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One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

A Reply to Nicole Deitelhoff and Lisbeth Zimmermann

Abstract: In their response to our article »Office Hours«, Nicole Deitelhoff and Lisbeth Zimmermann issue three major points of critique towards our proposal of a critical approach to norm research: They criticize, firstly, our discussion of constructivist norm research, secondly, our use of the concepts of local and Western and, thirdly, the overall critical potential of our proposed approach, which they criticize as going merely beyond an unmasking gesture. We take our response to our critics, firstly, as an opportunity to clarify some of the arguments made in our article. Secondly, we confront the points of criticism outlined above and show that Deitelhoff's and Zimmermann's critique can only be maintained if one accepts their specific reading of our article. Moreover, it gets tangled up in three major contradictions and is built upon a problematic understanding of the relation between empirical facticity and normative evaluation.

Keywords: constructivism; critical norm research; critical theory; post-colonialism; post-structuralism

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1 Introduction

In our article »Office Hours: How (Critical) Norm Research Can Regain Its Voice« (ZIB 2/2012), we propose a critical norm research program that challenges traditional constructivist norm research. Inspired by post-structuralist, feminist and post-colonial approaches, it enquires relations of power and domination that underlie processes of normative change. While Cornelia Ulbert (ZIB 2/2012) reminds us in her reply not to lose contact with the fundamental conventions of the academic community, Nicole Deitelhoff and Lisbeth Zimmermann appear

»enduringly provoked« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 72) by our critical research program. In their reply »From the Heart of Darkness« of constructivist norm research (ZIB 1/2013), they entertain major doubts about the justification of our criticism as well as the critical potential of our contribution. In sum, Deitelhoff and Zimmermann criticize, firstly, our reading of constructivist norm research as not careful enough; hence, our discussion systematically distorts contributions and arguments of constructivist norm research (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 62). The second point of criticism relates to our arguably undifferentiated use of categories such as Western and local, which, according to the authors, raises »substantial normative and empirical problems« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 62). Thirdly, Deitelhoff and Zimmermann dispute the critical potential of our research program as such, as it misses any reflection of the normative criteria of critique itself, and is therefore unlikely »to develop an emancipatory thrust that goes beyond an unmasking gesture« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 62).

In the following, we reply to the accusations of our critics and thereby hope to re-enforce the irritation we caused with our contribution. Even though Deitelhoff and Zimmermann at first appear to follow our argumentation and to support »the plea for a self-reflective form of norm research that is critical of hegemony and integrates postcolonial and anthropological perspectives« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 62), this announcement soon falls by the wayside. Instead, Deitelhoff and Zimmermann offer a one-sided reading of our text and get entangled in contradictions in regard to their own points of critique and demands. Moreover, their proposal of »criticism as social practice« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 62) is built upon a problematic understanding of the relation between empirical facticity and normative evaluation.

Sections 2–4 of our reply first answer to each of Deitelhoff's and Zimmermann's points of criticism and expose their internal inconsistencies. We also take this opportunity to clarify the arguments made in our post-structuralist contribution to critical norm research, while Section 5 concludes by discussing implications of *right* and *wrong* forms of irritation for a critical norm research program.

2 Oblivious to Power and Unreflective? Readings of Constructivist Norm Research

The first criticism raised against our contribution by Deitelhoff and Zimmermann concerns our evaluation of constructivist norm research (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 62). According to Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, we accuse norm research in general of being »oblivious to power, Eurocentric, and unreflective«

(Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 63), an accusation which, according to the authors, cannot be maintained »on a careful instead of *only* a critical reading« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 63; emphasis in original). Deitelhoff and Zimmermann then use individual passages of our article as reference points and contrast them with their own reading of constructivist norm research.

