Bringing the outsiders in: an interactionist perspective on deviance and normative change in international politics

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Abstract *In this article, we draw on insights from the interactionist perspective in sociology and international relations (IR) norm contestation literature to explore the relationship between deviance and normative change in international politics. In IR, this is still largely unexplored territory: we already know a great deal about how norms change, yet we know much less about the actual role norm violations play in this process. In order to address this gap, we conceptualize three types of normative contestation and affirmation that take place in connection with deviance (re)construction: (1) applicatory contestation and affirmation, reconstructing the meanings of international norms; (2) justificatory contestation and affirmation, challenging and reaffirming the legitimacy of international norms; and (3) hierarchical contestation and affirmation, contesting and reaffirming the relative value and importance of international norms. We discuss how, as a consequence of these dynamics, deviance-making produces both stability and change in the normative structure of world politics.*

Introduction

In this article, we draw on the interactionist perspective in sociology to explore the conceptual underpinnings of the relationship between deviance and normative change in international politics.[1] In the field of international relations (IR), norm dynamics has been the 'topic of the day' for many years, and it seems to be even more relevant today than ever before.[2] In spite of this,

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[1] We use the term 'deviance' in its traditional sociological sense of 'certain deviations from social norms which encounter disapproval' (Clinard 1957, vii). While the main focus of sociology as a discipline has been on deviant behaviour, deviance also encompasses norm-violating attitudes (beliefs) and conditions (Adler and Adler 2014, 13). For a discussion on competing definitions of deviance in sociology, see Clinard and Meier (2011, 6–9).

[2] See, for example, Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), Risse and Sikkink (1999), Acharya (2004), Sandholtz (2008), Krook and True (2012), Müller and Wunderlich (2013) and Bloomfield (2015). For literature reviews, see Björkdahl (2010) and Widmaier and Park (2012).

thorough theoretical elaboration of the link between norm violations and changes in the normative structure of world politics is still in its infancy.

The key argument of this article is that in order to understand what is considered 'right', we need to first observe what is considered 'wrong'. Specifically, the 'dark side' of norm compliance—that is, norm violation—can tell us much about the norms under scrutiny. Studying the conduct of states that conflicts with what we understand to be *normal* in international politics, a focus on the 'outsiders' of international politics, opens new avenues for IR research which can advance our understanding of the dynamics of international norms.

This insight crucially builds on interactionist insights into the link between deviance and norm creation. Labelling certain acts as deviant is as much about denouncing the act as it is about drawing boundaries of socially appropriate conduct (Durkheim 1973).[3] Interactionist scholars treat deviance as a historically and culturally contingent, socially constructed phenomenon. They frequently suggest that deviance is not an *a priori* pathological element in society but rather a natural part of all social orders, in which it functions as a source of both social stability and change.

This article proposes that the interactionists' conceptual link between deviance on one hand and stability and change on the other is largely compatible with the contemporary constructivist research on normative contestation and dynamics in IR. We propose that the discourses and practices employed within the dynamics of deviance (re)construction should be considered against the backdrop of broader norm contestation processes in world politics. Within these processes, intersubjective meanings, legitimacy, and hierarchy of international norms are continuously re-established.

The interactionist perspective on deviance enriches our understanding of norm violations in IR scholarship by tying it closer to the sociological roots of norms research. We provide a new conceptualization of three types of normative contestation and affirmation that take place in connection with the process of deviance (re)construction: (1) *applicatory* contestation and affirmation, reconstructing the meanings of international norms; (2) *justificatory* contestation and affirmation, challenging and reaffirming the legitimacy of international norms; and (3) *hierarchical* contestation and affirmation, contesting and reaffirming the relative value and importance of international norms. As a consequence of these dynamics, (re)constructions of deviance produce both stability and change in the normative structure of world politics. By bringing in the concepts relating to the construction of deviance, we are better able to delineate and distinguish different types of norm contestation in international affairs. We hope that our article will encourage scholars towards further cross-fertilization between the study of norm deviance and norm contestation in the broader constructivist (and beyond) research programme in international relations.

In this article, we proceed as follows. First, we discuss the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the interactionist perspective in sociology. Second, we elaborate on some of the specifics of translating interactionist insights into the field of IR and review the existing scholarly efforts in this

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[3] For an IR application to the study of 'rogue states', see Wagner (2014) and Nincic (2005).

direction. Third, we provide an argument about the compatibility between the interactionist perspective and the contemporary IR literature on norm contestation and change. Fourth, we conceptualize the aforementioned types of normative contestation and affirmation. Fifth, we elaborate in more detail on the operations of these three types of normative contestation and affirmation as they take place across different stages of the deviance-making process. We conclude by summarizing the findings of this article and recommending avenues for further research.

