lehmann-Larsen (2014) cites NGO mediators such as the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Conciliation Resources, swisspeace, the Centre for Security Studies ETH Zurich and the HD Centre as groups that produce relevant “knowledge management tools” that contribute to the coherence and effectiveness of peace interventions. Looking at the large number of knowledge products that NGO mediators have produced, the most salient are the three international norms previously mentioned: inclusivity, gender equality and transitional justice,⁶ which illustrate the

⁶UN Groups of Friends Statements, UN General Assembly Resolutions, Reports of the Secretary General and specific documents such as the EEAS Mediation Support Factsheet (2013), the African Union Handbook Series on Mediation and various OSCE Mediation Guidelines are just some examples of institutional documents that make explicit reference to these norms.

agency of NGO mediators playing important norm setting roles regarding effective peacemaking and best practice in the field.

*NGO Mediators' Power: Legitimacy and the Limits
of Normative Agency*

Third, it is essential to understand how “power” undercuts normative agency and how the perceived legitimacy of a mediator affects the outcome of norm promotion. How does the legitimacy of a mediator in the eyes of the negotiating parties shape the outcome of the norm diffusion process (e.g. displacement, localization, resistance)? This requires understanding whether and how the inclusivity norm changes during the process of localization, and the role that mediators play (or do not play) in this change.

My view of power as a mediators' legitimate authority to facilitate or influence the negotiating parties' behavior towards certain outcomes emphasizes the non-coercive or persuasive forms of power and applied to norm promotion, the ability of a mediator to promote norms. Despite their “notoriously slippery” nature as concepts, power and legitimate authority (Hurd 1999; Kratchowil and Ruggie 1986; Beetham 2013) are central to understanding the conditions under which mediators can promote norms and actually influence the behavior of the negotiating parties. Two developments that accompanied the evolution of the study of global society are relevant in this regard: a shift in the type of actor that wields power over others (the understanding that actors other than states can hold legitimate authority) and the type of power these actors exhibit. I conscript the use of Barnett and Duvall's (2005) typology of power, where:

Compulsory power refers to relations of interaction that allow one actor to have direct control over another [...] Institutional power is in effect when actors exercise indirect control over others [...] Structural power concerns the constitution of social capacities and interests of actors in direct relation to one another [...] Productive power is the socially diffuse production of subjectivity in systems of meaning and signification. (Barnett and Duvall 2005, 3)

These “alternative” concepts of power are important because they add two essential dimensions for understanding norm dynamics in political processes: conceptualizing power produced by relational and interactional

means, and power produced through different kinds of social relations, whether specific/direct or diffuse/indirect (Barnett and Duval 2005). In the field of mediation, where the mediator does not wield direct power over the negotiating parties, this conception is essential, as it allows for other forms of legitimated power (Arnault 2014; Kastner 2015).

Based on this logic, ascribing to a constructivist approach that considers constructions of reality as reflecting, enacting and reifying relations of power (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001, 398) in norm diffusion theories makes sense. Such an approach maintains the core assumptions of constructivism but considers that ideas may not be autonomous from power distribution (Checkel 1998, 84). It also does not aim to build theory, but instead seeks to “denaturalize dominant constructions” (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001, 398) and explore how the diffusion of norms is related to power. Looking at only the customary and usual practices in the international system (Björkdahl 2002) emphasizes the normal and leaves out what is normative. For the normal to become normative, there must be a feeling of obligation on the part of the actors (Raymond 1997). But where and from whom does this feeling of obligation come? While earlier constructivist scholarship in interest and identity formation argued that norms themselves do not only constrain behavior but constitute actors’ interests independent of power (Checkel 1999), the *diffusion of these norms* may not be so autonomous from underlying power distributions. Revisiting the possibility of these underlying power distributions between mediators and the negotiating parties through investigating how mediators are accepted by the parties who deem them as legitimate is essential for my analytical framework. Furthermore, employing a constructivist approach that relates ideas and power to scholarship on norms can provide an additional dimension of scholarly inquiry into the power of the “agent” in constructivist theory on norms. This approach can add to the growing work surrounding “agentic constructivism” (Sikkink 2011). A viable path to relating ideas to the power of agents is investigating the legitimacy of agents in norms diffusion. The concept of legitimacy is an important connector between the rules of power and the norms that provide their justification, and comprises the moral or normative aspects of power relationships (Beetham 2013, 25).

Practically speaking, I look at whether the inclusivity norm changes in *substance*, as the “reinterpretation and re-representation of the outside norm, including framing and grafting, [...] may extend into more complex processes of reconstitution to make an outside norm congruent with

a pre-existing local normative order” (Acharya 2004, 244). In other words, is it substantively changed to fit into the negotiating parties’ cognitive prior? I investigate whether successful constitutive localization has taken place by observing the integration of the external norm at the same time as the reinforcement and congruence building with existing local beliefs and practices. Furthermore, I also investigate the role that the mediator plays (if any) in the norm diffusion process. Can the substantive changes in the norm during the process of localization be attributed to the intervention of the mediator, or are they rather the by-product of an alternative process led by a local agent?

I do not assume that the inclusivity norm is internalized by the parties, but assume that successful diffusion can be observed through the negotiating parties *accepting* the norm via promotion from the mediator. Therefore, I operationalize this question by observing whether or not the negotiating parties adopt norm-consistent behavior. It is not easily established which norms are accepted. Internalized norms are “hard to discern” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 904) because actors often do not explicitly consider or discuss whether or not to conform their behavior. The difficulty of determining the acceptance of a norm also invokes questions on whether one views norms with either a universalistic or particularistic approach. While a universalistic approach would clearly apply to norms stemming from basic human rights as applicable across contexts, a particularistic approach criticizes translating seemingly universal normative frameworks into specific contexts, highlighting the challenges of norm localization. The underlying assumption here is that if the negotiating parties accept the norm, the norms regulate, constrain or enable the behavior of the negotiating parties.

4.3 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The normative agency of NGO mediators in promoting inclusivity is based on their idea of framing inclusivity as important to effective peace processes and utilizing knowledge production practices to promote inclusivity. But there are limits. While much of these limitations are directly related to NGO mediators’ lack of political leverage, an important element is the normative environment, or “cognitive prior” in which an NGO mediator is working. What happens when an NGO mediator takes an interpretation of inclusivity based on their own normative socializations and tries to promote it in a context with pre-existing normative frameworks around

inclusion and exclusion in its peace politics? Could it not be seen as yet another form of external actors (mostly from the Global North) imposing their sets of norms, no matter how well intentioned, on the Global South? And given the large number of NGO mediators working in conflict contexts around the world, what are the risks of multiple working definitions of inclusion being promoted by several NGO mediators working with negotiating parties? The next three chapters explore these questions empirically, looking at what exactly happened when NGO mediators in Myanmar promote inclusivity to the negotiating parties in the framework of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement process from 2011 to 2015.

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