



SCHOOL FOR
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

The Social Dynamics of Civil War: Insights from Constructivist Theory

Jeffrey T. Checkel



Simons Papers in Security and Development

No. 10/2011 | March 2011

The **Simons Papers in Security and Development** are edited and published at the School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University. The papers serve to disseminate research work in progress by the School's faculty and associated and visiting scholars. Our aim is to encourage the exchange of ideas and academic debate. Inclusion of a paper in the series should not limit subsequent publication in any other venue. All papers can be downloaded free of charge from our website, www.sfu.ca/internationalstudies.

The series is supported in part by The Simons Foundation.

Series editor: Jeffrey T. Checkel

Managing editor: Martha Snodgrass

Checkel, Jeffrey T., *The Social Dynamics of Civil War: Insights from Constructivist Theory*, Simons Papers in Security and Development, No. 11/2011, School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, March 2011.

ISSN 1922-5725

Copyright remains with the author. Reproduction for other purposes than personal research, whether in hard copy or electronically, requires the consent of the author(s). If cited or quoted, reference should be made to the full name of the author(s), the title, the working paper number and year, and the publisher.

Copyright for this issue: Jeffrey Checkel, jtcheckel(at)sfu.ca.

School for International Studies
Simon Fraser University
Suite 7200 - 515 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, BC Canada V6B 5K3



The Social Dynamics of Civil War: Insights from Constructivist Theory

Simons Papers in Security and Development
No. 11/2011 | March 2011

Abstract:

With roots in sociology, anthropology and political theory, constructivism has made many inroads in contemporary political science. It has provided new insights on agency (as socially embedded), institutions (as community builders), an array of group processes (socialization, social influence, persuasion, deliberation) and power relations (social and discursive). More important, it has applied such insights empirically, thus also addressing all-important issues of data and method. After briefly reviewing this work, I suggest several ways in which it can help us better understand the social dynamics of civil war. Yet, this should not be a one way street. Constructivists also have much to learn – in theorizing violence, ‘nasty’ socialization, and, more generally, the dark side of politics.

About the author:

Jeffrey T. Checkel is Professor of International Studies and Simons Chair in International Law and Human Security. In addition he is Research Professor, Centre for the Study of Civil War, Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO). Checkel is the author of *Ideas and International Political Change: Soviet/Russian Behavior and the End of the Cold War* (Yale University Press), editor of *International Institutions and Socialization in Europe* (Cambridge University Press), and co-editor (with Peter J. Katzenstein) of *European Identity* (Cambridge University Press). His current research focuses on the transnational and social dynamics of civil war.

About the publisher:

The School for International Studies (SIS) fosters innovative interdisciplinary research and teaching programs concerned with a range of global issues, but with a particular emphasis on international development, and on global governance and security. The School aims to link theory, practice and engagement with other societies and cultures, while offering students a challenging and multi-faceted learning experience. SIS is located within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Simon Fraser University. Our website is www.sfu.ca/internationalstudies.

The Social Dynamics of Civil War – Insights from Constructivist Theory

Over a decade ago, I assessed efforts to bring insights from sociology, social psychology, anthropology and political theory to bear on central questions in international relations (IR). This “constructivist turn,” as I called it, brought a breath of fresh air to the subfield, pushing it to problematize both its predominant materialist ontology and preferred – instrumentally rational – theory of social action that emphasized a logic of consequences (Checkel 1998; see also March and Olsen 1998, 949-50). As a result, IR had broadened its repertoire of causal mechanisms to capture an array of social dynamics – norms, discourses, identity, social networks, narratives – and their ability to shape politics (Adler 2002).

Students of civil war, arguably, need no such turn. While much work still has roots in political economy (Blattman and Miguel 2010, for an excellent review), a number of scholars have theorized and empirically documented social processes similar to the IR constructivists (Tarrow 2007). At the same time, there are findings and approaches in constructivism that have not figured prominently in the civil-war research program.

This mixed picture leads me to structure the memo as follows. I begin by defining constructivism, including both its positivist and post-positivist versions. Next, the essay suggests several ways in which constructivist theorizing can shed light on the social dynamics of violent conflict. This should not be a one way street, however; constructivists also have much to learn – in theorizing violence, ‘nasty’ socialization, and, more generally, the dark side of politics. I conclude by highlighting several lessons that flow from the application of constructivism.

Constructivist Theory – Two Flavours

Over the past 15 years, constructivism has become trendy. Its core concepts – deliberation, discourses, norms, persuasion, identity, socialization, arguing – are now invoked frequently in debates over globalisation, international human rights, security policy and more. To make better sense of these terms – and the very different ways in which they are employed – I distinguish between North American and European variants of constructivism.