The sociology of deviance and the interactionist perspective

The study of deviance is one of the most prominent topics in modern sociology. In the early days of the discipline, norm-violating behaviour was primarily treated as a social pathology, a sort of 'disease' contrasted with a 'healthy' normal state in the medical analogy. The first systematic accounts of deviance as a complex phenomenon naturally occurring in all social orders appeared in the 1950s; Lemert (1951) is sometimes hailed as one of the pioneers of the concept. The focus of the emerging sociology of deviance eventually split into two major research agendas: *explanatory* approaches and *interactionist* approaches.

Explanatory approaches are primarily concerned with causal explanations for deviant behaviour in society. They correspond to the positivist tradition in sociology, seeking to identify variables on the level of society which would explain *why* some individuals violate social norms, while others do not. Inherent to this approach is the metatheoretical assumption that social sciences are able to employ rigorous methods that reveal essential, 'objective' conditions that 'cause' human action. What exactly stands for deviant behaviour is taken for granted and is not by itself subject to scientific enquiry in these approaches.[4]

By contrast, interactionist approaches study *how* deviant categories come into being. Interactionists strictly depart from the absolutist conception of norms and deviance, and point to the intersubjective, socially constructed nature of both. They draw on the tradition of symbolic interactionism in sociology (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969), which is concerned with the *meanings* that people attach to themselves, other people, physical objects, ideas, behaviour, or institutions. These meanings are not fixed but constructed and constantly (re)negotiated in social interaction through language and cultural symbols. The self and society are mutually constitutive: people internalize shared meanings and the reactions of others and they simultaneously participate in the co-construction of meanings and the overarching social order (Hall 1972). Even though the meanings are in flux and always open to further (re)negotiation, they nevertheless have a far-reaching influence on the lives of individuals and

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[4] Some of the most influential achievements in this area of research include, for example, Sutherland's (1947) differential association theory explaining how individuals learn deviant behaviour (see Matsueda 1988); Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) control theory which focuses on the social bonds and (the lack of) self-control; Merton's (1938) work on anomie and opportunity structures; and Akers's (1977) social learning approach.

society as a whole. In the famous dictum of WI Thomas (1938, 572), 'if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences'.[5]

The interactive social construction of meanings forms the ontological and epistemological core of interactionist approaches to deviance. Becker (1963) built upon these principles to redefine deviance from a relativist and 'reactionist' view. In his seminal book *Outsiders*, he argues that

> *social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance*, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is *not* a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender.' The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label. (Becker 1963, 9, original emphasis)

This focus on the *labelling* of individuals by 'normal' society and the non-essential, contingent nature of these labels, shifted the interest of interactionist researchers to the reactions of societal 'audiences' and the mutual deviant–audience interaction. It is precisely *within* this interaction that the deviance is (re)constructed through the negotiations of disvalued labels.[6] What counts as disvalued is both historically and culturally contingent, and subject to constant reinterpretation in ever-changing contexts. In fact, the very same behaviour can be labelled deviant in one specific social setting and pass as completely normal in another (see Plummer 1979, 98–99; Goode 2015, 15–20).

Most interactionist scholars subscribe to a functionalist perspective on deviance in society. In one of the founding texts of modern sociology, Durkheim (1895, 98–101) offered a novel perspective on crime: instead of as a pathology, he understood it as 'an integrative element in any healthy society … indispensable to the normal evolution of morality and law'. This laid foundations for a functionalist theory that revolves around four societal functions of deviance: affirmation of shared norms and values; clarification of moral boundaries; reaffirmation of moral and social ties in a group; and encouragement of social change (Macionis 2012).

Kai Erikson (1966, 13) further explored this nexus of moral boundaries and deviance in society, suggesting that 'each time the community moves to censure some act of deviation … it sharpens the authority of the violated norm and restates where the boundaries of the group are located' (see also Dentler and Erikson 1959). The role of community is crucial for the construction of deviance. For interactionists, it is not the act but the community's reaction that makes a certain action deviant.

The (re)construction of deviance in social orders corresponds to two main processes of normative dynamics: normative *stability*, as a reaffirmation of group values and normative consensus; and normative *change*, as a redefinition of acceptable and appropriate behaviour in the group, leading to innovation

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[5] There is, however, also an explanatory dimension of interactionist scholarship, particularly with respect to 'secondary deviance', a concept closely tied to the labelling theory (see Lemert 1951; Lofland 1969; Farrell and Nelson 1976; Paternoster and Iovanni 1989).
[6] Some authors promote the inclusion of *positive* deviance as a distinct type of highly valued, yet rare behaviours, traits and conditions (such as 'genius' or 'hero') that signal an exceptional degree of conformity with shared norms. See, for example, Heckert and Heckert (2002). For a critique, see Dotter (2004, 88).

and moral adaptation (Ben-Yehuda 1990, 6, 10–11; Adler and Adler 2006). The explanation for these two seemingly contradictory yet in fact largely complementary dynamics lies in the interactionist assumption about the contingent nature of social orders. Hall (1972) suggests that social objects have a tendency to produce tensions due to their ambiguous quality. To maintain a sense of order, the meanings of these social objects are bargained and negotiated in the interaction among different constituencies. Hence the concept of *interaction order* (Goffman 1983) or *negotiated order* (Strauss et al 1963; Hall 1972) as a societal model in interactionist theorizing.