For instance, the authors write that we illustrate the »obliviousness to power« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 63) of constructivist norm research by showing how the constructivist concepts of persuasion and socialization remain blind to power. This reading, according to the authors, cannot be maintained as socialization research in particular explores pressure and coercion as mechanisms of socialization, and persuasion approaches consistently emphasize that persuasion in the context of normative change is »a highly improbable occurrence« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 63). However – and a careful instead of only a critical reading of our contribution would have made this clear – we do not criticize the concept of socialization for being *per se* oblivious to power (we do not use this term at all, by the way, it is adapted from Deitelhoff's and Zimmermann's reading of our text). We rather argue, building upon an article by Charlotte Epstein (2012), that power is not sufficiently problematized in the socialization approach as this concept constructs a particular framing of normative change which represents norm diffusion »as a teleological process of progress, which leads to an improvement of the socialize« (Engelkamp et al. 2012: p. 109). Furthermore, we criticize the socialization model for constructing the actor who is being socialized as passive and reacting and as a morally empty subject whose »own values and identities are suppressed and therewith revoked« (Engelkamp et al. 2012: p. 109). What is problematic in regard to models such as socialization or persuasion is not, therefore, as our critics assume, a general »obliviousness to power« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 63). Rather, what is problematic is, on the one hand, the implicit normative evaluation of diffusion processes and the power potentials involved in them as progress or conducive to progress; and, on the other hand, the blinding out of the perspective and the value systems of the socialize. Overall then, we are talking about completely different forms of exercising power here. Whereas in the studies we criticize, power appears as something which subjects possess and use strategically, we criticize the lack of reflection of constructivist research, understood as political practice, in regard to its own discursive effects. Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, in contrast, mix these differences up in their question how the exercise of power is to be »normatively evaluated« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 64).

Our discussion of the persuasion model, moreover, is embedded in a broader examination of the practical decisions taken by norm research. Specifically, in our contribution we discuss the particular use of persuasion models in norm

research, i.e., the decision when and in regard to which empirical processes persuasion is considered as a relevant mode of normative change at all. We argue that those rather positive and affirmative modes and motivations of norm diffusion, such as persuasion, consensus-oriented behavior, empathy or altruism are predominantly used in constructivist norm research if actions are to be explained which are performed in the name of global norms, e.g., those carried out by norm entrepreneurs (Engelkamp et al. 2012: p. 109). In contrast, such concepts are hardly ever applied in descriptions of colonial and post-colonial resistance against global norms beyond the West. In short, what we centrally criticize is not only the implicitly positive connotations of the persuasion model which, through its application, are transferred onto empirical processes of normative change. Rather, we criticize the politics of reality practiced by constructivist norm research which applies such concepts and models only to very specific empirical phenomena and thereby reaffirms them.

This leads us to the second criticism raised by our critics against our contribution, namely our assessment of the »lack of awareness of the normative predisposition of norm research« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 64). Here, Deitelhoff and Zimmermann at first seem to agree with us when they write that the normative evaluation of such power-based processes »is either not broached at all or is implicitly treated positively in many articles« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 64). Their critique of our argumentation is, then, that these implicitly positive evaluations of constructivist norm research are not at all unreflective, but in most cases can be traced back to the particular political experiences of individual norm researchers (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 64). Moreover, the authors write, the examination of the normative premises of this research has advanced considerably in recent years. Here, Deitelhoff and Zimmermann refer in particular to the edited volume *Moral Limit and Possibility in World Politics* by Richard Price (2008b) which went hand in hand with an article of the same title, published in the journal *International Organization* (Price 2008a), and which, as Deitelhoff and Zimmermann put it, has made the explication of the normative premises underlying constructivist norm research »into [its] program« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 64).

These two publications indeed represent a reaction to similar criticisms towards constructivist norm research, as we articulate them in our contribution. Price wants to react to accusations holding »that this agenda [of constructivist norm research] (and constructivism generally) has been beset by a normative bias in favor of *good* norms that worked« (Price 2008a: p. 193; emphasis in original).

Nevertheless – and Price makes this explicit on several occasions (Price 2008a: p. 194, 197, 2008c: p. 16) – in contrast to Deitelhoff's and Zimmermann's assumptions, Price does not offer the kind of reflection here that we demand in

our contribution. To make it clear here one more time: Our central point of critique of traditional constructivist norm research is, (1) that this research, through its theoretical models and concepts and through its selection of empirical research objects, exercises a politics of reality which privileges hegemonic and seemingly global norms while marginalizing alternative and competing value systems; (2) that these implicit normative predispositions of constructivist norm research remain largely unreflected (Engelkamp et al. 2012: pp. 111–112).

