Ya Basta! A Case for Social Movements in Critical Norm Research

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Norms in International Relations scholarship are a medium through which people can interpret the social construction of international politics. Many constructivist scholars in International Relations study norms because it is the core lens through which they explore how international politics is intersubjectively constructed (Towns, 2012). However, most constructivist norm literature explains international politics through a sociological lens, which views the world as socially constructed through human action. Conventional constructivism asserts norms have a causal role in constituting behavior that heavily relies on the actor's agency to affect change. Conventional constructivist norm literature aims to explain how norms are accepted without questioning how their meaning was produced (Epstein, 2008). This view limits the scope of analysis for the field by overemphasizing the role of the agent within a trans-historical structure of interaction. Critical norm research approaches the subject by interpreting meaning through discourse. Therefore, the agent and structure are co-constitutive, and do not proclaim that norms are clearly defined objects.

The critical approach to the field of norm research emphasizes their discursive character, which starts by acknowledging the lack of permanence in the structure of reality and, furthermore, the content of the norm itself (Krook & True, 2010). Norms, viewed critically, are continuously reshaped by actors whose identities are also continuously reshaping. A critical approach does not epistemologically constrain understanding because the norm's definition is continuously revisited. Additionally, looking at norms through a critical lens recognizes the role power has in assigning privilege to a discourse. Therefore, critical norm research enables scholars to analyze discourses that take place beyond the West, because it recognizes the hegemonic dominance of Eurocentric discourses (Towns, 2012).

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Chiapas, Mexico is a social movement that is an interesting case for critical norm research. The Zapatistas are an autonomous collective that ideologically opposes the neoliberal world order. Their movement has been studied extensively since their First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle in 1994. Social theorists have looked at the Zapatistas to understand the relationship between states, institutions, and social movements (Reitan, 2007). There is also some literature that approaches their discursive opposition to the hegemonic discourses of neoliberal social and economic policies (Morton, 2002). However, critical norm literature has yet to explore how the Zapatistas might add to the study of International Relations. The Zapatistas' method of governance, namely their participatory practices, are compelling enough reasons. The Zapatistas' practices tether the leader to the led, which creates an ideology that is open-ended and improvisational (Morton, 2002). The Zapatista's lack of a preconceived plan for their revolutionary ideology challenges conventional constructivism's implied ontology for norms as a prescribed set of behaviors, or "instructional units" (Fiorini, 1996, p. 364). The Zapatistas are therefore challenging for the conventional constructivist approach to norms, which a critical approach could address more appropriately. Furthermore, a study of the Zapatistas, as a social movement, could add light to how social movements contribute to political change in International Relations, which have not been studied in critical norm literature thus far.

This work is an endeavor to demonstrate that a critical norm approach is best suited for a study of the Zapatista's discourse and practices. The Zapatista example will demonstrate where the current norm literature is too rigid to fully

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explain their methods. This essay will begin by discussing the current approach to international political norms and some of their critiques. I will go on to explain post-structuralism's contribution to norm research. I will next introduce the Zapatistas as a social movement. Then, I will follow by analyzing the Zapatistas governing practices and where they sit outside the conventional constructivist norm literature. Finally, I will explore where the Zapatista Movement is best suited to an autoethnographic research design for a critical norm approach.

Norms

Norms have been discussed from rationalist perspectives in International Relations, but they are not as important analytically as they are for constructivism. Neorealists look at norms as a reflection of state preferences in relation to power (Deitelhoff, 2009). This view asserts norms as a coercive measure, backed by material power, which states use to bend actors to their will. Neoliberal thinkers look at norms as a self-interested actor's strategic choice of costs and benefits and therefore view the adoption of norms where actors see a benefit from cooperation (Deitelhoff, 2009). Conventional constructivism departs from the previous two explanations for norms. It views norms as socially constructed models for behavior that govern international politics, which are intersubjectively agreed upon by states (Fioroni, 1996). The conventional constructivist approach to norms is a departure from the two former explanations because it sees where state behavior is "not explainable by short-term power maximization" (Firoini, 1996). Therefore, norms are a crucial analytical tool for constructivists to approach political change in international politics.