In the interactionist perspective, norms and rules as social objects are similarly contingent, ambiguous and open to negotiation and different interpretations. The application of norms in practice is not as straightforward as portrayed by their creators, resulting in conflicts over the 'right' way to comply with them. Furthermore, norms sometimes clash, their prescriptions are contradictory and their direct links to abstract values of society are problematized (Becker 1963, 15, 131–132; Turner 1964, 382–425; Dotter and Roebuck 1988, 24). As deviance is constructed and reconstructed in society, norms and their meanings are challenged. This leads different audiences to either reaffirm or shift the boundaries of particular symbolic–moral universes (Ben-Yehuda 2015, 553–554); 'in the process the problematic norms are negotiated, often well beyond the original act in question' (Dotter 2004, 124).

Deviance and the study of international politics

The interactionist approach to deviance is mainly used to study the 'outsiders' in modern society, such as cannabis smokers (Becker 1955), male prostitutes (Luckenbill 1986), the mentally ill (Link 1987), transsexuals (Kando 1972) or ex-convicts (Harding 2003). In fact, Liazos (1972) highlighted a certain case selection bias in the sociology of deviance, which had been predominantly concerned about 'nuts, sluts, and perverts', rather than, for example, unequal power relationships and deviance among the political elite. Since Liazos's call, there have been several notable interactionist attempts to examine deviance in the political sphere of social life (see Lauerdale 2015). In this section, we employ the interactionist perspective to study deviance in the realm of *international* politics.

Generally, the interactionist approach studies the social construction of deviant behaviours or traits. The deviance-making process, however, not only constructs a single deviant act or characteristic, but simultaneously involves a potential for marking the transgressors as 'deviant' themselves, 'spoiling' their social identities by linking the specific attribute(s) to a more general stereotype. With reference to individual practices or characteristics, the states and non-state actors are then labelled 'rogue', 'barbaric' or 'backward', inferior to 'normal' actors within the social hierarchy.

A successful construction of deviant identities has a real impact on the course of events in international politics. Becker (1963, 32–33) observed that a deviant label imposed on an individual has a tendency to take on the character of a 'master status' in relation to social identity, effectively overshadowing other traits (Hughes 1945). The social construction of a 'deviant' state does not directly *cause* any particular course of events but it enables and constrains

actions that would otherwise (not) be possible. In international politics, labelling states as deviant is frequently followed by the application of exclusionary practices. This can be illustrated by the example of North Korea, isolated by the international community for its violation of non-proliferation norms (Ogilvie-White 2010). In other situations, perceptions of deviance justify unequal treatment of the state in diplomatic, economic or security matters (Zarakol 2014, 326–327), and open up a window for extraordinary measures to be taken in defence of the 'normal' states (Müller 2014). In extreme cases, 'deviant behaviour' even legitimizes the use of violence against the transgressor—the 2003 invasion of Iraq is a case in point. Many interactionists also highlight the 'self-fulfilling, self-reinforcing, and self-propelling processes' that lead to the individual's engulfment in the deviant's role (Schur 1980, 13; see Lemert 1951; Lofland 1969).

In IR, concerns over the exclusionary practices performed by the 'normal' international community have been especially relevant to the problem of 'rogue states' and their position vis-à-vis international society. In response to the post-Cold-War securitization of the rogue state phenomenon, IR scholars and policy experts engaged in debates over the causes of and possible responses to the norm-breaking behaviour of 'international outlaws' such as North Korea, Iraq and Iran (see, for example, Klare 1996; Tanter 1998; Litwak 2000; Smith 2006; Lennon and Eiss 2004; Rotberg 2007).[7]

The role of international society is clearly relevant when it comes to the labelling processes in world politics. Iran's case is illustrative here. Since the early 1990s, the United States has tried to isolate Iran over its human rights abuses and nuclear programme. Yet, European countries continued to develop lively political and economic relations, and in 2002 even started negotiating a draft Trade and Cooperation Agreement (Dryburgh 2008; Mousavian 2008). This image started to change in 2002, when new information about Iran's nuclear programme emerged, and in 2003, when the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) listed 13 violations of Iran's commitments (Fitzpatrick 2006). After 2006, when the IAEA passed Iran's dossier to the United Nations (UN) Security Council, numerous European leaders denounced Iran as a 'rogue' and untrustworthy partner (Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung 2006; 2007; Barluet 2009). The case of Iran illustrates that even a powerful actor cannot successfully impose the deviant label on its own; it is conferred by the community that is necessary for the deviant label to stick.