Price (2008), however, unmistakably says that, in his texts, he does not want to examine the normative predispositions inherent in the concepts of constructivist norm research. This is particularly clear in his discussion of Mervyn Frost. According to Price, Frost convincingly shows »how any explanation of IR inescapably involves substantive normative theory« (Price 2008a: p. 197). As Price points out, Frost’s key criticism of the discipline of International Relations is that it blinds out ethical issues and claims for itself the ability to develop objectively appropriate descriptions and explanations of international phenomena. This, according to Frost, is impossible however, as such an enterprise can never be conducted without implicit normative presumptions (Price 2008a: p. 197). Price explicitly distances himself from this line of argumentation:

»But rather than examining the role of ethics in [constructivist] explanations, this article looks at the flip side of this relation – the role of empirical claims in ethics – as this is a neglected side of the equation and where the constructivist research program and other empirical traditions in IR may be harnessed to provide rigorous support for ethics« (Price 2008a: p. 197).

In his introduction to the edited volume, Price also emphasizes this point (Price 2008c: p. 16). In sum, Price explicitly does not want to delve deeper into the normative assumptions underlying theoretical concepts (Price 2008c: p. 16). Instead, he is looking for the specific contribution constructivist norm research can make to ethical approaches. In Price’s eyes, this contribution lies primarily in investigating the empirical conditions of (im)possibility with which normative ideals are confronted and which thus mark the real limits of ethical principles.¹ Constructivist analyses are therefore supposed to help take decisions in situations of ethical dilemma and to evaluate processes of normative change as either moral progress or regress (Price 2008a: p. 199, 200, 2008c: p. 17). However, Price’s suggestion of

¹ Again Price justifies this point with reference to Frost, whom he accuses of falling back on constitutive social norms of global politics in his argumentation, while not defending or examining them empirically. This, according to Price, is exactly where the potential of constructivist research lies, which he therefore considers as a productive supplement of normative approaches (Price 2008a: p. 198).

a reflexive constructivist research agenda is fraught with a number of normative and theoretical problems which have already repeatedly been criticized (see e.g., Erskine 2012; Inayatullah and Blaney 2012; Weber 2013).

Most recently, Martin Weber (2013; see also Erskine 2012: p. 454, 455) has convincingly argued that Price's program, due to its conflation of empirical facts with moral evaluation, does not reflect those ethical standards which form the basis for normative decisions and evaluations of progress or regress:

»While the goal is clearly to provide accounts of incremental moral and institutional change "in the right direction" in the context of circumstances, which otherwise make the realization of maximalist ethico-political agendas difficult, or practically impossible, such arguments are nevertheless confronted with the logical problem of making moral judgment contingent on "empirical fact" [...]. The moral position, which sustains the notion of "progress" under circumstances limiting ethical maximalism, is hence merely posited, replacing normative theory once more with normative "fact," this time in the sense, almost of a *fait accompli*« (Weber 2013: p. 9; emphasis in original).

In a similar vein, Naeem Inayatullah and David Blaney criticize that Price's understanding of moral progress through norms relies on normative standards which are unreflective and taken as given and can only be maintained if the possibility of alternative ethical visions is simultaneously denied (Inayatullah and Blaney 2012: p. 168). Even more, the understanding of moral progress suggested by Price makes it necessary to conceal the historical context and the colonial violence which made these moral developments possible in the first place (Inayatullah and Blaney 2012: pp. 167–169). In this context, it would then also be possible to speak of obliviousness to power, at least if oblivion is not seen as a passive act but as an active operation (Inayatullah and Blaney 2012: p. 173, 174).

