

Women's Inclusion in the Malian Peace Negotiations: Norms and Practices

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Abstract: *This article studies the implementation of the global norm of women's inclusion in the Malian peace negotiations. It constructs a theoretical framework for analyzing practices of resistance, which object to the validity of the norm, and practices of refinement, which engage with the application of the norm. Based on interviews with women who attended the Malian peace negotiations it finds that women face widespread practices of resistance when they demand to be included. However, when pressure is applied concessions often follow, indicating growing acceptance of the norm. Actors also engaged in practices of refinement, observed through a number of disagreements over how, when and which women should be included. The article contributes important insights on the relationship between norms and practices by demonstrating not only that norms influence practice, but how practices of resistance and refinement shape the meanings and life cycles of norms.*

KEYWORDS: Norms, practice, women's inclusion, peace negotiations, Mali

Introduction

Peace negotiations is a field where there has been slow progress regarding women's inclusion. A recent study found that women signed only 13 of 130 peace agreements between 1990 and 2014 (Krause et al. 2018). However, over the past two decades we have seen an increased recognition and formalization of a global norm about women's right to inclusion in peace processes (True and Wiener 2019: 561). The call for women's inclusion in peace processes has been iterated through a range of international documents, most significantly in a number of UN Security Council resolutions known as the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. The currently widespread adoption of resolutions, national action plans and organizational policies raises expectations regarding the implementation of the norm in official high-level peace negotiations. It is therefore puzzling that, in the 2014–2015 “Algiers negotiations” between the Malian government and rebel groups, women's inclusion never became a priority, despite activism by women's organizations and support from the UN and other international partners.

This article seeks to address this puzzle through a study of the gap between women's right to inclusion as a widely accepted norm in the international system, and its implementation in practice at the Malian peace negotiations. International Relations (IR) theory on norms has traditionally defined these as “standards of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 891), while more recently, constructivists have emphasized the dual quality of norms as both structuring and constructed (Wiener 2004;

2014; Krook and True 2012). This has implications for how we understand the relationship between norms and practice. In Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) life cycle model, norms are understood as having an effect on practice. However, a static conception of norms and their meaning prevents a discussion of how practice may in turn contribute to the norm life cycle. I therefore argue that scholars should devote more attention to studying how norms are constituted through practice. This is in line with constructivist arguments about norms being dynamic processes characterized by their ongoing constitution (Krook and True 2012: 105; Wiener 2014) and implies that practice is not only an effect of the existing norm but potentially contributes to the norm's development and change. This article thus seeks to shed light on the following research questions: How are global norms about women's inclusion in peace processes implemented in practice in the context of peace negotiations, and how does practice contribute to the norm life cycle?

To study norms in practice, I construct a theoretical framework building on the important work of scholars who have highlighted the role of discursive interventions and contestations such as protest, rejection and accusation (Wiener 2004; 2014; Krook and True 2012), and more recently behavioral contestations such as inaction, ineffective implementation and acts of sabotage (Stimmer and Wisken 2019: 516; True and Wiener 2019), in how norms get constructed and evolve over time. I propose to study how contestations manifest in practice by analyzing practices of resistance, which object to the validity of the normative claim of women's right to inclusion, and practices of refinement, which engage with the circumstances under which women's inclusion should be applied. I then discuss the role of these practices in shaping the life cycles of norms.

In 2012, Mali experienced a coup d'état and a secessionist civil war in the north, followed by a deep political and humanitarian crisis. This spurred an unprecedented level of international engagement in Mali, including through the establishment of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2013. In the affected areas, the conflict directly impacted women as many became victims of violence, were displaced, or were left behind when their husbands and sons left the home to fight. In order to put an end to the fighting, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), under the leadership of Burkina Faso's president Blaise Compaoré, organized ceasefire negotiations in Ouagadougou in 2013. While women's groups were not invited to take part in the ceasefire negotiations, four women from civil society travelled to Ouagadougou and demanded a seat at the table. A ceasefire agreement was signed in June, followed by presidential elections in November 2013.

Negotiations for a comprehensive peace agreement then took place in Algiers from 2014 to 2015. By then, the process had become highly internationalized. The international mediation team was represented by Algeria as the lead mediator, with more than ten co-mediators to the process, including the UN, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), France, and several neighboring countries. The three parties consisted of delegations representing the government of Mali, armed groups closely aligned with the government, and opposition armed groups. The negotiations, which took place over five rounds, resulted in the *Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali*, signed in June 2015. Among approximately one hundred delegates from the three parties who participated in the negotiations, there were only five women. Civil society participation was also limited; however, delegations with representatives of refugees and the diaspora, traditional leaders, women, youth and religious leaders were invited to one week of civil society hearings during the second round of the negotiations (O'Reilly et al. 2015; Boutellis and Zahar 2017).

The analysis focuses on the inclusion of Malian women who represent either a conflict party or civil society and builds on extensive fieldwork in Mali where I conducted over sixty interviews with Malian civil society representatives, individuals working for the Malian government, and representatives from the international community. This includes three interviews with women who attended the negotiations in Ouagadougou and six interviews with women who attended the Algiers negotiations. The article studies the interviewees' perceptions of how women's inclusion was implemented in practice. This provides unique insights into the circumstances under which these women perceive practice to confirm or deviate from their understanding of the global norm.