Perhaps because theoretical approaches view norms differently, there is currently no authoritative definition for what constitutes a norm in International Relations. Conventional constructivist literature points to Peter J. Katzenstein's definition, coined in *The Culture of National Security*, which dictates that a norm is a "collective expectation about proper behavior for a given identity" (Katzenstein, 1996, p. 65). Many other definitions exist, but Krook & True's (2010, p. 108) description of norms as "sense-making practices" that "shape what people *do* and who they *are*" is most significant because it introduces power to social construction. Krook & True rely upon Epstein (2008) to define a discursive approach to norms, which is more attentive to patterns of meaning embedded in separate contexts. It is for this reason that a critical approach is more compelling for the study of norms.

Norms are difficult to define partly because they constitute discursive practices, which are consistently reformulating in accordance with interaction (Krook & True, 2010). Conventional constructivist literature describes norm content as fixed and focuses on their dynamics of change through human action (Wiener, 2004). Norms, generally, are understood to homogenize the prescriptions of certain practices, ideas, and discourses across international borders (Towns, 2012). As homogenizing entities, norms ignore the hierarchies of power that legitimize some actors. A critical reading of norm scholarship acknowledges that most norms that are studied originate in the West (Engelkamp & Glaab, 2005), which ignores the contribution of other meanings. Therefore, the learning outcomes from literature that focuses on Western norms will privilege discourses and practices that are commonly accepted in mainstream international politics. It does not address the underlying motivations for the broad acceptance of norms, because it does not acknowledge the hidden power dynamics within the international system (Towns, 2012). Conventional constructivism approaches norm research by viewing human interaction as a product of human action, but this does not address the consequences of power embedded within social interaction, which weakens the capacity of the approach to understand normative change.

A sociological approach to norms, by focusing on human behavior, is not attuned to the ambiguity laden within normative change. Norms, like writing, are an expression of identity, which is inevitably value-laden. Conventional constructivist norm literature, using sociology, alienates itself from the subject matter by hiding its normative assumptions. Zero-degree writing, coined by Roland Barthes, is the use of language in academic writing that distances the writer from their work (Barthes, 1967, p. 5). There is, however, still a voice even if it is one of absence (Doty, 2004, p. 389). In the same way the researcher, by asserting a norm's definition, is involved in the process of legitimizing it, which critical norm research has managed to point out (Krook & True, 2010). Asserting a position of objectivity confines the conventional constructivist approach to discuss how norms are accepted and contested among actors, but they do not adequately address the process of change in the content of a norm (Deitelhoff, 2009). Discursive approaches are more capable of addressing normative change because they are attentive to the ways that language creates narratives about the world and defines how things work (Heller et al., 2012).

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Conventional constructivism analyzes normative change between levels of analysis using social logic. Most norm literature explains how norms are adopted through the sociological processes of diffusion, persuasion, coercion, learning, or mimicry (Towns, 2012, p. 184). These logics generally explain how states adopt behavior, norms, from one another. The sociological approach to normative change explains that norms are either simply accepted or rejected (Acharya, 2004). Conventional constructivists' emphasis on socialization, which views the adoption of norms as a unidirectional process of moral improvement, ultimately ignores the recipient's role as an agent of normative change (Epstein, 2012). Adopting a norm, where it is accepted internationally, is multidimensional and requires that domestic actors accept them, which may entail that the norm's content will change (Krook & True, 2010). Post-structuralism, by focusing on the discursive position of norms, can better understand how norms change than human psychology by interpreting meaning rather than social logic.