Overall then, the further development of norm research suggested by Price can definitely be understood as an attempt to integrate more reflexivity into the constructivist research program. However, Price does not succeed in problematizing the normative predispositions of norm research, and so a reflection of their normalizing effects and the politics of reality of constructivist research remain out of sight.² The only statement in this regard that can be found in Price's article is in the conclusion where he briefly reflects on the ethical components that might be implicit in constructivism's basic assumption – in comparison, specifically, with

² A similar point is made by Toni Erskine in regard to the remaining chapters of Price's edited volume. After her reading of the volume, Erskine sums up: »The constructivists represented in Price's volume, by contrast, combine underlying ethical convictions and curiosity with detailed empirical analyses and a perceived imperative to prove their social science credentials, which seems to result in an accompanying tendency to downplay any ethical element of their work« (Erskine 2012: p. 459).

realist approaches (Price 2008a: p. 216). Here, Price reaches the (very optimistic) conclusion that the constructivist focus on the general possibility of social and political change allows for such a change empirically, in contrast to the assumptions held by conservative international political theories (Price 2008a: p. 217).³ In contrast to the assessment of our critics, we hold the view that a comprehensive reflection from constructivist norm research is still missing.

3 Locality and the West: Is the Heart of Darkness located in Frankfurt?

Deitelhoff and Zimmermann accuse us of using the concepts local and Western in an undifferentiated manner and of unreflectively privileging the former over the latter. We do in fact share some of the conceptual concerns that our critics voice against a dichotomous categorization of Western and non-Western norms and values. We have hinted at this point already in our article (Engelkamp et al. 2012: p. 107, Fn. 11). Their critique from the »Heart of Darkness of constructivist norm research« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 62), however, misses key aspects of our argument, overdoes others and is eventually contradictory in its own reasoning.

Our critics begin with criticizing our apparent failure of providing any evidence for or explanation of what we understand by »Western concepts [of norms]« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 65) and how these may differ from non-Western norms and values. Actually, we do illustrate this point in our discussion of Siba Grovogui's work (2011). Enquiring into the case of the Haitian anti-colonial struggle, Grovogui shows how alternative meanings of human rights developed which, in a stronger manner than Western concepts, focus on the existential basic needs of all excluded people. This points towards a more comprehensive understanding of human freedom than the one prevalent in Western discourses (Engelkamp et al. 2012: p. 116). So instead of regarding human rights in an undifferentiated manner simply as Western, our aim here is to consider different perspectives and to show possible ways for empirical enquiry.

Some of our critics' irritations can probably be explained by their reading of our text: Deitelhoff and Zimmermann wonder why the illustrations of our reconstructive research strategy in our example of the reconciliation norm do not seem to fit very well against the foil of the Western hegemonic norm (Deitelhoff and

³ For another similarly optimistic conclusion in regard to the core postulates of constructivist ethic, see also Hoffmann (2009: pp. 245–248).

Zimmermann 2013: p. 67, 68). The answer is probably that it is Deitelhoff and Zimmermann themselves who apply this foil to our text. Judith Renner's example illustrates the reconstructive analysis of a hegemonic norm discourse within one particular and across different non-Western contexts, nothing more, nothing less. Also, our other examples – Carol Cohn's studies on sexualized security language, V. Spike Peterson's research on structural violence and the auto-ethnographic reflections – are not really connected to the dichotomy *The West vs. The Rest*; our aim here is, rather, to show different paths of empirically reconstructing alternative bodies of knowledge and to reflect them critically.

Furthermore, according to Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, our proposal of critical listening »suggests« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 67) that we proceeded from quasi »*authentic* local values« which are to be strengthened (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 67, emphasis in original). Based on their reading of our text, the authors reason that we have ascribed an undifferentiated and Eurocentric attitude to norm research, only in order to be able to justify our privileging of the local as a counterprogram. As we arguably failed in justifying our preferential treatment of the local, our contribution undermines its own standards (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 62). At this point, our critics are moreover convinced to hear the post-colonial allegation of paternalism against non-Western actors, which »one could fabricate here« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 67, Fn. 7) with regard to our critical research program.

On the one hand, our critics hence accuse us of treating social actors as *judgmental dopes*, as defined by Robin Celikates (2009: pp. 17–26), i.e., as unknowing agents in need of an unmasking gesture of the critical theorist in order to be able to recognize their own entanglement in ideological structures (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 67, Fn. 7). On the other hand, we are allegedly unable to subject these social agents to critical assessment, as we treat the local, as our critics put it, »like a protected species« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 70), thus privileging them normatively. It is not entirely clear here what the criticism is actually targeted at: either we patronize local actors and deny them their normative ability to judge, or we suspend them altogether from critical scrutiny and elevate the local as a normative benchmark of our research. Both perspectives together seem to logically exclude each other.