The next section describes my approach to studying norms in practice, followed by a presentation of the interview material and method. I then outline the global norm of women's right to inclusion in peace processes, before moving on to the analysis of women's inclusion at the Malian negotiations. The final section presents a discussion of how practice contributes to the life cycles of norms.

Norm Life Cycles and Norms in Practice

Studies of peace processes and peace negotiations as sites for the implementation of gender equality norms have often focused on textual outcomes in peace agreements (see Bell and O'Rourke 2010; Anderson 2016; Ellerby 2016). This article seeks to add to this literature by focusing on women's inclusion in peace negotiations in practice. Constructivist research in the 1990s was pathbreaking in demonstrating how norms play a role in international politics, and developed influential models to describe the dynamics of how international norms impact on state behavior, including the norm life cycle model (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998), "boomerang" effects (Keck and Sikkink 1998) and the norm-diffusion spiral (Risse et al. 1999). The norm life cycle model has been particularly influential in the thinking around how norms emerge and spread from one context to another. In the first stage of the norm life cycle, norms emerge and are propagated by individuals, organizations or national governments. In the second stage, norm leaders attempt to socialize other leaders to become norm followers and a critical mass of supporters emerges before the norm reaches a tipping point and its diffusion cascades throughout the international system of states (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 895). The third stage of the norm life cycle indicates a growing acceptance of the norm, along with expectations that a new norm will be followed when 'norms acquire a taken-for-granted quality' (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 895).

While the norm life cycle and other models are useful for explaining how norms come into existence and how transnational advocacy networks form, most of these accounts present a static view of the internal constitution of norms after norms emerge at the international level and take on the abovementioned "taken-for-granted quality" (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse et al. 1999). In assuming that norms have fixed meanings, these accounts have been able to demonstrate that norms have an effect on behavior and practice. At the same time, however, such accounts do not open up for an exploration of the possibility that norms themselves may change through practice, and how practices may influence the norm life cycle.

More recent contributions have questioned the idea of norms having fixed meanings and highlighted the dual quality of norms as "structuring and constructed" (Wiener 2004: 2014; 2018; Krook and True 2012). This means that in addition to guiding behavior by providing "standards of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity" (Finnemore

and Sikkink 1998: 891), norms are understood as dynamic processes characterized by their ongoing constitution (Krook and True 2012: 105). I draw on constructivist norms research that emphasizes the malleability of norms whose meaning and content are constantly challenged, contested, confirmed and/or renegotiated (Acharya 2004; Wiener 2004; Krook and True 2012; Stimmer and Wisken 2019). I also build on the work of others who have put forward an understanding of the WPS agenda and the norm of women's right to inclusion as "work in progress", rather than a finished product (Krook and True 2012; Davies and True 2018).

IR norms research initially treated the relationship between norms and practice in terms of norm following and compliance (Risse et al. 1999; Cortell and Davis 2000; Kelley 2004). Later work studied processes of localization and translation of global norms into local practices and institutions (Acharya 2004; Zwingel 2012). Scholars are however increasingly arguing that practices shape the meanings and trajectories of norms (Bode and Huelss 2018; Bode and Karlsrud 2019; Stimmer and Wisken 2019; Wiener 2014; 2018). Building on this literature, this article proposes to study how norm contestation manifests in practice through a focus on practices of resistance and refinement.

Antje Wiener identified contestation as key to norm constitution and change, where the concept of norm contestation is understood as the discursive practice of objecting to or expressing disapproval of norms (through protest, rejection, negation, or accusation) (Wiener 2004: 201; 2009: 177).¹ Further, Stimmer and Wisken (2019: 516) recently identify behavioral practices of contestation such as inaction, ineffective implementation and acts of sabotage as influencing norm change. Resistance to norms may thus be explicit, through protest, rejection or accusation, or implicit, through inaction, ineffective implementation or sabotage (Wiener 2014; Panke and Petersohn 2016; Stimmer and Wisken 2019; Fung 2020).

Resistance to norms has however also been conceptualized as a process that may promote social buy-in when potential stakeholders have the opportunity to modify the norm, for example through localization, contestation or rhetorical adaptation (Acharya 2004; Gould and Onuf 2009; Wiener 2014; 2018; Fung 2020). Theories of localization and translation also emphasise processes of adaptation and negotiation rather than outright objection (Acharya 2004; Zwingel 2012). In their recent work, Deitelhoff and Zimmermann (2020: 56) distinguish between validity discourses, which question the righteousness of the claims a norm makes, and application discourses, which question the application of a norm and whether the norm is appropriate for a given situation. This suggests that contestations and disagreements concerning a norm's application may serve to refine the norm in question (through adaptation, negotiation). I therefore distinguish between practices of resistance and practices of refinement in the theoretical framework. Practices of resistance object to the validity of the normative claims, i.e. women's right to inclusion. Practices of refinement, on the other hand, engage with the circumstances under which women's inclusion should be applied.