Before discussing such differences, however, it is important first to highlight what unites all constructivists. Simply put, constructivists see the world as socially constructed. Socially means they give greater weight to the social – as opposed to the material – in world politics. Consider the ultimate material capability – nuclear weapons. Constructivists would argue that it is not so much the brute fact of their existence that matters; rather, it is the social context that gives meaning to that capability. Hence, British possession of (many) nuclear weapons matters not at all to America for they are interpreted through a social context of friendship. In contrast, North Korean or Iranian possession of even one such weapon is viewed with deep alarm given the social context of enmity prevailing in these relationships (see also Wendt 1995, 73-74).

Constructed means that constructivists understand the world as coming into being through a process of interaction between agents (individuals, states, non-state actors) and the structures of their broader environment – for example, social norms. More formally, there is a process of mutual constitution between agents and structures (Adler 2002, 95). Thus, instead of just assuming that a particular agent has certain interests, constructivists explore how those interests are constructed through a process of interaction with broader environments.

This broader context may be defined by social norms or social discourses. With norms, the theory of action linking individual and environment is the logic of appropriateness, where action involves evoking an identity or role and matching the obligations of that identity or role to a specific situation (March and Olsen 1998, 951-52). For discourses, it is a logic of the everyday, of practice and habit, where action is guided by memories of what has been done and what has and has not worked before. Habits imply actions by giving us ready-made responses to the world that we execute without thinking (Hopf 2010, 541).

Beyond this common starting point, however, constructivists begin to diverge. The North American variant, which is heavily dominated by US scholars, examines the role of social norms – shared understandings with a quality of oughtness – and, in fewer cases, identity – who we are – in shaping international and foreign-policy outcomes. These scholars are positivists and thus committed to uncovering top-down/deductive mechanisms and causal relationships among actors, norms, interests and identity. In the literature, they are often referred to as conventional

constructivists – conventional in the sense that they start from a standard (for the US) positivist view of how we should do social science.

The European variant of constructivism – often labelled post-positivist or interpretive – explores the role of language in mediating and constructing social reality. This role is not explanatory in the sense that A causes B. Rather, interpretive constructivism asks how possible questions. In other words, instead of examining what factors caused aspects of a state's identity to change – as would the conventional mainstream – interpretative constructivists would explore the background conditions and linguistic constructions (social discourses) that made any such change possible in the first place.

Put differently, interpretative constructivists are committed to a deeply inductive, bottom up research strategy that seeks to reconstruct agent identity, with the methods encompassing a variety of linguistic techniques. Consider Hopf's study of the relation between identity and changes in Soviet/Russian foreign policy in 1955 and 1999. He begins not with some hypothesis or theory about what causes that policy to change, as would conventional constructivists (Checkel 1997). Rather, Hopf seeks to uncover Soviet-Russian identity as it emerges from a variety of texts, ranging from novels to the minutes of Politburo meetings; as such, his methods are textual and narrative. These identities set broad limits on Soviet/Russian foreign-policy choices (Hopf 2002). For Hopf, then, foreign policy is made possible through these linguistic constructions; it does not result from one or more causal factors (see also Hopf nd).

The Difference Constructivism Has Made (IR) and Could Make (Civil War)

Constructivism has made a difference precisely because it has not remained at the abstract, conceptual level of the preceding section. Over the past 15 years, constructivists – whatever their epistemological starting point, have demonstrated the empirical value added of the approach, bringing their pristine social theory down to the empirical mud, as it were. In what follows, I review this value added in three areas: the nature of agents, institutions, and group processes. Within each, I start with the IR findings, and then suggest possible extensions to civil war.

Constructivism and Agents. A focus on agents per se is nothing new for political science or the international-relations subfield. From elite theories of domestic politics to psychological approaches in IR, the role of the individual has always – albeit with some variation over time – been theorized. However, constructivism moves us from an atomized view of individuals with given priors to an appreciation of the social embeddedness of all agents. In turn, this social context can shape core agent properties. How, though, does this happen? For some constructivists, it is a story of boundedly rational individuals (note – not instrumentally rational) taking cues from their social environment that then lead them to enact certain roles; this is the underlying dynamic in March and Olsen’s (1998) logic of appropriateness. IR scholars along with Europeanists have empirically documented such (social-structurally-induced) role playing in a number of different contexts, for example, in the Council of the European Union (Beyers 2005).