Our paper does in fact diagnose a Eurocentric predisposition among norm research as we read it. We do consider this as one-sided and both normatively and theoretically problematic. Our assessment does not apply exclusively to constructivist norm research. Paradoxically, International Relations as a discipline that purports studying global phenomena has often and correctly been criticized for neglecting and even marginalizing the world outside the West. It is contested,

however, to what extent a dichotomous categorization of the world in terms of the *West* and the *non-West* may help to overcome the indication of Eurocentrism.⁴

In our research programmatic piece, we decided to make the Eurocentric disposition of norm research explicit and situate it within the context of a politics of reality which we regard as theoretically and politically problematic. The key aim of our text has been to demonstrate ways of critically reflecting upon this disposition and of conducting norm research in such a manner that dominant bodies of knowledge and value systems are not normalized, but contextualized and problematized. Therefore, the second point of our research program, reconstructing alternative bodies of knowledge, refers explicitly to Edward Said's proposal of a contrapuntal reading of the »Western cultural archive« (Said 1994: p. 59, quoted in: Engelkamp et al. 2012: p. 115). The aim of such a strategy is to highlight the mutual constitution of narratives with »those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominant discourse acts« (Said 1994: p. 59, quoted in: Engelkamp et al. 2012: p. 115). Instead of juxtaposing and thus reifying the local or the West carelessly as geographically definable entities, the task is to reconstruct different bodies of knowledge »in their mutual constitution and contingency« (Engelkamp et al. 2012: p. 116). Hence, we are not converting local actors into »*judgmental dopes*«, as Deitelhoff and Zimmermann (2012: p. 71) suspect. Our point here is, rather, that research should also analyze structures of meaning via the contingent interpretations and practices of local actors within their respective social contexts and structures.

And yet, we find ourselves in between competing conceptual and research programmatic considerations. Post-colonial and feminist authors have pointed out that Said's earlier work (i.e., Said 1978) on the deconstruction of Orientalist discourses eventually helped to reify both the Orient and the West as apparently coherent and definable discursive entities. What is more, he tended to neglect the subject's practices of resistance and hence her potential for emancipation and self-determined agency (Bhabha 2004: pp. 101–108). Therefore, there may in fact be good reasons to move away from the dichotomous heuristic of Western and non-Western bodies of knowledge. Instead, one could focus more closely on the moment of transition and enquire more explicitly the space between the categories. The advantage of such a move would be to avoid all too simple attempts of categorization and to complicate hasty normative assessments, which may concur with the former. Moreover, such a procedure would create space for subtle and subversive practices of resistance, the articulation of mimicry, irony and

⁴ Cf. on this the contributions of Acharya (2011) and Tickner (2003) as well as Hutchings (2011) and Bilgin (2008) for critical statements on the West/non-West dichotomy, with further references.

persiflage, of which authors like Homi Bhabha (2004) or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2008) speak.

4 On Normative Reflexivity and its Pitfalls

Deitelhoff and Zimmermann accuse us of not adhering to our own normative criteria and of not having the analytical apparatus to reflect normatively on political processes. They criticize that our critical research perspective on hegemony fails to grasp »possible empirical variations in repression« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 69) and cannot evaluate »the legitimacy of norm negotiation and diffusion processes« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 69). They argue that our research program is therefore unable to develop an emancipatory potential beyond an »unmasking gesture« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 70). These difficulties of a supposedly missing reflexivity culminate in the suggestively phrased question whether we would approve of local dispute settlement mechanisms, if they excluded women or included »public flogging« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 70).