Whereas most IR scholars shy away from an explicit conceptualization of deviance processes in world politics,[8] a segment of 'rogue state' scholarship draws, more or less explicitly, on the key tenets of interactionist theorizing on deviance. For example, several scholars highlighted the social 'constructedness' of the rogue state phenomenon and the labelling practices that bring deviant images into being (Mutimer 2000, 93–97; Geldenhuys 2004; Nincic 2005; Malici 2009; Malici and Walker 2014; Geis and Wunderlich 2014; Onderco 2015; Wunderlich 2017). Others pointed to the problematic aspects of the exclusion of certain states from international society (Saunders 2006; Corrias 2014).

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[7] For a review of different perspectives on 'rogues', see Herring (2000).
[8] For notable exceptions, see Wagner et al (2014); Homolar (2011).

According to Wunderlich (2014; see also Wunderlich et al 2013; Acharya 2012, 202), the 'outcasts' are not merely passive objects of labelling; they also exhibit their own agency and often challenge their societal exclusion. Many scholars therefore problematize the use of the 'rogue state' label (Wagner et al 2014; Jacobi et al 2014; Wunderlich 2017), or even claim that, if norm-breaking is the foremost attribute of 'rogue states', the label should primarily apply to the United States as the ultimate 'rogue' of world politics (Chomsky 2000).

In this respect, some scholars have noted the hierarchical stratification of international politics which allows hegemonic states to impose deviant labels from unequal power positions (Werner 2014; Homolar 2011). As EH Carr remarked almost 80 years ago, 'any international moral order must rest on some hegemony of power' (1939, 151). In world affairs, the norms are predominantly shaped by the most powerful actors in the system (Reus-Smit 1999). Hegemons then spread these norms through international organizations and law.[9] The ideas of powerful states about international norms become hegemonic 'not because they are the only conceptions … but because, in a narrow sense, they are embraced by the dominant coalition of states' (Reus-Smit 1999, 578). Widespread adoption of norms then allows hegemons to refer to widely shared norms when they want to exercise their power to 'name things' to manage the international system (Kratochwil 2011).[10] Referring to such widely shared norms then allows labelling without suspicion of catering to one's own parochial interests.

Recently, IR scholars also started to apply Erving Goffman's (1963) inter-actionist concept of 'stigma' to study deviance in the international realm. Notably, Ayse Zarakol (2011) has studied the attempts of post-war Turkey, Japan, and Russia to cope with stigmatization from (the predominantly Western) international society. Elsewhere, she has provided additional insights into the role of stigma in international politics, arguing that it is mainly stigmatization that drives norm diffusion and compliance in the international realm, rather than 'friendly' persuasion and socialization as suggested by conventional constructivists (Zarakol 2014). Similar insights were derived by David Fidler (2001), who argued that the concept of a 'rogue state' harks back to the concept of a standard of civilization, which allowed European countries to stigmatize (and forced change upon) non-European countries in the early twentieth century. Rebecca Adler-Nissen (2014b) has further elaborated on strategies that stigmatized states employ to cope with shame (see also Adler-Nissen 2014a). Jeffrey Chwieroth (2015) has studied the dynamics of stigmatization in the global financial governance. As such, Adler-Nissen notes that 'today, third generation constructivists are returning to the sociology of … symbolic interactionists to address problems of identity, power and deviance in international politics' (Adler-Nissen 2016, 27).

Discursive contestation and normative change

The interactionist perspective on deviance is highly relevant for IR debates about international norms dynamics. This particularly applies to the contemporary

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[9] Importantly, Bloomfield (2015) notes that the depth of institutionalization of the norm matters for whether actors are seen as deviant or norm entrepreneurial.

[10] Similar insights were adopted by realist scholars as well. See Gilpin (1983).

discursive approaches to norm contestation and change.[11] Most of these approaches share the dynamic view of continuity and change in social structures, achieved in discursive interactions of 'sentient' (thinking, speaking, doing) actors (see Schmidt 2008; 2010). Norms are portrayed as intersubjectively constructed, contingent, flexible and dynamic. From the agent–structure perspective, they are both 'constructed and structuring' (Wiener 2004, 201): while the institutions are constantly open to continuity and change through discursive interventions of actors, they simultaneously constrain these actors in what they think, say and do.

In line with interactionist theorizing, discursive approaches depart from the conception of stable norms ('norms as things') which was prevalent in early constructivist research. Instead, they treat norms as *processes* (Krook and True 2012, 104–105). In this reflexive understanding, all norms undergo a constant development in relation to both 'external' interactions with other norms, rules and principles, and 'internal' discursive interventions that problematize and (temporarily) fix the meanings of these norms (Krook and True 2012; Sandholtz 2008).