Following the constructivist conceptualization of norms as structuring and constructed, I understand practice as both shaped by the existing norm as well as contributing to the norm's development and change (Wiener 2004; 2014). For my approach to the study of norms in practice, I follow Wiener (2004; 2014) in drawing on Giddens' (1979)

¹ While this definition of contestation (and its application in Wiener's earlier work) emphasises the role of discursive interventions, the term also encompasses nondiscursive forms of contestation (see Wiener 2014; 2018).

conceptualization of social structure as the product of actions by agents who have the capacity to reflect on their actions and to act according to their intentions. I consider norm contestation to be an interactive process (Wiener 2018), and any actor who is a relevant stakeholder can potentially engage in practices of resistance and refinement. That being said, in a context where a norm is promoted (for example women's inclusion) as a challenge to the status quo (women's exclusion), practices of resistance are more likely to occur in response to efforts to promote the norm in question. Further, rather than separate categories I consider the two types of practice as opposite ends of a continuum, and actors may choose strategically to engage in one practice or another in response to the actions of other actors.

Research has further debated how norm robustness develops throughout the norm life cycle, and whether contestation serves to strengthen (Wiener 2014) or weaken (Panke and Petersohn 2012) norms. The initial focus on achieving taken-for-grantedness implies a gradual strengthening of a norm in the international system as its meaning becomes stabilized (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). However, scholars increasingly argue that the meanings of norms may change throughout the norm life cycle, or that new norms may emerge (Acharya 2004; Wiener 2004; Krook and True 2012). Finally, others discuss the potential weakening of norms, or even norm death (Keating 2014; Panke and Petersohn 2012; 2016). As Deitelhoff and Zimmermann (2019; 2020) point out, existing literature has not provided arguments for what kind of contestation, or how much contestation, affects a norm's potential strengthening or weakening throughout the norm life cycle. They define norm robustness as high when a norm enjoys widespread acceptance and its claims guide the actions of its addressees (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2019: 3; 2020: 53), and argue that contestation of the validity of a norm is likely to lead to its weakening, while contestation on the grounds of a norm's application can strengthen norms. Similarly, we should expect practices of resistance that question the validity of a norm to contribute to its weakening. Practices of refinement, on the other hand, serve to develop a norm's precision and to (temporarily) stabilize its meaning, and we should therefore expect this to contribute to strengthening the norm over time.

Method

The analysis presented here draws on 65 interviews with 20 men and 53 women² conducted in 2017-2018 with representatives from the international community (diplomats, UN staff, NGO staff), individuals working for the Malian government (ministries and other government bodies, peace process mechanisms), and Malian civil society representatives (women's organizations, other civil society organizations, researchers, and activists).³ Among this material, three interviews with women who attended the negotiations in Ouagadougou and six interviews with women who attended the Algiers negotiations form the primary data for this article. These nine interviews include three interviews with civil society representatives who attended the ceasefire negotiations in Ouagadougou, three interviews with civil society representatives who attended the civil society hearings in Algiers, and three interviews with women who represented the Malian

² Because some interviews had more than one participant, the total number of interviewees who participated in the 65 interviews is 73 (20 men and 53 women).

³ Interviews were conducted in French and English. Quotes have been translated from French to English by the author where relevant.

government at the Algiers negotiations, one of whom worked in a support function.⁴ All conversations were non-attributable, and interviewees are referred to by their primary affiliation (civil society, government etc.). Given the low number of women who participated in the negotiations, I have chosen not to disclose further details or attribute their statements beyond these categories.

The interviews focused on respondents' experiences and perceptions of women's inclusion in the peace process. Because norms are collective and intersubjective as well as contentious and subject to discussion and justification, this means that the way people talk about norms provides evidence for their existence (Björkdahl 2002: 13; Wiener 2014). Analyzing how interviewees talk about women's inclusion at the Malian peace negotiations therefore allows me to study diverging understandings of the meaning of the global norm of women's right to inclusion in peace processes. Interviewees' experiences and perceptions of how women's inclusion was implemented as conveyed through interviews thus constitute important data on the interplay between norms and practice. The women interviewed for this study further represent actors on the margins of international relations. They are often excluded from peace negotiations, and despite a growing body of feminist scholarship, their experiences are seldom included as relevant data in mainstream IR (Martin de Almagro 2018: 321). The perceptions of these women merit in-depth examination because they are among the few women – both in Mali and globally – who have had the opportunity to be present at peace negotiations and whose perceptions can be studied.

When analyzing the material, I sought to identify interviewees' perceptions of women's inclusion in the negotiations, with a particular focus on their perceptions of the interplay between norms and practice. Because I view norms as work in progress, my inquiry started from the premise that a norm's meanings and its practical implications are a matter of contention (Hofferberth and Weber 2015: 90; Wiener 2014). The analysis focused on identifying perceptions of conflict or disagreements over norms, or between norms and practice. The following questions guided the analysis: (According to the interviewees) what did women's inclusion look like? What did they think it should have looked like? Was women's inclusion resisted explicitly or implicitly? Did different actors involved in the process disagree on the circumstances for the norm's application? What were the contentious issues? Based on this analysis of references to norms and their implementation in practice, I sought to identify practices of resistance and refinement at the Malian peace negotiations.