Although Deitelhoff and Zimmermann at first underline that they »support the basic thrust of the article, namely, the plea for a self-reflective form of norm research that is critical of hegemony and integrates postcolonial and anthropological perspectives« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 62), they do not seriously seize the two points. In fact, their example of local dispute settlement mechanisms substantiates our suspicion that our article has not yet irritated strongly enough. From our research perspective, a retreat from the subject of research precedes any normative judgments. Critical reading and the reflection of the researcher's position would reveal that Deitelhoff and Zimmermann construct the local as the norm-deviant other in their example of the exclusion of women and physical punishment. The way the authors illustrate the local evokes associations of patriarchy, repression and violence. This approach is surprising, as Deitelhoff and Zimmermann strongly refer to Celikates's concept of reconstructive critique when formulating their notion of critique (Celikates 2009). Their account rather reminds of his orthodox model of critique, however, that claims to be able to normatively evaluate empirical facts from an external perspective. The difficulties of such an approach become particularly clear, in the context of

»such often cited (and mostly rather unimaginative) extreme examples, which proof the necessity of an external critique – some barbaric practice in Africa or the distant Orient, which seemingly can only be problematized thanks to the greater insight of Western critics – [but even then], at least pre-forms of this critique can usually be found in the respective

culture, society or community itself and put forward by the concerned actors (even if they are superimposed by hegemonic actors)« (Celikates 2009: p. 163, own translation).

In order to be able to take such »pre-forms of critique« (Celikates 2009: p. 163, own translation) into consideration and thus to do justice to the complexity of the contexts under research, in our contribution, we have located those normative-reflexive challenges within *a research ethic* of utmost listening (Engelkamp et al. 2012: p. 115). These arise from questioning hegemonic knowledge, as practiced most notably by authors inspired by feminist, postcolonial and ethnographic approaches. Thomas Bauer's book *The Culture of Ambiguity – A Different Story of Islam [Die Kultur der Ambiguität – Eine andere Geschichte des Islams]* (2011) illustrates such a differentiated and context-sensible approximation to normative structures by showing that seemingly clear normative judgments of the other are far more complex than they appear at first sight. In his analysis, Bauer focuses on the topic of normative ambiguity. As such, the common representation of local discourses as seemingly determined by Islamic law only depicts a distorted picture, which serves as a contrast to Western modernity (Bauer 2011: p. 222). By acknowledging early Arabic sources, Bauer shows a more differentiated variety and normative ambiguity of the Islamic world, which rests on the historic co-existence of legal discourses, which are grounded in their own normative systems. Accordingly, the need to define definite norms only developed in the course of colonialism, which was accompanied by 19th century Western rationalism. The epistemological violence of Western modernity, which accompanied demands for normative unambiguousness, actually enabled the »Islamization of Islam« (Bauer 2011: p. 192, own translation) as a dominant image in the Western media. Hence, the image of the local as the un-civilized other is just a social construction that first of all has to be revealed according to a critical research ethic.

Bauer's work deploys a critical and context-sensitive research ethic by being sensible towards the subject of research and by taking the other seriously: In this sense, normative standards unfold only through interpretative reconstruction, historization and embedding sources of knowledge in their respective contexts. Instead of conducting seemingly universal normative judgments, it is imperative to tolerate the contingency and ambiguity of normative orders, without risking implicit evaluations based on one's own predispositions. As we already pointed out in our article, this does not mean that a »relativization or particularization« (Engelkamp et al. 2012: p. 116) of norms follows from such a research perspective. In fact »new interpretations of norms and normativity« (Engelkamp et al. 2012: p. 118) are rendered possible. In some cases, these may be inconvenient and might not correspond with one's own moral beliefs. Critique as social practice permits emancipation, as it

»aims at strengthening the daily practices of justification and critique by appraising the social conditions of possibility of these practices of reflection and transformation« (Celikates 2009: p. 184, own translation).

Certainly, we do not absolve the local from any criticism, nor do we support physical punishment or patriarchal structures. Rather, we want to denaturalize constructions such as the uncivilized other and let locality speak in its normative ambiguity. This, however, does not imply privileging the local, but revealing the contingency of normative orders. A normative evaluation is only the last point of a historic-reconstructive analysis, which shows the emancipatory potential of the subject.

Deitelhoff and Zimmermann justify their claim for normative criteria with empirical facticity. They demand an »analytical apparatus« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 69) and »normative criteria« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 69) for the evaluation of empirical phenomena in norm research. But how are empirical facticity and the desired normative reflexivity related? Deitelhoff and Zimmermann complain that, from our post-structural research perspective, the identification of repressive and productive forms of discourse does not justify any assumption on whether the political consequences are normatively problematic (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: pp. 69–70). It rather is »a question that must be answered in both empirical and theoretical terms« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 70) and that should, among other aspects, analyze the degree of repression exercised by norm discourses.