Post-structuralism is more equipped to address the weaknesses of norm research than the advancements made in conventional constructivism. Amitav Acharya, using a sociological approach updated Finnemore & Sikkink's (1998) simplistic view on the dynamic exchange of norms between the local and international. He discusses how norms change between levels of analysis, which he calls localization. Localization is the process that explains how congruence is developed between transnational norms and local beliefs (Acharya, 2004). A norm must be framed in a certain way to assimilate its interpretation with one that already exists, which will empower the beliefs and practices of the domestic actor (Acharya, 2004). Acharya's (2004) work adds depth to understandings about norms by acknowledging that they will inevitably change to fit within the ecosystem of commonly accepted practices that are indigenous to a specific area. Acharya adds complexity to the discussion on norms, but is still confined to describing change through logics of "grafting" and "framing", which are predicated on purposeful behavior. A discursive approach that departs from a focus human action would offer a better understanding of how norms build congruence between local and international actors by focusing on in meaning.

Discourse Theory

Discourse theory is a post-structural approach that analyzes the latent power in meaning, which is conveyed through language (Epstein, 2008, p. 12). The theory uses discourses to analyze the linguistic construction of international politics through intangible meaning, as opposed to rationalist approaches' fixation on observable reality. Post-structuralism applies discourses as an epistemological framework through which meaning is conveyed, and by extension, words are a set of empty vessels wherein there is meaning (Foucault, 1981). This approach makes it possible to analyze the interplay of norms as constructed by both an agent and the overarching structure of knowledge and power. Therefore, a norm's meaning is constructed by the agent whose identity is at the same time derived from the international structure (Engelkamp et al., 2014). Analysis in discourse theory searches for the power in meaning, which is constituted by its prevalence in discourse. Meaning is always being created, which makes it difficult to assert that there is an essentialist self where norms can originate or be internalized (Epstein, 2010). The application of a critical discourse theory is therefore more equipped to understand international politics by departing from the functionalist assumptions of rationalist theory, which ignore the possibility of alternative meanings.

A major distinction between conventional and post-structural norm research is between subjectivities and subject-positions (Epstein, 2008). As mentioned earlier, conventional constructivist literature treats norms as things that are affected by human action, which therefore views communication as such without analyzing how communication itself affects the norm (Krook & True, 2010). Analysis of norms therefore focuses on the subjectivity of the actor and how this affects the norm's diffusion. Post-structuralism's emphasis on discourses as a framework, where norms are interpreted through a collection of subject-positions, defines identity through locations within a discourse (Epstein, 2008). The process of norm change therefore is not reliant on observable manifestations of a norm or a definition for the norm as an entity. Therefore, focusing on how norms change through subject-positions transcends the levels of analysis from local to transnational, because the discursive approach does not distinguish identities as social actors.

A more critical approach to norms assumes they are subject to change based on how well they are accepted by self-identifying groups. The successful internalization of norms by local actors, mentioned earlier by Acharya, dictates that local actors will appropriate norms based on how well they fit into existing practices or pre-existing values (Acharya, 2004). A post-structural approach to norms will view the norm's content to have some level of ambiguity

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that will appeal to different groups (Krook & True, 2010). The ambiguities that are necessary for norm diffusion open the possibility for their content to change over time. Therefore, the integrity of norms is perpetually challenged from their internal dynamic, a critical view, as well as the broader framework of already existing norms, the conventional view.

A post-structuralist approach to discourse acknowledges that people insert power into language, which determines our social reality (Foucault, 1981). When meaning is interpreted through language it redefines how power is conceived. Language is both constitutive and reflective of reality, which departs from the sociological notion that certain objective meanings are present in discursive interaction (Epstein, 2008). Identities are therefore continuously shaped and reshaped by the speaking actor absent the presence of a socializing agent (Epstein, 2008). It is compelling to view norms from this perspective because the meanings that shape identity are contingent on their relation to power.