The Global Norm of Women's Right to Inclusion in Peace Processes

Over the past twenty years WPS has emerged as a powerful and salient international normative framework (Aggestam 2018; Davies and True 2018), and no one any longer argues "that peace processes should not be *inclusive*" (True and Wiener 2019: 561). Women's right to inclusion in peace processes must therefore be understood as a widely accepted norm in the international system. At the same time, the literature on the WPS agenda points to a persistent gap between a rhetorical commitment and a lack of

⁴ I was not able to interview any women who represented the two non-state parties at the negotiations in Algiers, which may have influenced the findings. However, in interviews with women affiliated with the armed groups (but who had not attended the negotiations themselves), I was told that women's inclusion was an issue they had not been campaigning for until after the peace agreement was signed.

implementation (Raven-Roberts 2005; Anderlini 2007; Porter 2007; UN Women 2015: 14), and there is great variation in how the norm is implemented in different contexts. Peace negotiations in particular are contexts where practice often lags behind (Aggestam and Towns 2018; Krause et al. 2018).

The call for inclusion of women in peace processes can be found in international “soft law” such as the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing Declaration) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security adopted in 2000, as well as the nine follow-up resolutions which together constitute the WPS agenda. The Beijing Declaration states as one of its strategic objectives to increase the participation of women at decision-making levels, with actions needed to “promote equal participation of women and equal opportunities for women to participate in all forums and peace activities at all levels, particularly at the decision-making level,” and to “integrate a gender perspective in the resolution of armed or other conflicts” (UN 1995: 58). Resolution 1325 follows along similar lines, urging “Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict” (UN Security Council 2000: 2). In Resolution 1820, the UN is asked to “invite women to participate in discussions pertinent to the prevention and resolution of conflict” (UN Security Council 2008: 4), and in Resolution 1889, member states and international and regional organizations are asked to take “measures to improve women’s participation during all stages of peace processes” (UN Security Council 2009: 3). The women’s right to inclusion norm forms part of normative developments in the context of peace building where a broader inclusivity norm has emerged, defined as “the carving out of space within which a broad cross-section of the conflict-affected community, from community-based organisations to ordinary citizens to potential spoilers, can exercise meaningful voice and agency in the design and implementation of peace processes” (Donais and McCandless 2017: 293).

The literature on women’s inclusion in peace negotiations distinguishes between descriptive representation (the presence of women’s bodies) and substantive representation (influence), and between direct (at the table) and indirect forms of participation (Ellerby 2016; Paffenholz 2018). Direct forms of participation include involvement as mediators and negotiators, as members of mediation or negotiation teams, and as civil society representatives. Women also participate indirectly through consultative mechanisms and representative decision-making, such as parallel forums, subcommittees, and different forms of communication with members of mediation or negotiation teams, as well as through mass action. These different forms of indirect participation can be effective, but such engagements often take place in an ad-hoc manner (McGhie and Wamai 2011: 9; Paffenholz 2018: 176–181).

Studies have found that although it is not the only factor, women’s descriptive participation (presence) matters for their substantive participation (influence) (Ellerby 2016), and that there is a robust relationship between women signatories to peace agreements and the durability of peace (Krause et al. 2018), which would support calls for direct participation. Other studies have shown that it is not women’s presence as such, but rather the degree of women’s actual influence on peace negotiations that increases the likelihood of the signing and implementation of peace agreements (Paffenholz et al. 2016). Existing research has further shown that it is usually women’s groups, often with the support of international partners, who are behind the promotion of gender equality norms in peace negotiations (Anderson 2016; Chang et al. 2015; Ellerby 2016; Paffenholz et al.

2016; Saiget 2016). Women themselves thus stand out as important actors in much of the literature, and it is often women's advocacy that have gotten them access to or ensured their influence on the negotiations. Finally, women activists consider peace negotiations as opportunity structures not only for women's inclusion but also for promoting women's rights within the state in the long term (Anderson 2016).

Women's Inclusion in Practice at the Malian Negotiations

This section analyzes the way women's inclusion was implemented in practice at the Malian peace negotiations. Starting with the Ouagadougou ceasefire negotiations and then moving on to the Algiers negotiations, I first analyze practices of resistance which object to women's right to inclusion (validity). This is followed by the analysis of practices of refinement concerning the circumstances for women's inclusion in peace processes (application).

Countering Resistance to Women's Inclusion

Practices of resistance to women's inclusion at the negotiations in Ouagadougou and Algiers came in different forms, both explicit (through negation) and implicit (including inaction and sabotage). When the time came for ceasefire negotiations to take place in Ouagadougou in 2013, women's organizations were not invited. Without even knowing the venue of the negotiations, four women from civil society travelled to Ouagadougou to demand a seat at the table and an end to the fighting. When I asked them why they wanted to be there, they emphasized that they wanted peace, but also said that: "we wanted the participation of women in the management of the crisis. That women can have a say in everything that is going to be implemented in this country."⁵ Their answers made it clear that they felt that they not only had a right to be there, but that they saw themselves as relevant actors in the peace process and it was important that they were there to represent women's interests. This view was supported by international partners such as UN Women, who provided funding for the four women from civil society to travel to Ouagadougou.