Other constructivists operationalize the social embeddedness of agents by exploring the causal role of language in shaping their interests and identities. In particular, they have theorized the roles of persuasion (Johnston 2001, 2008 – drawing upon social psychology and communications research) and arguing (Risse 2000; Lynch 2002 – drawing upon Habermas’ theory of communicative action; Schimmelfennig 2001 – drawing upon Riker’s notion of heresthetics) as linguistic mechanisms shaping agents. We now have a number of empirical studies documenting such dynamics and – all important – their scope conditions. For example, with work on persuasion, insulated and de-politicized settings seem key in allowing persuasive appeals to have causal effect (Johnston 2008; Checkel 2001, 2003).

For interpretive constructivists, the social embeddedness of agents becomes complete, in the sense that their identities and interests are constituted – made possible in the first place – by their (social) structural environment, with the latter typically operationalized as discourses. If such work could once be criticized as being too much social theory and not enough social science, this is no longer true. Indeed, one sees increasing attention to method (Milliken 1999; Hansen 2006; Neumann 2008) and a recognition of the ultimately underspecified nature of discursive arguments (discourse, after all, is a structural variable).

The result has been an operational turn in discourse studies with scholars thinking hard about data issues such as replicability and selection (Hopf 2007), and how discourse must be combined with other factors to explain fully particular outcomes. Thus, Hopf (nd), in explaining Soviet foreign-policy choices during the early Cold War years, argues that a central role was played by identity discourses embedded in particular institutions.¹

Extension to Civil War? Leading scholars in the civil-war research program have now endorsed the view that identity change is often endogenous to conflict. Identities may harden or soften (Kalyvas 2008), or may (at least in part) become other-regarding instead of self interested (Wood 2003, ch.1). It is quite possible this change may reflect a strategic calculation and conscious choice (see also Laitin 1998); however, identities may also change via the social dynamics sketched above. When an insurgent becomes more other-regarding during the course of a conflict is this a reflection of his/her identity being shaped by broader societal discourses? If so, it might be useful to draw upon Hopf's (nd, ch.1) 'bringing society back in' approach to identity change.

What about the social dynamics within rebel groups, dynamics that may change the identities and interests of new recruits? For sure, nothing social may be at work, as recruits simply adapt their behaviour in the face of coercion or in response to material or other incentives (Gates 2002; Weinstein 2007). At the same time, however, as scholars disaggregate and look inside rebel groups, we are uncovering evidence of much more social processes, including peer pressure and indoctrination (Blattman 2007; Annan, *et al* 2009; Staniland 2010) and socialization (see below). Indeed, for certain kinds of rebel groups – those headed by charismatic leaders; those with an ideological mission – one might expect acts of persuasion to play a central role in shaping recruits' interests/identities.² And, here, the empirical work of some constructivists has much to offer on the data sources (interviews; memoirs; secondary accounts) and methods (triangulation; checking for audience effects; process tracing) needed to document persuasion's causal effect (Johnston 2001, 2008; Checkel 2008).

¹ For a similar argument in the early ideational literature, see Sikkink 1991.

² Thanks to Lars-Erik Cederman for discussions on this point.

Constructivism and Institutions. The new institutionalism has been a focus in political science for over two decades (March and Olsen 1984), where it has become conventional practice to distinguish among rational choice, historical and sociological forms of institutional analysis (Hall and Taylor 1996). Constructivists have played a key role in developing the latter, sociological variant. At first, these scholars were heavily influenced by the sociological institutionalism of John Meyer and colleagues at Stanford (Finnemore 1996a, b), with its problematic emphasis – from a process perspective – on establishing macro-correlations.

However, the last decade has seen a sustained move by constructivists to connect institutions to social actors through a number of causal mechanisms, including norm diffusion (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Price 1998; Risse, Ropp, Sikkink 1999), socialization (Checkel 2007) and the creation of background social knowledge (Hopf nd). In this work, institutions are viewed as having both regulative and constitutive effects. The former views them as providing information and creating incentives; it is the dominant perspective in rational-choice institutionalism and much of historical institutionalism as well. The latter – which is the constructivist value added – views institutions as creators of social reality and community builders. What, though, does this mean?

To view institutions as community builders is to argue they are social environments, where actors exit differently than they enter; their identities and interests are thus endogenous to interaction (Johnston 2001). Constructivists have documented such dynamics mainly at the international level, including studies of NATO and China's growing interaction with international institutions (Risse-Kappen 1995; Gheciu 2005; Johnston 2008). When individuals meet repeatedly within such organisations, do they – under certain conditions – rethink their preferences in situations where the material costs might be high – for example, on citizenship policy at a time when state identity is threatened by immigrant flows (Lewis 2005).