Introducing a framework that includes power into the discussion of norms will better enable International Relations to understand how normative political discourses function. The essentialist assumptions of social reality that seek Truth in rationalist theory limit International Relations to study a Western conception of Truth and morality. Foucault (1982) mentions that rationalizing the social world without opening the possibility to study specific rationalities is dangerous for its lack of attention to forms of resistance against this perceived homogenous rationale. The West remains the locus of International Relations scholarship, which means studying norms through a poststructuralist lens will see politics for the way the subject sees it, and will therefore generate a better understanding of the world. Studying how critical norm research can approach the Zapatista Movement of National Liberation will require that its historically contingent view of reality is discussed.

Zapatista Movement of National Liberation (EZLN)

The Zapatista Movement of National Liberation came to international attention during an armed revolt against the Mexican state at their signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. The Mexican government had revoked existing protections to national industries in the preceding years leading up to NAFTA's enactment (Stahler-Sholk, 2014). One of the most significant changes for the Zapatistas occurred in 1992 when the Mexican government reformed Article 27 of the constitution to end land redistribution and allow communal lands to be broken up into private segments (Morton, 2002). In the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, the movement found legitimacy for their revolt by invoking Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution, which gave them the ability to modify their form of government (EZLN, 1993). They laid down their arms 12 days later after the government responded with a militarized counter-insurgency campaign at the hands of the Mexican Armed Forces (Stahler-Sholk, 2001). They subsequently focused on creating a national movement in solidarity against neoliberal politics.

The movement stands out for its improvisational character as a revolutionary movement, which focused on the political mobilization of civil society, rather than overthrow of the Mexican state (Stahler-Sholk, 2001). The Zapatistas fight to dismantle the neoliberal world order, which they recognize as a hegemonic discourse (Morton, 2002). The Zapatistas are therefore, in some ways, characteristic of a modern social movement, because all grassroots movements inherently embody a counter-hegemonic identity. They emerge out of a crisis of modernity and exemplify a new understanding of political and social life (Escobar, 1992). The Zapatistas embody a long tradition of solidarity in Chiapas that dates to the 1930s. Local resistance movements advocated for the acknowledgment of Indian identity and a regional government with more autonomy under the Mexican state (Stahler-Sholk, 2001).

It is easier to understand the Zapatistas if the hegemonic paradigm they aim to overthrow is better understood. Neoliberal economic thinking generally opts for the discontinuation of state intervention in markets and the dissolution of trade barriers, which allows markets to produce welfare globally (Oatley, 2012). The United States, as a dominant actor in the international political economy, are privileged to steer the climate of international practices. The enactment of regional trade agreements is an area where the United States has redirected the trend of market-oriented thinking from global market integration to preferential treatment for trade partners (Gathii, 2011). The United States can coercively implement trade liberalization policies with its partners to create an economic environment of their liking.

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NAFTA is a model for how the United States engages in international trade, which the Zapatistas saw as a threat when Mexico adopted the treaty in 1994. NAFTA is a regional trade arrangement, between Canada, Mexico, and the United States, which provides preferential market access to the partner countries involved (Oatley, 2012). Article 102 stipulates one of its main objectives is to "eliminate barriers to trade in, and facilitate the cross-border movement of, goods and services between the territories of the Parties" (NAFTA, 1994, p. 3). This agreement advocates for the liberalization of trade, which enables the flight of capital from the areas of production that subsequently relegates labor to the periphery of the international market. NAFTA was the most overt encroachment of the United States' neoliberal project into Mexico, which the Zapatista's viewed as a threat to their existence (Morton, 2002). The United States' concept of globalization, outline by NAFTA above, neglects any mention of its social implications, which is essentially a renegotiation of alternative identities to mirror the West (Stahker-Sholk, 2001). The Zapatistas therefore aim to act as a movement for the negotiation of non-Western identities to remain in their current form.