The fact that women's organizations had been left out of the program and the lack of information available to them constitutes practices of resistance and barriers that the women needed to overcome to access the ceasefire negotiations. This neglect and exclusion amounts to inaction at best, and acts of sabotage at worst. While the women I spoke to emphasized that rather than being welcomed, they had to force their way in, they also described how the chief mediator conceded when they confronted him:

In the end President Blaise Compaoré was uncomfortable, and he said fine, I will listen to everyone. Before it was our turn, we wrote a statement, which we read on behalf of the women of Mali. And it was this statement that became the preamble to the final declaration.⁶

Although these women had to force their way in, they succeeded at both getting a seat at the table and ensuring that many of their concerns were included in the agreement in the end. According to one of the interviewees, their efforts also set an important precedent: "After this meeting there was a second meeting, but then we were officially invited."⁷ Given the

⁵ Interview with civil society representative present in Ouagadougou.

⁶ Interview with civil society representative present in Ouagadougou.

⁷ Interview with civil society representative present in Ouagadougou.

initial practices of resistance, this story is quite remarkable in terms of what the women were able to achieve and in setting a precedent for the next round of negotiations, indicating the effect practice can have on norm following. Unfortunately, when the Algiers negotiations began in 2014, women had to work to fight their way in all over again.

While the Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement had landed a ceasefire between the government and rebel groups, this focused on short-term goals and failed to address issues regarding the future status of the northern territories and rebel combatants. Amidst increasing tensions, Algeria began discussions with armed groups in northern Mali in January 2014, and in July 2014 the Algiers negotiations commenced. Here, women's inclusion was met with practices of resistance from several actors. According to reports by international observers, women's inclusion was initially a top priority for the UN and the EU, but this drew little support among many in the international mediation team in Algiers, who were "reluctant to include community representatives and women for cultural reasons and because they thought it would delay the negotiations" (O'Reilly et al. 2015: 9). These implicit practices of resistance in terms of inaction were accompanied by explicit negation of the norm. A representative of the international community who was present during the Algiers negotiations remembered the lead mediator making a comment during the opening of the mediation regarding the complexity of mediation and how women rather belong in the kitchen.⁸ As the leader of the negotiations, the mediator would be in a position where he could not only ignore but explicitly resist the global norm without sanctions of any meaningful magnitude. This also set the tone very early on, making it clear that women's inclusion would not be a priority.

While such explicit negation of the norm was rare, inaction was also observed among other members of the international mediation team. The same representative of the international community observed that "the [UN] SRSG was dissatisfied that Algeria had taken the lead. He decided that was his battle, and that he would not spend time on other 'soft' issues."⁹ While several members of the international community initially fought to include civil society, including women's organizations, in the negotiations, they felt that this battle was lost and the initial focus on inclusion waned as the process went on and the power dynamics of the negotiations affected the priorities of the involved actors. The conflict parties were also reluctant towards the inclusion of women's representatives at the negotiations (O'Reilly et al. 2015: 9).

After Ouagadougou, women's organizations had hoped that they would be involved and consulted in the Algiers negotiations. One of the women who attended the civil society hearings in Algiers explained:

We wanted to be in Algiers, around the negotiating table. Nobody listened to us. We held a press conference to alert international opinion to the fact that we were about to have yet another discussion about peace in Mali without women. After the press conference, the Prime Minister received us. He told us that he is going to make the necessary arrangements so that women can be there. Before that, we had done everything to be able to meet the High Representative of the President. He did not want to receive us; it was when we were received by the Prime Minister that he now decided to receive us.¹⁰

⁸ Interview with international community representative present in Algiers.

⁹ Interview with international community representative present in Algiers.

¹⁰ Interview with civil society representative present in Ouagadougou.

When they were not included in the initial round of negotiations in Algiers, women's organizations perceived this as unfair and were frustrated with the resistance they faced. However, when these women pressured the parties, this resulted in some concessions and women's organizations were finally able to meet with Malian officials. According to the interviewees, women's groups were not alone in "making noise". They were joined by technical and financial partners, including the EU, MINUSMA, and UN Women. In the interviews, they also spoke about the Minister for Reconciliation at the time, who had been very supportive and had provided training for a group of women in negotiation and conflict resolution with support from the Swiss government.¹¹ This joint campaign by Malian women's activists and international partners resulted in a consultative mechanism of civil society hearings being set up during the second round of the negotiations in Algiers. Refugees and representatives of civil society then travelled to Algiers to provide testimony and share their experiences with the international mediation team and the conflict parties. Again, we see that calls for women's inclusion were initially met with practices of resistance, including inaction and sabotage, but when pressure mounted concessions were made.

According to the interviewees, MINUSMA, UN Women, and several representatives of the international community who were involved in the mediation process shared a commitment to supporting women's inclusion in the negotiations. The international mediation team on the other hand initially explicitly resisted (through negation) and certainly did not take it on themselves to promote women's inclusion (through inaction and sabotage), but they decided to facilitate the civil society hearings as pressure to include women and other civil society actors increased. The analysis shows that several actors initially questioned the righteousness of women's inclusion through practices of resistance, to which activists responded by "making noise", which was followed by concessions. The data thus confirms that a gap remains between the rhetorical commitment and wide acceptance of the norm in the international system, and its implementation in practice at the Malian peace negotiations. At the same time, the fact that concessions of some form were usually made indicates an increasing acceptance of the norm and serves to confirm its validity also in this context.