The key observation in this dynamic conception of social structures is that norms, while seemingly stable over substantive periods of time, are also regularly *contested* by actors. There are different forms of normative contestation in international politics. Sometimes contestation is practised as an explicit discursive intervention in the form of a more or less formal affirmation, objection or deliberation. Other times, contestation may take a more implicit shape where the actor simply ignores the norm or defies it. All these modes then 'reflect a specific (re-)enacting of the normative structure of meaning-in-use' and are therefore 'constitutive towards norm change' (Wiener and Puetter 2009, 10); in other words, we can speak of the 'norm-generative power of contestation' (Wiener 2014, 2; see Tully 2002).

The IR constructivist literature on norm dynamics has often used different perspectives to study normative change: while the more conventional branch is mainly preoccupied with the salience, strength, and robustness of norms in time, some more recent streams of constructivist thought focus on the changing meanings of norms. Effectively bridging these approaches, Nicole Deitelhoff and Lisbeth Zimmermann (2013) observed that there are two main types of norm contestation in world politics: *justificatory* contestation, as the opposition to the norm as a whole; and *applicatory* contestation, which questions the way the norm is applied. In the former, the legitimacy, appropriateness and/or validity of the norm are contested. In the latter, it is the meaning of the norm that is the object of contestation. Whereas successful justificatory contestation can lead to the erosion or eventual disappearance of the norm, applicatory contestation carries the potential for the norm's strengthening by clarifying the meaning of the norm (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013).[12]

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[11] The *discourses* in these approaches are understood as 'sense-making practices' that construct *meanings* of social phenomena. The focus is, nevertheless, not just on 'words' actors say/write, but also on what actors 'do', insofar that their actions and (material) practices represent sites of meaning production. See Epstein (2008, 4–6).

[12] In a yet unpublished paper, Deitelhoff and Zimmermann have tied their argument to the concept of norm robustness and changed the term 'justificatory contestation' to 'validity contestation'. We are grateful to Deitelhoff and Zimmermann for sharing their unpublished paper with us.

Table 1. Typology of normative contestation and affirmation

Type	Discourse	Target
Applicatory contestation and affirmation	Applicatory discourses	*Meanings* of norms
Justificatory contestation and affirmation	Justificatory discourses	*Legitimacy* of norms
Hierarchical contestation and affirmation	Ordering discourses	*Relative weight/position* of norms

Another distinction in these approaches is whether the contestation and change are gradual or driven by a specific event or crisis (see Schmidt 2011, 108). In terms of the latter, some scholars suggest that 'individual events, shocks, or traumas of a certain magnitude hold potential for triggering norm change', since 'they might challenge dominant ideas and ideological paradigms, put new issues on the table that call for collective action, alter cost–benefit calculations of member states, or shake the international balance of power, and thus impact on both agency and structure' (Müller et al 2013, 141). Such crises open a window of opportunity, providing the stakeholders with an opportunity to reconstruct normative standards in the given social order.[13] It is also an impulse for the enactment of new initiatives—laws, rules, agreements, organizations, procedures—that solidify the norm and clarify its meaning. Furthermore, a crisis represents a 'high stakes' situation, in which there is increased potential for contestation 'as time constraints enhance the reduced social feedback factor' (Wiener 2008, 64).

In this respect, Wayne Sandholtz (2008) has developed a crisis-based model of cycles of norm change, driven by tensions between norms and the actual behaviour of actors. Due to the contingent and mostly ambiguous nature of international norms, the actions of particular actors frequently trigger disputes concerning the application of the norm in practice. Consequently, 'the outcome of such arguments is always to modify the norms under dispute, making them stronger or weaker, more specific (or less), broader or narrower' (Sandholtz 2008, 103–104). Although these normative conflicts sometimes lead to the establishment of competing normative perspectives in international society, they also represent a unifying (and norm-bolstering) opportunity. In fact, as Wiener (2017, 11) concludes, 'validity claims obtain legitimacy precisely through public dissensus'.

(Re)constructions of deviance and the typology of normative contestation and affirmation

In this section, we introduce three types of normative contestation and affirmation that take place in connection with deviance (re)construction: (1) *applicatory* contestation and affirmation, reconstructing the meanings of norms; (2) *justificatory* contestation and affirmation, challenging and reaffirming the

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[13] For example, Harald Müller and Wolfgang Kötter have persuasively shown how scandals in nuclear supplies led to massive changes in German arms control practices relating to dual-use goods. Germany became, in a short span of time, a champion of strict export controls, in stark contrast to its earlier lax attitudes (Müller and Kötter, 1991).

legitimacy of norms; and (3) *hierarchical* contestation and affirmation, contesting and reaffirming the relative value of competing norms (see Table I).