NAFTA led the Mexican government to draw back land rights for small farmers further than its previous measures. Those living in the state of Chiapas were the most significantly affected by this shift in policy. Chiapas provides a wealth of natural resources for Mexico's export market, with approximately 35% of the country's coffee export derived from this region (Marcos, 2002). Much of the profit from the natural resources in this area is realized in the centers of capital in Mexico and the United States (Rus, 1995). Chiapas withheld approximately 27% of unresolved land reform claims, which were privatized when Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution was reformed in preparation for the trade agreement (Stahler-Sholk, 2001). Subcomandante Marcos, the spokesman for the Zapatista movement, described NAFTA as the most recent and potent set of reforms against their livelihood, and a threat to their identity (Reitan, 2007, p. 190). He elaborated that the indigenous identity is an embarrassing omission from neoliberal modernity, because it highlights an alternative reality, which incentivizes the neoliberal hegemon to eliminate nonconforming identities from public perception (Marcos, 2001). Marcos insinuates that the neoliberal project is a destructive homogenizing force that is threatened by contestation because it loses its legitimacy as a moralizing policy regime.

Arturo Escobar (1992) made an important point that contemporary social movements reflect the crisis of modernity and are a domain to understand how new realities emerge. The Zapatistas encapsulate Escobar's sentiments. Their resistance to the modernizing intentions of the hegemonic neoliberal order is a suitable case for International Relations to understand how social movements contribute to normative discourses in global politics. As mentioned above, the Mexican government capitulated to the United States' neoliberal hegemonic order, which effectively makes the state a proxy through which the Zapatistas challenge the neoliberal hegemony. The Zapatistas therefore constitute a set of counter-hegemonic processes that challenge the neoliberal world order, an anti-neoliberalism movement (Graeber, 2002). They do not simply accept or reject conventional norms in the same way, it could be argued, that state actors or institutions can.

The Zapatista philosophy of *Neo-Zapatismo*, a reinvention of Emiliano Zapata's revolutionary ideology, is the vehicle for emerging subject-positions to take form from among the collective to combat neoliberalism. *Zapatismo* emerged in mid-20th century Mexico among Emiliano Zapata's followers as an ideology for indigenous rights in areas of Mexico where he had never acted (Collier & Quaratiello, 2005) Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas shifted from *Zapatismo* as he said of their followers, "They wanted us to dialogue. This completely broke our scheme and ended up defining *zapatismo,* the *neo-zapatismo*" (Weinberg, 2000, p. 188). The *Neo-Zapatismo* ideology therefore turned the Zapatistas into an intermediary to voice the concerns of those who were marginalized by neoliberalism.

Neo-Zapatismo

The Zapatistas are an appropriate case study to apply a discursive approach to norms because their methods are not easily definable with a sociological approach. It is difficult to apply conventional constructivism to the Zapatistas because they do not adhere to a fixed ontology, which is embodied in their concept of *Neo-Zapatismo.* This is the only definable ideology of the Zapatistas, which is namely their observance of a set of practices: local autonomy, radical pluralism, horizontal power, and servant-leadership (Reitan, 2007). The sociological approach of conventional constructivism would treat the Zapatista movement as an object that is clearly defined (Khagram et al., 2002), but the highly participatory methods of Zapatista leadership continuously reconstitutes the movement as a concept. The

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Zapatistas have no preconceived plan, but are instead unified as a single bloc against the hegemony of neoliberalism. Their methods are devoutly nonconformist and they are willing to adopt any strategy that opposes this force (Reitan, 2007). The improvisational nature of *Neo-Zapatismo* presents several issues for conventional constructivist literature about norms, because it is problematic to operationalize a social logic for bodies of knowledge that are continually changing. Therefore, studying the Zapatistas requires an approach that embraces ambivalence and contingency.