In order to answer the question on whether empirical observations of a »distinction between exclusion, marginalization, repression, and delegitimization« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 69) can be normatively evaluated, Deitelhoff and Zimmermann seem to follow the reflective research approach by Kathryn Sikkink (2008). In Price's edited volume, Sikkink argues that normative judgments must result from an evaluation of the empirical consequences of an object of investigation. Thus, moral progress can be evaluated through historical impact analyses of change (Sikkink 2008: p. 92). With respect to our critics, the starting point for normative judgments is, thus, the empirically detectable facticity of norms. Yet, as Weber aptly noted, an empirical analysis that treats norms as social facts without scrutinizing their historic genesis does not allow for moral evaluations (Weber 2013: p. 9). Empirical accounts on norm-inflected behavior »do not reveal anything yet about whether the norms in question are "good" or "bad"« (Weber 2013: p. 12).

Likewise, one could argue that a typology of empirically detectable forms of exclusion does not yet make normative standards, as an evaluation on the basis of empirical results neglects the contra-factual validity of norms. In contrast, our

approach tries to reset normative placements *in lieu of* an interpretative reconstruction with the help of context-sensitive techniques. As such, (auto-)ethnographic methods do not serve »an end in themselves of a misperceived reflection of a research position« (Ulbert 2012: p. 137, own translation), which Ulbert rightly warned of in her answer to our article. Instead, they should help to get a better understanding of normative change. By outlining and explicitly reflecting own assumptions, a researcher is able to keep a position of doubt that prevents his or her own predispositions becoming reified in the research process.

5 On »Right« and »Wrong« Ways of Irritation

In their articles, our critics bring forth different criticisms on our proposed research program. While Ulbert warns of not losing the ability to speak within a research community (Ulbert 2012: p. 137), Deitelhoff and Zimmermann criticize that our program cannot be realized for critical norm research. They argue that we distort the contributions of constructivist norm research, unreflectively use the terms Western and local and are unable to subject political process to normative assessment (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 61).

At first sight, the latter seem to take a step towards a norm research that is critical of hegemony and sensitive to context, yet, on a closer look, their answer turns out to be a setback. In particular, we see three related contradictions in the criticism issued by Deitelhoff and Zimmermann: First, our critics accuse us of turning local actors into *judgmental dopes* while simultaneously claiming that we inconsiderately privilege the local; second, they ask us to dissolve dichotomous categories *in lieu of* hybrid forms of reciprocal constitution, while at the same time suggesting normative judgments along ordinal categories; third, in their answer, they mix ontological arguments on a given social reality with a constructivist epistemology.

Particularly the last point shows the differences to our post-structuralist research program, according to which normative judgments cannot be formulated in reference to a pre-existent empirical reality. Thus, our critics demand an approach which indicates that they do not proceed from a post-structuralist approach but from their own epistemological background. This clearly shows that they either did not genuinely listen or did not accept our post-structuralist perspective. Their understanding of normativity demands an approach which does not correspond to the theoretical context of post-structuralist positions. Post-structuralist approaches are always concerned with questions of ethics: The normative cannot be circumvented, as the normative and the political cannot be

separated. As knowledge is never stable and always contested, it can also not be used to ground one's normative position. Therefore, normative judgments cannot be made according to universally valid or empirically grounded principles. It rather is the obligation of a relational and reflective practice to take a position of doubt, continually questioning sources of knowledge (Zehfuss 2013).

In general, we concord with Nicole Deitelhoff and Lisbeth Zimmermann's statement that critique should irritate. This opens the possibility to accelerate the inner-disciplinary exchange, as demanded by Cornelia Ulbert. Although Deitelhoff and Zimmermann are just irritated for the »wrong reasons« (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013: p. 72), their answer may show the normalizing potential of implicit norms, on which at least the German norm research seems to be based. However, this raises the question whether the right irritation in the sense of in the Deitelhoff and Zimmermann would suffice to shake the heart of darkness of constructivist norm research to its foundations.

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