

EXPLORING NORMATIVE PLURALISM A TRANS-DISCIPLINARY RESEARCH VENTURE OF THE FINNISH CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE RESEARCH

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Normative pluralism is everywhere we go. To provide a few simple examples: a law-abiding citizen might normally stop when faced by a 'don't walk' signal, but common sense would suggest an alternative course of action if running across the street could save someone's life without endangering the lives of others. Here normative pluralism manifests itself in the choice between legality and legitimacy. Or consider a businessman who operates in an Arab state: he or she would surely not succeed in making deals without adherence to important cultural and religious norms of the Islamic value system. In Africa, he or she is likely to invoke allegations of cultural hubris, if he/she decided to disregard 'common sense anthropology', that is, sensitivity to the set of local customs and traditions. And the soldier on the battlefield may have to choose between the dictates of international law and the instructive traditions of his or her unit. It is clear from these examples that normative pluralism is something that complicates our lives, but also rewards those who are sensitive to it. Actors constantly make choices between, and also unconsciously or unintentionally simply adhere to, different sets of legal, moral, cultural, religious and bureaucratic norms.

Solving the puzzle of normative pluralism requires a pluralist approach. A sufficient understanding of the multiple normative systems governing human choices and behavior would be impossible without the participation of a wide range of researchers who have expertise in each of these value systems: anthropologists, legal theorists, theologians, sociologists, historians and researchers of international relations. They all have a privileged access to the *savoir-faire* of their particular field of research, but individually they usually lack explanation for those social phenomena in which one value system converges or comes into a collision course with another value system that is beyond their immediate expertise. The latter task requires a combination of researchers working together, that is, a pluralist platform of research. The Finnish Academy-funded Centre of Excellence in Global Governance Research (CoE) at the University of Helsinki provides an excellent platform to conduct that type of research, as it already combines experts from all of the aforementioned fields. Normative pluralism therefore seemed a natural research topic for the CoE, and a collective project was launched by the Centre in 2008 with the aim of studying interaction between various norms emanating from different authorities, such as legal, quasi-legal, cultural, moral and religious. The questions put forward in the group are whether there is a hierarchy between these normative orders in different cases, and what can be done to accommodate these different orders and authorities in cases of conflict.

The agenda of the working group has been as pluralistic as its research object: the group, composed of researchers of the CoE and invited outside experts, has already debated a variety of cases such as the relationship between the jurisdiction of modern nation-states and the application of *shari'a* in local and international contexts. The group has been open to outside research and experts in the field, responding to these by inviting both visiting



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researchers, including William Twining and John Bowen, as well as practitioners from Finnish Government offices to join discussions. The working group will be an integral part of the CoE's undertakings during its next three-year period of functioning and welcomes input from scholars working in the field globally. It is obvious that normative pluralism poses a significant challenge to globalisation and should be a major concern of any research institution that studies globalisation. Technological and economic unification through globalisation has been coupled with a similarly powerful but opposite move in the cultural side towards normative pluralism: the 'shrinking of the globe' has often generated cultural and normative fragmentation, not unification.

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