Applicatory contestation and affirmation is based on the aforementioned assumption that norms are often ambiguous, vague and open to different interpretation; they have an 'open texture' (O'Mahoney 2014, 839). As such, their *meanings* are contingent and subject to contestation and reconstruction. Ambiguity and internal contradictions necessarily lead to conflicts when norms are applied in practice by actors. During these conflicts, the meanings of norms are contested and either (temporarily) fixed or reinterpreted (see Taylor 1993; Wiener 2004; Sandholtz 2008; Kersbergen and Verbeek 2007). In the process, actors employ *applicatory discourses* to 'clarify whether (1) a norm is appropriate for a given situation and (2) which actions it requires in the specific situation' (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013, 5). Applicatory discourses employed by deviant actors can be treated as 'oppositional' conduct, in which the actors accept the existence of general normative standards but contest the idea that the norm would apply in the specific case (see Daase and Deitelhoff 2014). In some cases, the deviant actors could also seek to 'reform' the meaning of the norm in the light of external challenges such as new technological developments or power shifts; in other cases, the argument could be more about 'renovating' the norm, as in a return to the 'original' meaning (Wunderlich 2014, 134).

An example of such applicatory contestation is Iran's denial that its nuclear programme violates existing non-proliferation norms, and the denunciation of the sanctions as a punishment arising from unfair application of the norm during the stand-off with the international community prior to the conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, also known as 'the Iran Deal'). As an active member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime, Iran did not contest the validity of non-proliferation norms, but contested their application and the evidentiary standards and conclusions asserted by the more powerful countries (for example, the United States), as well as a large part of the international community (Moshirzadeh 2007). Within this applicatory framework, the actions of the IAEA and the UN Security Council represented reaffirmation of norms application. The imposed sanctions were a means to isolate and punish norm deviance.

Justificatory contestation and affirmation is based on the assumption that norms can be questioned in terms of their legitimacy and appropriateness. As noted by Steele (2017, 3), 'norms may not only stigmatise but also generate resistance'. *Justificatory discourses* employed in these normative conflicts are not, then, about competing meanings of these norms, but instead about their validity as such (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2013, 5). Justificatory discourses by deviant actors can be treated as 'dissident' conduct, in which prevailing normative standards are resisted and alternative normative conceptions proposed (see Daase and Deitelhoff 2014; Jacobi et al 2014). In some cases, the justificatory contestation takes the form of 'revolutionary' norm entrepreneurship, which 'aims at the overthrow of the prevailing system and the establishment of a new order that defines clear boundaries from the overthrown one' (Wunderlich 2014, 89).[14]

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[14] In other cases, actors can plainly reject the norm—see, for example, Steele's (2017) work on the embrace of torture in American public discourse.

India's rejection of the NPT as a fundamentally unfair treaty, which divides the world into two unequal classes of states, and its subsequent development of nuclear weapons, might serve as an example of justificatory contestation. Since the inception of the NPT regime, India has been contesting the legitimacy and validity of its normative structure. Yet, India's experience with sanctions following the 1974 and 1998 nuclear tests and the absence of followers demonstrate the limits of justificatory contestation in the case of deeply institutionalized norms[15]—as would also be predicted by Bloomfield (2015).

Finally, *hierarchical* contestation and affirmation assumes that actors in international politics operate in a complex normative environment containing a number of competing norms, rules, and principles that the actors refer to in their decision-making. The relative weight and position of individual norms in a broader normative hierarchy is not determined a priori but instead contested and affirmed in normative conflicts when norms are applied in practice. Deviant actors then employ *ordering discourses*, implicitly or explicitly reconstructing the relative super- and subordinate positions of norms in the international order. Thus, through ordering discourses, actors contest not the meaning or the validity of the norm, but its inferiority vis-à-vis a superior normative standard.

Hierarchical contestation is conceptually similar to the 'consistent constructivism' raised by Kurt Mills and Alan Bloomfield (2018): clashes of interest boil down to competing claims about norms precedence. The discussions concerning humanitarian intervention—whether states' sovereignty rights trump individual human rights—may serve as an example of hierarchical contestation in today's international politics, in which two norms openly clash and different states interpret differently which norm trumps the other (Wheeler 2002). For actors violating established (even institutionalized) norms, it is common to highlight conflict with other established (and also institutionalized) norms to deflect deviance-labelling attempts.

The deviance-making process and the moral boundaries of international society

Applicatory, justificatory and hierarchical contestation and affirmation clarify the 'new normal' in international order. In this section, we elaborate in more detail on the operations of these three types of contestation/affirmation as they take place across different stages of the deviance-making process.

The discursive interventions contesting and affirming international norms take place in the dialectical dynamics between the deviant actor and the social audience (or multiple audiences). In the interactionist perspective, deviance as a social phenomenon exists only if there is a social audience that interprets the given social category as deviant and labels it so. Different audiences mobilize in response to different kinds of normative transgressions, and engage in the meaning generation for the given situation.

