

Review - “Lost” Causes

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NATALIYA SMYHORA, JUL 26 2015

“Lost” Causes: Agenda Vetting in Global Issue Networks and the Shaping of Human Security

By Charli Carpenter

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014

The questions of how an issue becomes an international norm, and what actors influence the process of norm internalization, have been central to the study of public policy and human security in recent decades. A distinguishable contribution to this field of research is Charli Carpenter’s *“Lost” Causes: Agenda Vetting in Global Issue Networks and the Shaping of Human Security*. Besides describing the key components that increase the chances of successful issue adoption by the global policy elite, the book analyzes why certain issues are neglected and “fall through the cracks in global issue networks” (viii). While researching a number of case studies, the author argues that the global advocacy networks and issue entrepreneurs are not free agencies holding equal power in global governance, as they are often described by social constructivists, but instead, their power is relative and varies significantly among networks as well as within networks themselves. Carpenter argues that an issue can become an international norm not as a result of its merit, or how it is portrayed by the media and perceived in the external environment, but rather it depends on the “relationships between issues, between actors... and between subnetworks themselves” (ix). The book goes deep into the analysis of the power dynamic among various non-state actors and the complex intranetwork relations within elite advocacy networks. The key driving questions throughout is: why are so many issues, despite being salient, neglected by elite advocacy networks? In order to reveal the key assumptions which underlie issue neglect, Carpenter analyzes three different campaigns: Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict (CIVIC), the “killer robots” initiative and the infant male circumcision campaign.

One of the central innovations of *“Lost” Causes* is that while the author acknowledges the importance of issue entrepreneurs in global governance, she argues that support from global “gatekeepers”, such as the UN, the WHO, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International play an instrumental role in deciding whether a new issue will become a global norm. Thus, unlike the authors of *Disease Diplomacy* (Davies *et al* 2015), who describe issue entrepreneurs and transnational advocacy networks as equally powerful voluntary agencies of expert communities, Carpenter views them as structures holding relative power that rely on cooperation with elite gatekeepers in order to succeed in bringing their issue on the global agenda. When analyzing the relative power among advocacy elite networks, *“Lost” Causes* employs three types of power, as outlined by Barnett and Duval, which include institutional, structural and productive power. As it can be observed, a significant focus of the book is an in-depth analysis of power relations not only among states, international organizations and issue entrepreneurs, but among powerful actors within global advocacy groups who decide whether an issue will eventually become a global norm or remain unnoticed by global society.

“Lost” Causes argues that elite advocacy networks are not driven purely by altruism, morale or international norms, but also by specific interests and develops the theory of “advocacy elite” preferences. Carpenter describes a number of issue attributes that increase the chances of an issue adoption, including: obviously vulnerable victim and obviously guilty perpetrator; the problem is clearly constructed and has a credible solution; contains emotional appeal (43). A new issue is also more likely to be adopted by the advocacy gatekeepers if it is different enough from already existing issues, but at the same time it should not be too contrasting to them. Nevertheless, the author continues to emphasize that issue entrepreneurs can succeed in “selling” their issue to the global gatekeepers if they construct it

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in a way that speaks to the preferences and interests of these network hubs (37). Carpenter argues that deep understanding of intranetwork relations can help find out the network preferences.

Besides analyzing the relations within networks, *“Lost” Causes* analyzes the relations among different issues and argues that they can compete with one another. The author states that if an issue does not speak to the network’s existing issues, it can be rejected by the advocacy elite even though it may be salient and pressing. Infant male circumcision is presented as an example of such “issue denial”. The advocates of this issue constructed infant male circumcision as a human rights violation, which turned out to be problematic since it was difficult for Amnesty International to adopt the issue without any medical proof of the harmfulness of the procedure. Also, the component of a perpetrator was not clearly constructed by the anti-circumcision issue entrepreneurs, since in case of the male circumcision campaign, parents appeared to be the perpetrators and violators of human rights. Another obstacle for “intactivists” (advocates against infant male circumcision) was the WHO and Joint UN AIDS/HIV Program to promote male circumcision as one of the forms of reducing the risk of the spread of AIDS, which directly conflicted with the anti-circumcision campaign. Besides the conflict of issues, there was competition between the anti-infant male circumcision campaign and the Female Genital Mutilation campaign, which was widely considered to be a much graver issue. Thus, Carpenter believes that the lack of support from the leading human rights organizations and ineffective construction of an issue has led to “agenda denial” of infant male circumcision campaign.

Interestingly enough, while *“Lost” Causes* analyzes how issues often compete with each other, the book does not analyze the presence of special interests that may also influence the decision-making process of global gatekeepers. Although the book analyzes the relations among individuals, the interests held by these individuals that shape their decisions were not revealed. Considering the fact that Carpenter acknowledges that issue entrepreneurs and advocacy networks are not driven purely by altruism and morale, it would be interesting to learn more about the role of special interests in the process of a successful issue adoption by the powerful advocacy elites or issue denial. While describing the key components of a successful issue adoption, Carpenter also briefly acknowledges that sometimes trigger events can bring an issue on the global agenda and become adopted by the advocacy networks without possessing the necessary components. However, the author did not present examples of this phenomenon. More could be said as to how and why certain trigger events cause the issue adoption, while others remain unnoticed by the advocacy elites.

“Lost” Causes is an invaluable addition to scholarly research in the fields of public policy and human security, as it analyzes cross-level relations among civil society organizations, issue entrepreneurs and international organizations that ultimately influence the global agenda. Carpenter explores networks of issues on a micro level by investigating the activity of individuals within these networks and organizations, which have not been explored as meticulously and deeply before. Therefore, *“Lost” Causes* encourages the reader to continue the exploration of complex relations among the key actors and issues in the global governance.

References

Davies, Sara, Adam Kamradt-Scott and Simon Rushton (2015) *Disease Diplomacy: International Norms and Global Health Security*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press

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