The Role of Transnational Advocacy Networks in Reconstituting International Organization Identities

by Susan Park

INTRODUCTION

International relations scholarship recognizes the important role that non-state actors play in areas such as human rights, the environment, poverty, and development. Constructivism has proved a welcome lens through which to view the actions and ideas of non-state actors, characterized here as transnational advocacy networks. This article argues that constructivism can provide a framework that goes beyond analyzing the strategic aims of such actors to understand the influence they have on the formation of international governmental organization's (IO's) identities. While transnational advocacy networks have had policy victories and defeats in campaigns against IOs, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the interest here is to question how IO identities are reshaped or reconstituted by interactions with transnational advocacy networks. Understanding IO identities is important in explaining why IOs operationalize their mandates in certain ways and not others. As such, it is posited that transnational advocacy networks shape the social structure within which IOs exist. These networks interact with and influence IO identities and therefore behavior. The first section establishes the importance of understanding IO identities. The second section establishes the role of transnational advocacy networks in world politics. The final section then analyses how transnational advocacy networks reshape and reconstitute IO identities through micro-processes of socialization. A constructivist framework provides a means of understanding IO-transnational advocacy networks interaction, giving insight into why IO identities internalize new norms.

THE AGENCY AND IDENTITY OF IOS

The proliferation of IOs within the international system in the post-Cold War period provides ample scope for analysis of how IOs undertake their functions.[1] IOs operate within and across all aspects of international relations (IR) and act not only as fora for states' interests but also as instigators of change in areas as diverse as the

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environment, development, human rights, and scientific practices.[2] Research on IOs suggests that they may not always operate according to the most efficient or optimal means and that they may, in fact, operate in ways not intended by states that establish them.[3] Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Snidal further claim that IO "operations also significantly influence the capabilities, understandings, and interests of states" and they "promote certain norms and practices among states, often in unanticipated ways."[4] Thus, IOs also operate as actors in their own right, teaching states their interests.[5] Providing another reason to analyze IO identities to understand the actions and behavior of IOs is Bob Reinalda and Bertjan Verbeek's statement that many IOs formulate and implement policies that cannot be "described as the simple product of interstate bargaining."[6] This makes a constructivist analysis compelling, or even necessary, in order to explain IO actions that state-centric explanations cannot. Thus, the various ways in which IOs interpret and undertake their mandates require an analysis of how and why IOs operationalize their agenda.

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Within IR theory, analyses of IOs tend to be concerned with inter-state cooperation and the impact of IO operations rather than how and why IOs undertake their functions the way they do. First, IOs are seen as arenas for state cooperation as determined by states' perceptions of absolute versus relative gains, which is predicated upon incurring minimal costs acceptable to states for cooperation to occur.[7] Within the broader IR literature, IOs have been viewed as functional: as having an agenda of peace; as vehicles to assist states to realize their goals and in reducing the transaction costs of cooperation; as public goods provided by hegemons; as arenas for state interests; or as components of regimes that explain collaborative practice in issue areas within IR.[8]

Second, IOs have been analyzed in terms of the degree and efficacy of their operations in fulfilling their mandates and achieving outcomes in IR as a whole, or in specific areas including development, environment, economics, security, and human rights.[9] IOs are therefore seen as legitimate if they are able to undertake goals determined by states. Most recently the focus has also been directed towards the control that states attempt to maintain over IOs in principle-agent models.[10] However, IO scholarship has not only focused its attention on interstate cooperation within IOs, state control over IOs, and IO efficacy, but also on how they are influenced.[11] This final strand is a vital subject of scholarship in IR now that IOs are targets of 'global civil society' and has led to renewed interest in how IOs undertake their mandates, and why they are being targeted by forces outside the purview of states.[12] This raises questions about how such events are perceived by IR theorists and requires alternative, non-state centric theoretical frameworks in which to analyze how IOs are situated within world politics. Yet even within the constructivist camp, which need not be state-centric, the focus has not been on IO identities. Rather, constructivists