The Zapatista movement's survival is the product of their ideology's global expansion. In fact, the Zapatistas have managed to survive despite highly repressive tactics from the Mexican state because they have connected with individuals and movements outside the region. The Zapatistas still resonate in the public consciousness because they have been receptive to voices from outside Mexico, which has consequently affected how they conceptualize themselves as a movement (Reitan, 2007). The Zapatista Solidarity Network emerged from a call to international unity against neoliberalism in the First Declaration of La Realidad in January 1996. The Zapatistas subsequently acquired a widely positive reception from movements around the world in solidarity with their cause. They acted to pressure the Mexican government to affect change that tempered some of their neoliberal reforms, which Reitan (2007, p. 198) described as a boomerang effect. Conventional constructivist norm literature defines a boomerang effect as the connection between a domestic group and its transnational allies to pressure state actors from the outside (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). This view is attentive to the dynamic interplay between actors that builds acceptance to a norm, but it does not account for the potential that a norm will be open to change (Krook & True, 2010). Richard Stahler-Sholk (2001), commenting on the Zapatista Solidarity Network, refers to this assertion as insufficient because the Zapatistas do not center their focus on these transnational organizations to engage with the Mexican state. It therefore cannot be said that the Zapatista's identity is encapsulated in this boomerang effect because it functions as an aggregation of individual interests, which follows that no singular explanation or method can explain these individuals.

The Zapatistas broach the distinction between agency and structure that distinguishes conventional constructivists' conception of ideology for self-identifying groups. The movement supports many paths to resist neoliberalism, which makes them highly adaptive to the systemic changes that take place at the structural level of international politics (Reitan, 2007). The Zapatistas are counter-hegemonic in their disposition, but remain free from any one distinctive ideology through the spirit of *Neo-Zapatismo*. This philosophy enables the group to behave as a dialectic vehicle between local and global forces (Stahler-Sholk, 2001). As an intermediary between low and high politics, their highly participatory nature reinforces their openness to alternative ideologies, because of their highly participatory nature. This is an integral component of Foucault's concept of resistance where there must be a degree of self-criticism that challenges the individual's own ideas (Shulzke, 2015). Their strategy, being open-ended and largely improvised, emphasizes a strong link between the leaders and the led (Morton, 2002). They engage in what is known as prefigurative politics, where their participatory approach to conceptualizing and implementing autonomy is an embodiment of the Zapatistas' end goal (Stahler-Sholk, 2001).

The process of norm change described in Finnemore & Sikkink (1998) is too rigid to explain the impact of social movements like the Zapatistas. They propose that norms follow a life cycle from emergence to internalization that is linear, and static in their conception of norm content (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Based on the description of their movement above, the Zapatistas follow a pattern that is non-linear and unstructured, which requires their discourse is interpreted to identify any continuity in their tactics. The agent, the Zapatistas, is continuously changing and its content is consistently reframed in the context of discourse, the structure, which is also continuously changing (Morton, 2002). In this way, the Zapatistas embody Antonio Gramsci's concept of common sense. A counter-hegemonic discourse, to Gramsci, is fragmentary, open to multiple interpretations, and supportive of different social visions (Rupert, 2003). Conventional constructivist norm literature would view the Zapatistas as a paradox, as they stand on "ungrounded ground", where norms only exist to be put into question (Slater, 1997). Their adherence to a deconstructionist ethic, where they "expose the inherent instability of any foundation or norm" (Popke, 2004, p. 306), enables them to transform alongside the interests of people in real time, for which positivist norm scholarship is too slow to respond. The issue at the root of conventional constructivist discussions about norms is their connection to Western social science's affinity toward universalisms. Their attempt to prescribe certainty removes any ethical responsibility because defining universal norms about social conduct are impossible (Popke, 2004). The Zapatista

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movement takes a particularistic perspective that acknowledges the coexistence of multiple realities.