The claim that institutions can create social reality may sound exotic, but it is not. It is simply to say they can fix meanings in ways that orient action and establish boundaries for acceptable behaviour. Thus, one constructivist study documented the role international institutions have played in shaping contemporary understandings of development and

international refugee law (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, chs.2, 4). In doing so, they created social realities that were not what their member states originally envisioned.

Extension to Civil War? Much of the institutional analysis by students of civil war builds on insights from rational-choice institutionalism – from Weinstein’s (2007, ch.1) invocation of the new economics of organization to model the (instrumentally rational) behaviour of rebel groups, to studies of post-conflict settings where institutions create incentives and structure behaviour (Lake 2007), to Salehyan’s (2009, ch.1) analysis of transnational rebel groups where borders are viewed as institutions constraining behaviour. What is wrong with this work? Nothing! Rather, the question is what – if anything – is lost by failing to explore the deeper, constitutive role of institutions. In fact, constructivist work on an issue of central concern to scholars of civil war – international intervention in conflict/post-conflict settings – suggests something is indeed lost.

In a study of the Rwandan civil war and subsequent genocide, Barnett and Finnemore document how international institutions played a central and deeply troubling role in the conflict. In chilling detail, they reconstruct how the United Nations Secretariat – and not just Security Council members – took clear, unambiguous evidence that genocide was imminent in Rwanda in 1993-94 and ignored it. The culture in the UN was such that a social reality was created that led to defining the situation in Rwanda as a civil war where the UN was powerless to intervene (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, ch.5). The account has a particularly true ring as Barnett was essentially a participant observer, being a scholar-in-residence at the UN Secretariat during the Rwandan events (Barnett 2002).

In a second example, Autesserre explores the international community’s attempted peace building in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2003. In a richly detailed account, she argues this failed intervention was not a function of poorly designed institutions that created perverse incentives. Rather, it resulted from a social construction – one that shaped international intervention and precluded effective action on local violence. Drawing upon frame analysis in sociology and constructivism, Autesserre shows how international institutions had constructed

roles and interpreted objects on the ground in Congo in a way that doomed their efforts (Autesserre 2009, 2010).³

As these examples suggest, constructivism can add value. And doing so is nothing terribly exotic in research terms. For the authors, a key methodological question is how they would recognize a social construction if it were to walk through the door. Their answer relies on a standard social-science tool kit, including the theorization of causal mechanisms (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, ch.2); the consideration of alternative explanations (Autesserre 2009, 272-75); a theoretically driven reconstruction of historical processes – process tracing, in the jargon (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, *passim*); and interviews (Autesserre 2009, 251).⁴ For sure, there are post-positivist methods in evidence as well – interpretation and ethnography, most importantly. However, this is done in an operational and empirically grounded way that blurs the supposed sharp distinction between positivism and its competitors. With Autesserre, for example, richly detailed ethnography provides data for an overarching causal argument (Autesserre 2009; see also Wood 2003; Hopf 2007; Schatz 2009).

Constructivism and Group Processes. Sociologists have known for a long time that groups are powerful social institutions, with an ability to shape individuals and collective outcomes. A key way they modelled the group was to think in terms of socialization: the process of inducting new members into the norms and rules of a given community, the endpoint of which is internalization. With the latter, pro-group behaviour no longer reflects conscious calculation; it becomes taken for granted. Building upon such insights, an extensive literature developed in the 1960s and 1970s on various arenas of possible national-level socialization, including militaries, schools and churches (Checkel 2007, ch.1, for background and definitions).

The constructivist value added has been to extend such thinking to the system level, arguing that socialization could occur for a given international community as well. For the past decade, this focus has been central for constructivists based in North America and especially in the US. To the non-IR specialist, this emphasis might seem odd; however, it is readily explained

³ For a similar argument applied to the international intervention in the Bosnian civil war, see Carpenter 2003.

⁴ If interviewees lie and strategically dissimulate, a constructivist will view such behavior as additional evidence allowing for the interpretive reconstruction of an agent's life world. Fujii 2010. See also Wood 2003, 33-40.

in terms of disciplinary politics. In the paradigm battles with realism and neo-liberal institutionalism, socialization was a trump card for constructivists, as both competitors essentially ignored such group dynamics (Johnston 2001).