Refinement through Disagreements over How, When and Which Women Should be Included

So far, the analysis has demonstrated that there was a significant amount of resistance to women's inclusion at the Malian negotiations. However, it also showed instances where actors responded to pressure from activists by engaging in practices of refinement. When activists pushed for direct participation (at the table) in Algiers, the international mediation team responded with an alternative mechanism for indirect participation (civil society hearings). In terms of conflicts between norms and practice, the ways different actors engaged in practices of refinement (such as adaptation and negotiation) reflected disagreements over how, when, and which women should be included.

When it comes to *how* women should be included, the issue of direct or indirect participation was central. Women's activists often highlighted the idea that women's organizations should have a place at the negotiation table. Interviewees who had attended the civil society hearings expressed disappointment that they had not been given a place in

¹¹ Interviews with civil society representatives, Bamako.

the actual negotiations: "We were told, your concerns will be considered in the negotiations. But it's not what we wanted, we wanted to be there, at the time of negotiation."¹² Other interviewees also explained that the civil society hearings had not been part of the actual negotiations.¹³ So, while the international mediation team had opted for indirect participation through a consultative mechanism as a way to include women's groups and other civil society actors in the negotiations, the women's activists interviewed for this article had a clear understanding that they should participate directly at the negotiation table, and perceived this as a disappointment and a deviation from the norm. In this case, practices of refinement in terms of negotiation between the mediation team and women's activists did not result in women's direct participation as requested by activists. Instead, women's organizations were able to send their representatives who participated in the civil society hearings in Algiers in September 2015.

In addition to promoting women's participation in Algiers, MINUSMA engaged in practices of refinement that sought to convey women's organizations' input to the conflict parties. A MINUSMA officer in Bamako described MINUSMA's role in the negotiations in the following way: "They [women's organizations] gave their points of view. So, we gave it to mediation, we were a bit like the intermediaries".¹⁴ Such indirect participation "from a distance" was also highlighted by women's organizations who described how they had contributed with their reflections on the agreement from Bamako with the support of MINUSMA. This would take the form of meetings being organized in response to an event in the negotiations, such as when the roadmap for the negotiations was first made public. On these occasions, women's organizations came together and usually managed to gather around a common message that they could share with MINUSMA. In reference to this, the leader of a women's organization said that although she remained disappointed about the manner women's organizations had been included in Algiers, she was "not unhappy, because at least we know what happened."¹⁵ Despite women's activists' strong rhetoric about getting a place at the table, they displayed a willingness to adapt to the situation. Indirect participation from a distance thus emerges as an option for *how* women could be included that might be acceptable to many women's organizations, especially if they perceive their concerns to be reflected in the peace agreement. This reflects a perspective where the degree of women's influence on peace negotiations is seen as more important than their actual presence. However, influence is difficult to measure, and the majority of women's activists I interviewed told me that they were disappointed, and many felt that their concerns didn't make it into the final agreement.¹⁶

While women's organizations were clear about the importance of participating in the actual negotiations, the conflict parties thought that women's organizations and other civil society representatives should rather be included in the reconciliation phase that would follow the negotiations (O'Reilly et al. 2015: 9). Further, a representative of the Malian government suggested that "perhaps during the negotiations they should have put pressure on women to be included in all of these reform projects in the agreement."¹⁷ This points to disagreements over *when* women should be included in peace processes. While the norm

¹² Interview with civil society representative present at the hearings.

¹³ Interview with Government representative present in Algiers.

¹⁴ Interview with MINUSMA staff, Bamako.

¹⁵ Interview with civil society representative present in Ouagadougou.

¹⁶ Interviews with civil society representatives, Bamako.

¹⁷ Interview with Government representative present in Algiers.

of women's right to inclusion in peace processes is vague enough to leave this open for debate, UNSCR 1325 on the other hand emphasizes women's contributions in the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict, which supports activists' claim to inclusion during negotiations. When the international mediation team and the parties agreed to the civil society hearings, they engaged in practices of refinement that accepted women's organizations claim to inclusion also during negotiations. However, as several interviewees underlined that the civil society hearings had not been part of the "actual" negotiations, it seems they did so only reluctantly and partly.

The interviews also revealed disagreements over who should be included. When I talked to women from civil society, they emphasized that they had wanted to participate in the negotiations on behalf of "the women of Mali".¹⁸ A woman who attended the civil society hearings was frustrated to find, in her view, that: "The women the Prime Minister had brought could not speak on behalf of the communities."¹⁹ Women's organizations, then, were critical towards many of the women who participated in the process as members of the negotiation teams. On the other hand, many interviewees talked about how civil society was not independent, and each party had its own civil society that had been brought to the hearings. One interviewee representing the Malian government argued that civil society had been used politically in the process: "They were instrumentalized to come and say we lost this, we lost that, we have nothing left, we need help, etc."²⁰ In practice, all the delegations had women on their teams, but the numbers were very low (less than 5%). Of those I interviewed, some felt that they had an influence and one could even share examples of how she had affected the peace agreement text. As members of the delegations, the selection of these was up to the parties and I have not been able to identify practices of refinement which resulted in an increasing number of women on the delegations. Nor did the international mediation team engage much in practices of refinement on this point: Several interviewees noted that members of the international community failed to send women representatives to Algiers.