have viewed IOs as social environments – where states are inculcated into the social environment of the IO or that of the international community.[13] The focus therefore, has been on how states have been shaped by IOs or by other states in IO fora. The aim here however, is to problematize how IO identities themselves are shaped, by examining the role of non-state actors and to examine the processes of socialization which lead to the reconstitution of IO identities. Constructivist insights are therefore used to analyze how IO identities shift. Identity is important because actors' social identities shape their interests, which then influence their actions. Identity can be understood as "a property of intentional actors that generates motivational and behavioral dispositions" meaning that an actor's identity is "at base a subjective or unit-level quality, rooted in an actor's self-understanding."[14] Understanding IO identities, therefore, will aid understanding how and why IOs behave in certain ways and not others.[15]

This article therefore posits that IOs are agents in the international system and that IO identities are shaped by the social structure in which they exist. This is in contradistinction to determining the identity of an IO based on individual staff members or states that comprise the organization. Within this, the concept of identity is crucial, and is defined here as: *an organization's mandate and bureaucratic culture, and is both subjective and inter-subjective.* States are important in establishing IOs by setting their mandate, scope, and function, all of which contribute to determining its identity. Yet IOs historical development and culture based on the professional orientation of the majority of its staff, influence how it will act and react to situations within the international system.[16] Moreover, how the bureaucratic culture informs how the structure of the organization is shaped and interpreted is key to understanding an IOs' identity, and explains the way it fulfills its duties.[17] Thus, an IO has a mandate set for it by states, and a bureaucratic culture based on its dominant profession which influences how it undertakes its functions, but is also informed by how it perceives itself and is perceived by others. The subjective and inter-subjective aspects of identity are key in determining an IOs identity shift, as opposed to purely tactical policy changes.

International norms are a broader structure within which IOs exist, imposing limits on how agents behave. Yet, these limitations do not determine how IOs act.

IOs, it is argued, exist in a social structure of international norms. Norms are defined here as "collectively held ideas about behavior" such that "unlike ideas which may be held privately, norms are shared and social; they are not just subjective but *inter*-subjective."[18] Norms are important as they inform actors about the "logic of appropriate" behavior, such that "collective norms and understandings constitute the social identities of actors and define the 'basic rules of the game' in which actors find themselves in their interactions."[19] Thus, IO identities are shaped not primarily

by states as traditionally argued, but by a social structure of international norms which determine the appropriate behavior of IOs. Put another way, IOs are influenced by international norms, and these are shared by non-state actors such as transnational advocacy networks (discussed in the following section).

International norms are a broader structure within which IOs exist, imposing limits on how agents behave. Yet, these limitations do not determine how IOs act. How an IO responds to international norms is necessarily determined by its identity. Therefore, IOs are expected to behave in certain ways as determined by their identity, yet they may also act in ways that contravene international norms. In order to understand how it is that IOs may diverge from international norms is key to the socialization concept, which is examined next. Each IO has a different identity which determines how it responds to the social structure within which it exists. As such, the World Bank is very different from the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the IMF due to their different mandates, history, and professional base, but also due to their different organizational cultures which determine how they respond to the social structure in which they exist.

Asking why IO identities shift is to consider the extent to which IOs come to believe they internalize new norms such as gender mainstreaming by the UN or the idea of security communities and norms of ethnic dispute resolution as held by the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).[20] Or, alternatively, such a framework aims to explain why some IOs do not internalize new norms, as noted by Alexandru Grigorescu, when examining transparency norms within the Council of Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the European Union.[21] By stating that IOs are influenced by the social structure of international norms, the analysis goes deeper than arguing that state dictates change IOs, by suggesting that IOs may internalize new international norms or may attempt to resist them, or merely superficially adapt to them. This is not a new thought in IO analysis; scholars have long been interested in examining the differences between what IOs claim they believe, and what they actually believe.[22] IO scholars recognize the influence of the external (outside the organization) environment in shaping the agenda and actions of IOs.[23] For organizational theory, this was called the organization's task environment or milieu.[24] Such analyses incorporate both state and non-state influences, although they tend not to focus on ideational factors as discussed herein. The next section turns to examine the role of transnational advocacy networks in shaping the social structure in which IOs exist, which reconstitutes IO identities through micro-processes of socialization.

TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY NETWORKS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Thus far, the importance of IO identities in informing how IOs behave in the international system has been stressed by arguing that agent's identities inform their interests and actions. By arguing that IO identities inform their interests, but recognizing that IOs are located in, and are mediated by, social structures, attention is therefore

focused on how social structures influence IO identities. This section aims to locate IOs within the social structure of international norms which influence, shape and reconstitute IO identities. Here it is argued that a variety of actors share international norms, including transnational advocacy networks. First, the role of transnational advocacy networks will be expounded before analyzing how they increasingly shape the social structure in which IOs exist. The final section of the article will then establish how IO identities are reconstituted by transnational advocacy networks.

Significant work has been done on the role of non-state actors such as transnational advocacy networks, Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs), and civil society regarding their influence in areas such as the environment, human rights and security.[25] Transnational advocacy networks are made up of the following: research and advocacy NGOs (local, national and international), activists, local social movements, foundations, the media, churches, trade unions, consumer organizations, parts of state bureaucracies and intellectuals.[26] This is a slightly narrower description than the definition offered by Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink where transnational advocacy networks are made up of the following: research and advocacy NGOs (local, national and international), activists, local social movements, foundations, the media, churches, trade unions, consumer organizations, and intellectuals, and parts of government and international government organizations.[27] For the purpose of this analysis, international organizations are not included in order to maintain the theoretical distinction between multilateral institutions and transnational advocacy networks; agents and structures.[28] This is will be detailed further.

Transnational advocacy networks, as with NGOs more specifically, are often touted as the solution to broader issues such as global environmental problems and human rights as they embody a "principled idea or value that motivates their actions" over and above the self interest of states.

Keck and Sikkink state that transnational advocacy networks form campaigns which are "activities that are combined to further an aim or goal which members from diffuse areas undertake collectively, usually based on a norm or principle and focused on policy change, and whose actions are often not based on rational interest explanations." Campaigns undertaken by transnational advocacy networks are often directed towards IOs. Much of the work done by analysts on the World Bank for example, have attempted to explain the ways in which non-state actors have influenced the Bank to adopt measures originally considered antithetical to, or outside of, its conception of development (regarding the environment, the role of women in development, and human rights).[29] Transnational advocacy networks, as with NGOs more specifically, are often touted as the solution to broader issues such as global environmental problems and human rights as they embody a "principled idea or

value that motivates their actions" over and above the self interest of states.[30]

Transnational advocacy networks are analyzed in the context of how they attempt to shape international norms that inform IO identities. Keck and Sikkink analyzed how transnational advocacy networks influenced the World Bank on environmental issues, while others have analyzed how non-state actors influence IOs such as the WTO and the IMF on environment, human rights and labor issues.[31] Campaigns such as the Drop the Debt against the World Bank and IMF have demonstrated the success of non-state actors in pushing for, and succeeding in, creating new IO policies. The current attempt by transnational advocacy networks to influence the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to institute minimum environmental and social standards for national export credit agencies is one of many such types of interaction between non-state actors and IOs.[32] While these cases demonstrate how transnational advocacy networks influence IO policies, they also demonstrate how advocacy networks challenge what constitutes acceptable behavior for IOs. In this regard, they challenge the conception of development, thus making political previously accepted actions and behavior. As such, one may examine the surface level of IO-network interactions based purely on analyzing advocacy pressure on IO policies, or one may analyze the deeper level of interaction which explores how these policy changes affect the IO's perception of itself and its role in the international system.

The aim is to understand how transnational advocacy networks go beyond influencing IO policies to reshaping and reconstituting their identities.

The intention herein is not to examine the strategies and actions of transnational advocacy networks in policy campaigns against IOs. Rather, the aim is to understand how transnational advocacy networks go beyond influencing IO policies, to reshaping and reconstituting their identities. This goes much deeper than is normally acknowledged within studies of non-state actor-IO interactions.[33] Whether this is a result of the difficulties in determining IO identity change (specified here as a shift in mandate, bureaucratic culture and subjective and inter-subjective understanding of the IO), or whether this is a result of the interests of scholars examining non-state actors, is unclear. While research into whether IOs 'learn' is well established within the field, this is not framed in terms of identity.[34] An analysis of the social structures within which IOs exist will now be explored.