One important reflection from critical norm literature that bolsters the case for the approach to study the Zapatistas, regards the implicit moral value of norms in conventional constructivism. It is implied that norms have positive moral value, and much of the literature is reflective of this implied assumption (Heller et al., 2012, p. 284). A core tenet of neoliberal economic policy, free trade, is embedded with this assumption that, as a Western norm, it is an implied moral good. The George W. Bush Administration in the United States elevated free trade to the status of a moral principle that was embedded in the national heritage of the US (Rupert, 2003). The Zapatista's opposition to this policy therefore frames their challenge to the neoliberal economic order as unethical and morally invalid. Consequently, conventional norm literature unjustly privileges the Western perspective, and does not give equal weight to alternatives outside the hegemonic discourse.

Norms in conventional constructivist literature mostly follows the interactions between states and institutions that originate in the West, and furthermore, ignore alternatives or challenges from beyond (Acharya, 2004). States outside the West, and especially non-state actors, that contest these conceptions of human interaction are removed from the norm's constitutive process. They are a homogenous infantilized group that must be socialized into these Western progressive norms (Epstein, 2012). The World Bank wrote at length about the Zapatista's oppositional movement to their development reforms. They viewed residents in Chiapas as peasants, who aim to reproduce themselves as such, in their solidarity against the neoliberal reforms (Stahler-Sholk, 2001). The neoliberal reforms, embodied by the Mexican government's trade liberalization policies, are a modernizing agenda that aims to remake the world in the image of the reality from which the policy regime is derived (Rupert, 2003). Therefore, the conventional constructivist literature is equipped to explain the normative change in relation to the adoption of NAFTA, but their approach is inadequate when viewing the types of normative change advocated by the Zapatistas.

Conventional constructivist norm researchers, by taking a sociological approach, adopt a Western conception of reality embedded within the social sciences. Therefore, the researcher constructs the object "social movement" by reading a set of practices through a lens. Western social theory conceives reality under the illusion that there exists a pre-social identity (Epstein, 2010, p. 332), which homogenizes a heterogeneously composed set of meanings into an inaccurate, yet parsimonious identity. Social movements are processes rather than unitary, coherent, and collective actors (Harvey, 1998). Critical norm literature is attentive to the constitution of meaning and is sensitive to the impossibility of universals in the social world. The Zapatistas produce meaning and are synonymously produced by the neoliberal hegemonic discourse they challenge, which the functional rationalist approach of conventional constructivism cannot explain, and is therefore ill-suited to study them.

According to Tickner (2003) International Relations reifies certain understandings of the world that come to dominate others, which become normalized over time. The Zapatistas, understood as a series of processes rather than an object, defy the mainstream norm literature's assertion that it can be conceptualized as a definable entity. Sociological norm literature, a form of empirical social science, cannot study social movements as they are practiced because they are incapable of accounting for the historicity of the movement (Escobar, 1992). The Zapatistas, therefore, require a post-modern methodological approach because conventional norm literature must ignore the Zapatista's reality to reproduce itself, which is referred to as autopoiesis (Tickner, 2003, p. 299) In sum, the Zapatistas, "construct their 'subjectivities' through the articulation of 'subject positions…'" where their movement consistently, "…shifts, challenges, and accepts established forms of power" (Escobar, 1992, p. 414-415). The Zapatistas, as a case study in critical norm literature may help shape International Relations' understanding of political change by introducing a different reality concerning how politics function from beyond the West.

A Way Forward

Conventional constructivist norm literature, as demonstrated above, is an inadequate source material for conceptualizing political change. Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction highlights the limitations of Western morality, and by extension, conventional constructivists' conception of norms. He explains that the West's endeavor to prescribe conditions for universality is unfounded because there is no homogenous conception of reality for which all people ascribe (Popke, 2004). All concepts of morality that dictate how people should behave derives from a

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tempo-centric and spatial origin that is subject to change (Slater, 1997). Consequently, a post-structural approach to norms, as discussed earlier, will be attentive to this ambivalence of political change. Additionally, a critical approach to norms requires a research design that can understand political change for what it is.