Practices of refinement in terms of negotiations over women's direct versus indirect participation between the parties and the mediation team on the one hand, and women's activists and their supporters on the other, did however allow women from civil society indirect access through the civil society hearings. Here, the three parties each invited civil society organizations to nominate members to represent civil society at the hearings. For women's organizations who sought inclusion based on claiming to represent the shared interests of Malian women, it is a challenge if observers have the impression that they are divided along party lines. Again, participant selection were highly contentious and women's activists often had to adapt to the terms set by other actors. On the other hand, disagreements over who should be included are related to discussions about representation that are at the core of all peace processes. But they also show that in practice, the norm of women's right to inclusion is complicated by disagreements over *which* women should be included.

The previous section showed that the Malian peace negotiations were characterized by practices of resistance to women's inclusion, especially from the international mediation team and the conflict parties in Algiers. In this section, the analysis demonstrates how actors also engaged extensively in practices of refinement, for example through

¹⁸ Interviews with civil society representatives, Bamako.

¹⁹ Interview with civil society representative present at the hearings.

²⁰ Interview with Government representative present in Algiers.

negotiations over how and when women should be included, or when MINUSMA and women's activists adapted to the situation by seeking participation from a distance. The analysis shows that disagreements over women's inclusion often concerned the application of the norm: Specifically, *how* women should be included (at the table, through civil society hearings, from a distance), *when* women should be included (during negotiations or in the reconciliation), and *which* women should be included (civil society representatives or members of negotiation teams).

How Does Practice Contribute to the Norm Life Cycle?

Despite the consistency by which concessions were made and the practices of refinement described above, women's right to inclusion has not achieved the taken-for-grantedness in the context of the Malian peace negotiations that is expected in the third stage of the norm life cycle (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Talking about the international mediation team and the parties, one of the women who attended the civil society hearings told me: "I think they have understood even though they close their eyes to it."²¹ Her statement reflects the increasing acceptance of the norm, yet illustrates how it cannot be taken for granted that it will be followed. Women's organizations and activists are aware of this, as one of the women who attended the ceasefire negotiations in Ouagadougou explained: "Every time that the women of Mali took part in the management of the crisis, it was a result of our insistence."²² From the interviews, it was thus very clear that women's inclusion in practice was a result of women's activism, supported by international partners. Despite widespread practices of resistance, activists kept pushing for inclusion, and practices of resistance often shifted to practices of refinement as a result of pressure and activism. What these women's activists have learned, and what we can learn from this, is that practice matters.

Drawing on constructivist norms theory, I argue that practices of resistance and refinement shape norm trajectories. For example, practices of resistance to women's direct participation in Algiers prevailed, while practices of refinement resulted in their indirect participation from a distance and through civil society hearings. Further, the level and consistency of concessions represents a striking pattern in the data analysed for this article. The data therefore does not indicate that practices of resistance per se lead to the weakening of norms (however, given the limited scope it cannot be ruled out that this might happen over time). Further, when women from civil society travelled to Ouagadougou, they behaved as if they had the right to be there. And in the end, this was accepted. We also saw that this influenced norm following in the next round of negotiations in Ouagadougou. Under these circumstances, practices of refinement contributed to increased acceptance and compliance, and thus to strengthening the norm. So why did this not continue when the Algiers negotiations commenced?

A possible explanation lies with leadership and the role of mediators in promoting norms. While the negotiations in Ouagadougou and Algiers are part of the same peace process, they had different mediators and mediation teams. As noted above, there was explicit resistance from the lead mediator in Algiers, but there were also supporters among the international community and among the conflict parties. This suggests that leadership practices as well as donor coordination may potentially impact how norms get

²¹ Interview with civil society representative present at the hearings.

²² Interview with civil society representative present in Ouagadougou.

implemented in practice. Further, practices of refinement serve to stabilize the meaning of a norm at a specific moment in time and a specific location. This reflects existing theories that some norms are widely accepted precisely *because they are vague*, “enabling their content to be filled in many ways and thereby to be appropriated for a variety of purposes” (Krook and True 2012: 104). While one understanding of the norm was accepted in Ouagadougou, the vagueness which has enabled widespread acceptance in the international system also meant that operating principles needed to be re-established when the time and location changed.