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[15] India's partial adoption of the global non-proliferation norms, demonstrated by the country's attempts to join the very groups it used to denounce as cartels, shows that justificatory contestation may eventually weaken and turn into partial norm compliance (Lantis 2018; Hibbs 2018; Smetana 2018).

Often, deviant conduct is not merely recognized and verbally denounced by an audience, but is also subject to sanctions and disciplinary practices in answer to what the audience defines to be the transgression of the moral boundaries of social order. In the interactionist approach, this defence of the norm is the task for *rule enforcers*, typically the judicial system or law enforcement agencies (Becker 1963, 155–162). Through the institutions of social control, rule enforcers identify the instances of rule violations and apprehend and sanction the offenders.

The role of rule enforcers in international politics is usually assumed by one or more major powers that possess material resources and authority to enforce the norms and discipline the transgressor through the use of sanctions (see Wunderlich 2013, 33; Florini 1996, 375; Müller, Below, et al 2013, 316).[16] Although international society clearly lacks social control mechanisms comparable to those in domestic societies, it does possess certain institutions that monitor possible norm violations (for example, the IAEA which verifies the compliance of states with nuclear non-proliferation rules) or even impose binding sanctions on transgressors—most notably the UN Security Council with its unique authority to enforce norms concerning international peace and security (Werner 2004; 2014).

The process of deviance-labelling provides a discursive linkage that connects the deviant's transgression with specific norms that have been violated. Through *applicatory* contestation and affirmation, the rule-enforcing audience re-enacts the linkage between an action and the specific meaning of a norm and, at the same time, contests alternative meanings that would justify the deviant's behaviour. By doing so, the audience both sharpens the meaning and boundaries of the norm. Through *justificatory* contestation and affirmation, the audience reaffirms the validity of the norm and defends its legitimacy in the social order. Finally, through *hierarchical* contestation and affirmation, the audience discursively re-enacts the sub- and superordinate positions of individual norms in a way that supports the interpretation of the given conduct as deviant.

In interactionist theorizing, understanding of the dynamics of deviance-making would be incomplete without accounting for the agency of the deviant individual. Actors who are subject to labelling practices sometimes actively engage in the meaning-making process of deviance (re)construction, and strategically cope with the deviant label once their identity has been 'spoiled' in this process. One such strategy is to recognize the deviant category and take actions to 'normalize' one's identity. Some attributes are not necessarily permanent: in the event of deviant behaviour or a changeable trait, individuals may alter their behaviour or correct the problematic attribute (Mankoff 1971).

Correcting a deviant attribute is sometimes a viable option for states in a similar way as it is for individuals: the stigmatized state can cease (or conceal) 'deviant activities' and the domestic political system can change, for example, from an autocratic form of government to a pluralistic democracy (see Rumelili 2007, 38–39). Zarakol (2011) suggests that Japan, Russia, and Turkey, after their defeat in major conflicts, internalized the deviant labels ('backward' and 'inferior') imposed by the West and strategically engaged in self-correcting

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[16] Hegemons usually fulfil this role; see Hurrell (2007).

normalization policies. Japan, for instance, embraced a new pacifist constitution after 1945 and rebuilt its reputation through economic development. Russia, in the 1990s, adopted democratic reforms and a market economy. Turkey went through a process of secularization and modernization inspired by European countries.[17] Normalization, then, reaffirms the 'normal' interpretation of the meaning of the norm, reinforces its validity and re-enacts the linkages between norms in the broader normative hierarchy. As such, normalization is a strategy of *applicatory*, *justificatory* and *hierarchical* affirmation, contributing to the stability and reproduction of international order.

Actors can also discursively recognize the validity of the norm, but simultaneously deny that the specific attribute or behaviour represents a norm violation. In this, the alleged transgressors engage in *applicatory* contestation of the meaning of the norm in favour of an alternative meaning that would make their conduct normatively appropriate. This strategy can lead to a more detailed specification of the rules of social order that would clarify the contested meanings and prevent future 'misunderstandings'. Adler-Nissen (2014b, 160–165) observed this dynamic in Austria after the far-right Freedom Party of Austria entered government in 2000, highlighting the subsequent European Union (EU) attempts to specify the boundaries between normal and the deviant behaviour in the 2009 Lisbon Treaty.

The alleged deviant can also recognize the transgression but reject the normative legitimacy of the violated norm. The actor engages in *justificatory* contestation of the norm's validity, challenging, de-normalizing and delegitimizing prevalent normative beliefs, in favour of alternative normative conceptions that are constructed as 'more just' (see Crawford 2004, 101–103). As Martha Finnemore (2005, 197) notes, 'an argument that says, "I won't play by the rules" is a political loser. It is much more palatable and effective politically to fight rules with rules and argue, "I am playing by the rules; they just aren't your rules, and your rules are wrong."' The transgressions are also sometimes framed as explicit contestations of an illegitimate or obsolete norm that should be no longer part of the social order. In some areas of international law, this form of 'operational noncompliance' is one of the pathways in the development of common rules. For example, violations of sovereignty on the high seas eventually led to an alteration of the law of the sea, which better accounted for the interests of coastal states (Cogan 2006, 197–199).