Social structures, in the form of norms, rules, or institutions, are shared between actors within the international system. Norms, rules and institutions are social facts, which result from the collective intentionality of people or groups within society.[35] Social structures matter because they define expectations for behavior. This article prioritizes IO agency because of the power bestowed upon IOs by states. Non-materially powerful transnational advocacy networks constitute the social structure as they mediate the norms, rules and institutions that shape IO behavior. While

norms shape interests, repeated interaction between agents and structures mean that over time, norms shape an actor's identity (which in turn reshapes norms). By arguing that the social structure constructs actors, constructivists are holists, arguing that structures *constitute* actors thus changing the properties of the actor. Indeed, Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink argue that all constructivists use holism in some way.[36] Holism is deeper and more encompassing than analyzing the behavioral effects of structure, as it ultimately points to the reconstitutive nature of social structures that change the properties of the actor (its identity). As such, constructivists argue that actors cannot be divorced from the social structure within which they act.[37]

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However, constructivists also argue that "human agency creates, reproduces, and changes culture by way of daily practices," such that social structures and agents are mutually constituted and "cannot be reduced or collapsed into each other."[38] Thus, IO behavior is not wholly based on the social structure within which it exists, nor does it exist entirely outside of social interaction. Rather, IO identities are informed by social interaction, and identity change results from socialization, but how they change is distinct to each organization's identity. It is recognized here that transnational advocacy networks are important in world politics because they help shape and influence international norms to which IOs increasingly subscribe. Analyzing the way in which an IO has internalized new norms begins by first examining the IO as an agent, and then tracing how this shift came about. Therefore, any analysis of identity change within IOs would first examine the identity of the particular IO. The shift can then be traced by examining how IOs respond to new norms diffused by other actors, through examining the rise of opposition by transnational advocacy networks to, and their interaction with, the IO. In this way, how IOs interact and engage with transnational advocacy networks in turn mediates and shapes the norm propounded by the network, and hopefully creating shared meanings between both.

For example, transnational advocacy networks charged that World Bank development was 'destructive' and 'unsustainable,' which led to changed perceptions as to what appropriate development was. Yet how sustainable development norms have been reconstituted in turn, needs to be analyzed by reversing the agent/structure role and by analyzing the structural properties of the IO and the agency of non-state actors that influence it. This is necessary to understand the dialectical relationship between IOs and networks. By recognizing IOs as purposive actors in the international system is to recognize the power they are able to wield. The next stage is to reverse the agent/structure dichotomy in order to examine the network exertions upon the IO; that is, to examine how social structures are constituted through practices. Thus,

we need to examine how norms such as international development shifted to incorporate notions of sustainability insofar as they affect the World Bank.[39] This can be done by examining how transnational advocacy networks established and effectively maintained interaction with the World Bank through opposing, constraining, and reconstituting the IO. Such an analysis would also examine how the IO internalizes and then reflects the new norm. This analysis follows scholars working on non-state actors, such as example Lipshultz and Richard Price, who use transnational advocacy networks as agents, locating the source of ideational change and norm diffusion with them.[40] In this sense, transnational advocacy networks as with all other properties have both agency and structure.[41] By examining their specific actions in relation to the World Bank sheds lights on how the broader social structure and rountinized practices are established which then inform the Bank as an actor.