If we consider the Malian experience in a global context, it is notable that interviewees sometimes referred to other peace processes: “it is also one of the processes, with the one with FARC in Colombia, where victims were brought in during the negotiations.”²³ Civil society hearings and other consultative mechanisms can be observed in previous peace processes such as Guatemala in the 1990s, where women’s participation in the peace negotiations evolved through a civil society platform (Nakaya 2003); in Sri Lanka in the early 2000s, where a gender sub-committee was created (Nesiah 2012); and more recently the Colombian peace process, which employed a gender committee as well as civil society hearings (Bouvier 2016). In the existing literature, increased precision in the form of the development of operating principles to define and ensure compliance is often understood as an indication that the norm is changing (True and Wiener 2019: 561). These developments thus show that practices of refinement matter for the life cycles of norms when more specific forms of inclusion begin to resonate across different contexts.

This has the potential to reformulate the meaning of women’s inclusion as indirect rather than direct participation. At the Malian negotiations, creating formal mechanisms for women’s inclusion through practices of refinement actually gave women less opportunity to directly access and influence the negotiations. In Ouagadougou, women’s organizations could successfully demand a seat at the table because there was no alternative mechanism for their inclusion. In Algiers, setting up alternative mechanisms for indirect participation such as civil society hearings meant that demands for direct participation were easier to dismiss. From the point of view of activists, these developments are undesirable and seen as a weakening of the norm. This illustrates that – depending on who you ask – practices of refinement and the trajectories of norm life cycles do not guarantee normative change in the desired direction (see Hofferberth and Weber 2015: 90).

Adopted by the UN Security Council in 2019, Resolution 2493 may be interpreted as a response to this perceived weakening of the norm of women’s inclusion:

Urges Member States supporting peace processes to facilitate women’s full, equal and meaningful inclusion and participation in peace talks from the outset, both in negotiating parties’ delegations and in the mechanisms set up to implement and monitor agreements, *encourages* Member States to support efforts, including timely support to women to enhance their participation and capacity building in peace processes, in order to address the unequal representation and participation of women in the peace and security agenda (UN Security Council 2019: 2).

The resolution contributes to the formulation of more precise operating principles when it specifies that women should participate directly in negotiating parties’ delegations, but it does not say how those women should be selected and who they should represent. It is

²³ Interview with Government representative present in Algiers.

also vague on the participation of women's civil society representatives. Recalling Deitelhoff and Zimmermann's (2019: 3; 2020: 53) definition of norm robustness as high when a norm enjoys widespread acceptance and its claims guide the actions of its addressees, a reformulation of the norm of women's right to inclusion as indirect participation could lead to increased robustness and strengthening of the norm if this involves increased norm following. On the other hand, if this reformulation of the norm makes it unacceptable to some stakeholders such as women's activists, the norm would lose its widespread acceptance. In this case, practices of refinement may contribute to the weakening of norms. Keeping in mind that Security Council resolutions are the result of negotiations and compromise, Resolution 2493 affirms overarching, and perhaps necessarily vague, principles related to the norm.

Conclusion

This article has proposed a theoretical framework for analyzing the implementation of norms about women's inclusion in peace processes consisting of practices of resistance, which address the claim of women's right to inclusion, and practices of refinement, which concern the application of the norm. Based on interviews with Malian women who represent either civil society or a conflict party, this framework was then applied to the Malian peace negotiations, including the Ouagadougou ceasefire negotiations which took place in 2013, and the "Algiers negotiations" in 2014-2015.

The analysis identified widespread practices of resistance to women's inclusion, indicating a gap between the rhetorical commitment and wide acceptance of the norm in the international system and its implementation in practice at the Malian peace negotiations. On the other hand, a high level of concessions indicated that acceptance of the norm was increasing. Different actors also engaged in practices of refinement as observed through a number of disagreements over how the norm should be implemented in practice. These disagreements concerned whether the best way to include women would be directly at the table, through civil society hearings or from a distance (how), whether women should be included during negotiations or in the reconciliation phase (when), and whether women should be included as civil society representatives or as members of negotiation teams (who).

A key argument put forward in this article is that practice matters for the life cycles of norms. The leadership practices of mediators and donor coordination may influence whether norms are followed. Further, women's activism and pressure from international partners often resulted in a shift from practices of resistance to practices of refinement. For example, practices of resistance initially excluded women's organizations from the Algiers negotiations. While Malian women's activists campaigned for women's organizations to be represented directly at the peace table, practices of refinement led to their indirect participation through civil society hearings.

While it was assumed that practices of resistance would weaken the norm, the high level of concessions observed does not support this assumption. The analysis however indicates that practices of refinement may serve to weaken the norm through increased precision and development of operating principles which begin to resonate across different contexts. This can be observed through the increased implementation of practices such as civil society hearings and other consultative mechanisms across various contexts including Mali, Colombia, Guatemala and Sri Lanka, representing a potential reformulation of women's inclusion as indirect participation. Such a reformulation may increase the norm's precision,

potentially shrinking the gap between norms and practice, but it also potentially makes the norm less widely acceptable among important stakeholders.

This raises an important question regarding who has the ability and possibility to shape the life cycles of norms. Peace negotiations are sites where norms about women's inclusion in peace processes encounter norms and practices upheld by the myriad of actors involved: the parties, mediator(s), the international community, and potentially civil society and other stakeholders. Implications of the findings presented here suggest that if practice contributes to the norm life cycle and has a constitutive effect on norms, then it is important for women's organizations to access peace negotiations where these practices are located, and norms are shaped.

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