Finally, the actors also frequently engage in the practices of neutralization as a strategy 'to justify or excuse one's own rule-violating behaviour' (Conyers and Calhoun 2015, 270). Both individuals (Sykes and Matza 1957) and states (Shannon 2000; Crawford 2004) tend to provide verbal justifications for their transgressive conduct. To neutralize feelings of guilt and shame, reduce cognitive dissonance and limit the impact of norm violation on one's public image, deviant actors frequently justify the norm-breaking conduct with reference to superior norms, rules or principles that have preference in the given situation. Through such 'appeal to higher loyalties' (Sykes and Matza 1957), actors (implicitly or explicitly) engage in a form of *hierarchical* contestation,

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[17] Such changes are not necessarily enduring, and countries may return to their earlier 'deviant' practices (this time, however, glorifying them). We thank a reviewer for highlighting this point.

discursively reconstructing the relative positioning of individual norms in the broader normative hierarchy.

Conclusion

Our aim in this article was to unpack the relationship between deviance and normative change in international affairs. We approached this with the argument that, in order to understand 'appropriate', norm-following behaviour in international politics, we need to observe 'inappropriate' behaviour that conflicts with the norm. In IR, this is still largely uncharted territory. We already know a great deal about how norms change, yet we know much less about the actual role that norm violations play in this process.

In order to fill this gap, it is worth bringing the 'outsiders' of international politics to the forefront of norm dynamics research. Drawing on interactionist insights and discursive approaches to norm contestation and change, we introduced three dimensions of the process of deviance (re)construction which influence the normative stasis and change in the international realm: (1) *applicatory* contestation and affirmation, reaffirming the meanings of norms through applicatory discourses; (2) *justificatory* contestation and affirmation, challenging and reaffirming the legitimacy of norms through justificatory discourses; and (3) *hierarchical* contestation and affirmation, contesting and reaffirming the relative value and importance of competing norms through ordering discourses.

Throughout the article, we provided illustrative empirical examples for these dynamics and reviewed some of the existing attempts to apply interactionist insights in IR. More empirical research is needed to understand the complexity of deviance-making in world politics. In the remaining part, we highlight three promising avenues that could further advance IR research on deviance and international norms.

First, interactionist scholars frequently observe that although deviance (re)construction is usually charged with moral arguments, the overall process is, in its nature, highly political and power-laden. While communicative action is still a necessary part of the meaning-negotiation process, and the way the arguments are presented and framed *does* matter, the successful construction of deviant categories relies on power configurations in the social order and contributes to its social stratification (see Adler and Adler 2006, 133; Schur 1980, 6–7; Link and Phelan 2001). This observation allows deviance researchers to engage with the broader debates about norms, power and social hierarchies in the international order (Barnett and Duvall 2005; Guzzini 2005; Towns 2012; Zarakol 2014; Bially-Mattern and Zarakol 2016).

Second, under the behavioural revolution in social sciences (Hafner-Burton et al 2017), scholars started to study emotions in the research of international norm dynamics. The 'sentimental' approaches to norm research (Widmaier and Park 2012) highlight strong emotional reactions connected with violations of internalized norms, as well as the absence of emotional reactions when the norms had not been fully internalized (see Mercer 2006, 298–299; Crawford 2000, 154). Non-IR researchers in cognition have likewise observed feelings of disgust, fear, anger, and contempt in response to violations of social norms (Keltner and Haidt 1999; Smith 2007). Bruce Link et al (2004) recently included emotional reactions among the main components of the stigmatization process

(see Yang et al 2007). With the flourishing IR literature on emotions (for example, Crawford 2000; Mercer 2006; Ross 2006; Sasley 2010; Jeffery 2011; Hutchison and Bleiker 2014; Renshon et al 2017), there is a potential to devise research designs that will include emotions in the study of normative deviance.

Finally, worth exploring is Adler-Nissen's (2014b, 162) observation that the constructions of stigma are recognizable not merely in macro-level social practices, that they also frequently become embodied in various micro-practices of social interaction. The focus on micro-practices of deviance (re)construction could be a great addition to the IR literature on micro-level hierarchies in diplomatic interaction (Pouliot 2016b; 2016a). Arguably, micro-studies of diplomatic interactions could shed further light on the process in which the deviant categories are continuously re-enacted and embodied in specific discourses and practices of individual diplomatic representatives of states in world politics.

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