A more inclusive research design within a critical approach to norms will engender a better understanding of the Zapatista Movement and rectify the anachronistic approach of conventional constructivism. There is a current within academia, known as autoethnography, that takes aim at the lack of self-reflection in contemporary scholarship. This autoethnographic approach removes the illusion of objectivity from academic writing and acknowledges the participation of the researcher in its construction (Dauphinee, 2010). Studying the Zapatistas would require working alongside the research participants, which breaks the subject-object relationship that is laden within a traditional research design (Mato, 2000). Scholarship that originates in the West, especially involving social interaction, should integrate itself with the object of study. This should be evident in all aspects of research from data collection to writing.

An autoethnographic approach would be more applicable to studying a group like the Zapatistas who pursue an improvisational strategy that is always changing. Autoethnography dissolves the self-imposed barrier between the researcher and object of study by acknowledging that the academic is endogenous to the research (Doty, 2010). An inclusive research design is essential to understanding the individual's conception of the norm in question and how it adds to a broader understanding of meaning in politics. Autoethnography necessitates that the researcher use inclusive language to implant them within the study. Subject-positions are imperative when studying beyond the West because academia normalizes the Western identity to inoculate this self when it presents what is an impossible universal objectivity (Popke, 2004). Norm literature would benefit from this methodological approach because it is aware of the violence that scholarship perpetrates against the "realities it claims to write" (Dauphinee, 2010, p. 806).

Acknowledging the existence of multiple realities through a critical, non-essentialist, approach to norms is imperative to study cultures beyond the West. Social theory, as a functionalist approach, in conventional constructivism is not attentive to the local cultural realities that actors may perceive to transcend relations with another culture (Weber, 2014). The Zapatista Movement of National Liberation, as an exemplary case of social movements, are non-essentialist by nature. Therefore, social movements, as non-essentialist processes, are an important set of actors in International Relations that should be studied through a critical approach to norms, which can better understand their contribution to the social fabric of international politics than conventional constructivism.

Conclusion

Norms are fundamental to understanding the social interaction that takes place among actors in International Relations. The field has developed alongside the rise in popularity of constructivism, which has used the study of norms as a key analytical tool to explain interaction in global politics. It does not focus solely on states, institutions, and the transfer of power between them. There is a spectrum in the approach that constructivists take in their application of norms. Many scholars adhere to the thin constructivist tradition that emerged at the end of the Cold War, which applies a positivist epistemology toward the emergence and internalization of norms. More recently, there has been scholarship that has taken a more critical look at norms, which has updated the field to take a more reflexive position on the study.

Conventional constructivist literature has weaknesses that have been discussed more broadly by critical theorists in discussions about its approach to International Relations, but less has been said regarding norms. The study of discourse and practice in international politics, by adopting a causal logic, is less capable of understanding how identities are shaped and reformulated when it is not attentive to the individual. People engage with one another in a framework of interaction that is historically contingent and highly subjective. A discursive approach to normative change will do justice to multiple conceptions of reality, which is a more encouraging approach to difference than what International Relations has been able to offer thus far.

Critical norm literature, while less prevalent than conventional constructivist scholarship, is suited to the shortcomings of sociological understandings of norms. A discursive approach will generate better understanding

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about interactions between groups, which will enable researchers to discover the complexity of individual interests that undergird the social fabric of international politics. It will be especially conducive to the dynamic interplay between non-state actors, states, and institutions by treating them more equally as co-constitutive of the structures that define the international political system. A critical approach to norms will also situate different realities conceived outside the West alongside one another, which most norm literature has failed to acknowledge.

The discursive turn in norm studies has created a new avenue for understanding how political change takes place internationally. A critical approach to norms opens a new avenue for the field to study the contributions of social movements, like the Zapatistas, to International Relations. Charlotte Epstein (2008) points out that the impact of activists has been an object of study, but their "power to make a difference has rarely been analysed." A poststructuralist approach to norms is attentive to social movements as heterogenous and in process, which could introduce social movements to the study of International Relations with a better understanding of how they contribute to political change than is currently conceived.

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