

Karisa Cloward. *When Norms Collide: Local Responses to Activism against Female Genital Mutilation and Early Marriage.* New York, Oxford University Press, 2016. 285 pp. (\$99.00 hardcover, \$34.95 paperback).

The proliferation of internationally oriented non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the post-Cold War era has been remarked upon, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, mistrust, and ulterior motives, by scholars, practitioners, and governments playing host to these groups. In *When Norms Collide: Local Responses to Activism Against Female Genital Mutilation and Early Marriage*, Karisa Cloward seeks to understand under what conditions interventions in which the ‘international norm’ is at odds with the ‘local norm’ have resulted in attitudinal and behavioral change. In short, this book seeks to understand why NGOs go to certain communities, what happens when they get there, and why.

Through a unique theoretical framework and case studies of the prevalence of and attitudes towards female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage across three Maasai and Samburu communities in Kenya (each with varying degrees of exposure to interventions by NGOs), Cloward asserts that the ‘norm salience’ is key to understanding the conditions under which behavior can be changed. Norm salience refers to the “quality” of the international interventional norm, as well as the extent to which the local norm is promoted and respected. In this ambitious and methodologically-sound text, Cloward applies a rational choice framework to norm compliance, bridging the gap between the constructivists that dominate the field of normative studies and their rational choice counterparts. Removing norms from the realm of the intangible and imbuing them with “social utility” allows for a more nuanced approach to understanding what tradition is and why it persists.

Behavioral change, normative adoption, and even the promotion of norms is analyzed through the ‘utility’ granted to the actor; in recognizing the tangible value of social acceptance surrounding certain practices considered “harmful” by international norms, Cloward puts another nail in the coffin of those who claim that traditional practices (and their practitioners) are illogical. By focusing her attention not only on the “supply” side of norms, but also the incentives and preferences of those at the receiving end of these new normative options, Cloward’s text provides a much needed glimpse into the social dynamics of targeted communities.

In her theoretical framework, Cloward constructs a quadrant for understanding the conditions under which international activism is likely: in instances where the norm has high local salience, activism is unlikely if there is low international salience; “moderate activism” is expected if there is high international salience and low local salience (or vice versa); “high activism” is expected in instances where the international norm has high salience and the local norm has low salience. Cloward’s theory is then extended to explaining individual norm change in instances of activism. She identifies three potential normative changes: attitude change, primary behavior change, and secondary rhetorical change, and secondary behavioral and rhetorical change. Cloward draws on historical accounts, statistical analysis, and surveys to illustrate her theory in action across the three communities. Though the discussion of the impact of Western NGOs interventions into non-Western countries is frequently dramatized

and politicized, Cloward avoids losing her narrative to this tortuous debate by focusing her study on the dynamics of norm adoption rather than an evaluation of the legitimacy of actors within the “norm-entrepreneur space.”

With so many moving parts, it would be easy for the text to meander. Cloward does well in corralling the various units of analysis at all levels of analysis (individual, communal, national, and international) and even manages to describe and analyze interactions between these levels. Despite her general success in maintaining focus, Cloward’s clarity is at times hampered by her ambition. At times, an interesting idea is broached but left underdeveloped. For instance, the theoretical explanation and practical implications of the differences between activism on issues of FGM and early marriage could well have been a full chapter, but is instead siloed to a few sentences dispersed throughout the early chapters. If Cloward unpacks these truncated discussions into academic articles and books throughout her career, she will likely provide an even greater contribution to studies of transnational activism.

When Norms Collide is a thoroughly researched, well-constructed, and novel contribution to the literature on transnational activism. It is also a strong addition to the nascent study using rational choice theory to explain seemingly illogical choices by groups in terms of the social utility granted to members through their compliance. While Eli Berman, one of the forebearers of this field, focused on the social utility of sacrifice and public displays of membership within extremist groups in *Radical, Religious, and Violent*, Cloward’s book suggests that rational choice frameworks are useful in understanding traditional practices and social cohesion in a number of contexts. Though Cloward does contribute novelty in linking constructivist theory with rational choice, her text is also an extension of the work of Kathryn Sikkink and a valuable contribution to the literature on transnational activism in general. Further, her discussion of the prevalence and variation of FGM and early related marriage practices and the history of activism on these issues in Kenya (both from domestic groups and international NGOs) is a valuable contribution to women’s and East African studies. By framing the activism around FGM and early marriage within a broader discussion of normative change and talking about attitudinal and behavior change in rational, normative tones, Cloward moves this issue away from the tone of moralistic outrage and victimization narratives that often overwhelm these topics. Outside of academia, policy makers and practitioners will find much in this text to improve their campaign management and design. At a time when international norms are publicly clashing with the norms of communities around the world in public, violent ways, Cloward’s text is a deft explanation of the dynamics of normative change.

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