Transnational advocacy networks therefore attempt to influence IOs. It is the oppositional nature of the networks which place them as the normative adjudicators to IO actions. It also makes them agents, interpreting and reinterpreting the logic of appropriateness for IOs. Networks exist to oppose to IOs such as the World Bank, many of them only emerging in response to IO actions such as Bank funded projects which they perceive as creating environmental and social damage. In this sense, transnational advocacy networks are mutually constituted with the IO that they are engaged with and therefore cannot be reduced or collapsed nor separated from each other. Of course, advocacy networks emerged in earnest the 1980s against the actions and interests of IOs, and as such, the existence of IOs did not seemingly require the existence of transnational advocacy networks. Yet increasing knowledge about the impacts of IO actions (such as those of the World Bank, IMF and the newer WTO) led to the recognition that not all IO actions were laudable. While it could be argued that IOs do not need networks like a master needs a slave or a teacher needs a student, in actual fact IOs are not the only actors engaged in a number of important areas in world politics, and that non-state actors hold sufficient expertise and undertake activities in areas of IO operations. Transnational advocacy networks therefore counterbalance and reinforce IOs, ensuring that their actions take social and environmental, as well as security and economic factors into account. The process through which social structures influence agents is socialization. This is examined next.

HOW TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY NETWORKS RECONSTITUTE IO IDENTITIES

This article argues that transnational advocacy networks influence IOs through a process of constant interaction. This process thus shapes and reconstitutes the identity of IOs to internalize new norms and is part of a wider process of socialization. Socialization is defined here as a process whereby agents, such as IOs, internalize norms that constitute the social structure in which they exist.[42] For IOs, the socialization process results from the mutual constitution of IOs and the structure of international

norms. Transnational advocacy networks, as with other actors and global civil society more broadly, shape international norms such as sustainable development, human rights, humane security and economic policies.

Socialization is not a linear process, but one of continuous interaction between agents and structures, or between IOs and international norms. Social structures such as norms promoted by advocacy networks have structural characteristics in that "ideas – understood more generally as collective knowledge, institutionalized in practices – are the medium and propellant of social action; they define the limits of what is cognitively possible and impossible for individuals."[43] They shape the identity of IOs and are themselves shaped by the IO. In order to understand how this relationship reconstitutes the identity of IO, the analysis emphasizes how social structures socialize agents, rather than how agents in turn reproduce and reconstitute social structures. However, the premise of this argument is grounded in the broader norm diffusion literature, which demonstrates how international organizations reproduce and reconstitute norms throughout the international system.[44]

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The constructivist approach used throughout recognizes that all elements have both agential and structural properties.[45] This section reinforces the reversed agent-structure assumption made in the earlier section. While IOs are agents in the international system, in framing agendas and in providing social environments through which states become involved, all agents have structural elements.[46] In order to understand how it is that IO identities are shaped, it is important to analyze the role of transnational advocacy networks as agents in shaping the norms to which IOs adhere, examples of which are discussed below.

Put another way, transnational advocacy networks hold normative assumptions that influence their attempts to reconstitute IO identities. In this way, transnational advocacy networks shape alternative international norms which they attempt to diffuse within IOs. How IOs respond to this interaction depends on their identity, which is based upon their mandate and bureaucratic culture but is also subjective and inter-subjective. Arguably, analyzing IO identity change can further explain how certain norms are reinforced over others in the international system. In this regard, IOs are agents in the international system and are recognized for spreading norms throughout the international system, teaching states their interests.[47] To reiterate: transnational advocacy networks promote alternative norms and attempt to influence IO identities to internalize them. If IOs internalize these norms, they may then, as agents, diffuse them throughout the international system. This needs to be examined in more detail.

Networks influence and pressure IOs to adhere to a variety of norms such as sustainable development and human rights. Transnational advocacy networks encompass a range of groups involved in mediating and challenging IO actions,

interests and identities. How IOs respond to such normative overtures depends on their identities. IO responses however, influence and mediate the normative claims of advocacy networks, thus reconstituting the norms espoused by transnational advocacy networks. Yet how can this phenomenon be understood in practice? Alistair Iain Johnston argues that socialization can be understood through two micro-processes: persuasion and social influence. Persuasion involves "changing minds, opinions, and attitudes about causality and affect (identity) in the absence of overtly material or mental coercion."[48] Persuasion, he notes, can succeed when the actor is exposed to counter-attitudinal information repeatedly over time.[49] This is where transnational advocacy networks are able to persuade IOs to the relevance of particular norms through constant and ongoing campaigns. Transnational advocacy networks also engage in the second micro-process of socialization: social influence. This second process involves the distribution of social rewards and punishments. Punishments include "shaming, shunning, excluding, and demeaning, or dissonance derived from actions inconsistent with role and identity" which the transnational advocacy networks aspire IOs to acquire.[50] While rewards "might include psychological well-being, status, a sense of belonging, and a sense of well-being derived from conformity with role expectations."[51] Transnational advocacy networks engage in micro-processes of socialization in order to further norms throughout the international system. By promoting new shared meanings and norms across a range of areas within world politics, transnational advocacy networks can reconstitute the identity of IOs. Yet IOs do not just conform to these social structures but help mediate and shape them through their responses to transnational advocacy networks.

By promoting new shared meanings and norms across a range of areas within world politics, transnational advocacy networks can reconstitute the identity of IOs.

This dynamic process occurs through the constant engagement between IOs and advocacy networks throughout international relations. There has already been an attempt to empirically demonstrate how IO identities are reconstituted by transnational advocacy networks through a case study of the World Bank, although the micro-processes are not distinguished according to Johnston's delineation.[52] Rather the research focused on the process of internalization of the norms espoused by transnational advocacy networks and the paths used by the network's in attempting to influence the World Bank. As such, further research into the validity of examining IO identities and how they are reconstituted in the manner described here is warranted. However, by delineating the processes of socialization into two elements, persuasion and social influence, Johnston has attempted to marry the constructivist literature on socialization with the literature on how NGOs and non-state actors influence world politics.

Yet Johnston is not the first to view the process of socialization in steps. Risse, Ropp and Sikkink also attempt to examine the socialization process. Risse, Ropp and

Sikkink argue that some states that violated human rights were socialized to become human rights advocates (including Chile, Guatemala and Indonesia).[53] This process took a number of stages. First, there was outright denial by states that they were violating human rights and that the issue was important. After repeated pressure from transnational advocacy networks, the violating states recognized that human rights were important but maintained no wrong doing. In response to continued pressure, violating states began to recognize their complicity in violating human rights although no change in activities took place. In the final stage, these states began to accord with norms of human rights and "habitualized" an identity of human rights defenders. This is an example whereby socialization has been used to explain change in state actors that go beyond purely material explanations.[54]

By applying Johnston or Risse, Ropp and Sikkink's stages of socialization to instances of interaction between transnational advocacy networks and IOs in a range of issue areas within world politics, greater understanding of IO identities and the social structures within which they exist, can be reached. By doing so, greater pressure on IOs can be incorporated into analysis of IOs and their decision making processes. In addition, such theoretical applications can better incorporate wider IR theoretical discussions with empirical studies of IO-non-state actor interaction. By breaking down the processes of socialization in these ways, insight into how transnational advocacy networks influence IOs can be framed in a theoretical framework, which can then lead to a strong theoretically-based research agenda.

CONCLUSION

This article attempted to establish an alternative analytical framework through which to understand how transnational advocacy networks influence IOs. Constructivism enables scholars to go beyond state-centric theorizing to locate IOs frame of reference to include the significant role of non-state actors. Transnational advocacy networks aim to influence IOs because IOs are agents in the international system, and can teach states their interests. Recognizing the powerful role transnational advocacy networks play in shaping and reconstituting the social structure in which IOs exist, takes us one step closer to understanding the role of non-state actors in shaping the international system. Examining how international norms are shaped by non-state actors demonstrates that social structures are influenced, mediated and shaped by a variety of sources within world politics, including NGOs, groups within civil society, and transnational advocacy networks. Non-state actors as part of transnational advocacy networks are involved in micro-processes of socialization such as persuasion and social influence on IOs in order to diffuse (and thereby reinforce and reproduce) international norms within the international system.

Notes

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[4] Abbott and Snidal, 1998, "Why States Act," p. 13.

[5] Finnemore, 1996, *National Interests.*

[6] Bob Reinalda and Bertjan Verbeek, (eds.), *Autonomous Policy Making by International Organizations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 5.

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