Whatever the original motivation, constructivist scholars have developed an extensive socialization research program. At first, the goal was to establish that socialization mattered. This led to designs that showed how a particular state-level outcome was the result of international socialization and not – say – power differentials or instrumental calculation, with an emphasis on establishing correlations. That is, one first documented participation in the group/institution at $t = 0$, and then noted the subsequent adoption of group norms at $t = 1$. One might show, for example, efforts by UNESCO to promote national science bureaucracies, with this followed by state-level adoption in the absence of any obvious need for them (Finnemore 1996a).

More recently, the focus has shifted to how socialization occurs. In turn, this led to unpacking the concept in three ways. First, researchers came to recognize that socialization was indeed a process, and that it might therefore be useful to theorize points in it prior to full internalization. In a project on socialization and European institutions, for example, a distinction was made between type I and II socialization. With the former, an agent exhibits pro-group behaviour by learning a role – acquiring the knowledge that enables him/her to act in accordance with expectations – irrespective of whether he/she likes the role or agrees with it. Appropriate group behaviour, then, means simply that conscious instrumental calculation has been replaced by conscious role playing. In contrast, type II socialization is deeper and more thorough going. An agent accepts group norms as the right thing to do; he/she adopts the interests or even possibly identity of the community of which he/she is a part. Conscious instrumental calculation has now been replaced by taken for grantedness or full internalization (Checkel 2007, *passim*).

Second, moving beyond correlations, scholars have begun to theorize the causal mechanisms that result in socializing outcomes. These include persuasion and social influence (Johnston 2001, 2008); social learning (Price 1998; Checkel 2001); role playing (Beyers 2005); and instrumental calculation (Hooghe 2001, ch.1; Schimmelfennig 2005). This has not only resulted in a number of rigorously executed empirical studies, but promoted a long overdue

conversation between opposing social theories. If instrumental calculation is a part of socialization, where does rational choice stop and social construction begin?⁵

Third, despite group pressures, we have abundant evidence that socialization often fails. This has led constructivists to theorize their arguments' scope conditions: under what conditions is the likelihood of socialization increased? Key conditions include age (young is good, but not too young – there appears to be an inflection point), cognitive priors ('blank minds' are easier to socialize), status of the socializer, intensity of the interaction, and quality of the interaction (interactive back and forth is better than lecturing or hectoring) (Johnston 2005; Checkel 2007, chs.1, 8; see also Cohen 2007).

While these advances are welcome, there are clearly issues requiring further thought. For one, why is socialization always so 'nice'? Look again at the causal mechanisms adduced above; they are all, well, so soft – calm social interaction, deliberation, learning. In addition – and likely related – much of this constructivist work is premised on the presence of strong, functioning and legitimate institutions. Part of the explanation for these biases is that many constructivists are good old fashion liberals in the IR sense, which means they have a broadly optimistic view of global politics. However, equally relevant is a selection effect in their choice of empirical case material, too much of which comes from contemporary (western) Europe where institutions are functional, broadly legitimate and omnipresent.

Extension to Civil War? What extension? Indeed, socialization arguments are already present in work on civil war. Autesserre's research on international interventions and framing is in one important sense a claim about socialization: Certain taken-for-granted understandings of how to resolve conflict locally are so deeply embedded that they are never questioned (Autesserre 2009, 2010). More important, scholars such as Wood, Cohen, Lynch, and Hoover Green have explicitly theorized the concept. This came about as they examined a central actor in civil war – rebel groups – and asked what makes them tick. Given the group focus, it is not surprising that socialization dynamics then got considerable attention.

⁵ See also Schimmelfennig (2001) on rhetorical action, or the strategic use of norms and arguments.

For an IR constructivist, it is interesting to see these scholars theorizing the same term – socialization – but in quite a different way. Drawing upon insights from the military socialization literature, their arguments have a decidedly harder edge. Thus, Cohen, in her work on sexual violence and rebel groups, emphasizes what she calls combat socialization (Cohen 2007). In a similar fashion, Hoover Green (2010) and Wood (2010, 308-310) discuss combatant socialization as an important way in which the group over-rides/alters individual preferences. Here, the specific socialization mechanisms include (political) education and indoctrination, humiliation/abuse/hazing, and degradation/rebirth. Lynch (2008), drawing upon social psychology and genocide studies, offers a comparable roster of mechanisms.

One thus sees two sets of scholars (IR constructivists, students of civil war) theorizing the same core concept of socialization with little cross referencing or mutual learning. Constructivists could clearly gain from such an exchange, for example, by theorizing a more complete roster of socialization mechanisms. Likewise, civil war researchers could benefit from constructivist work on disaggregating socialization and on the conditions for when it fails.⁶

The Constructivist Turn at 15 – New and Improved

Constructivists in political science have been theorizing and empirically documenting various social dynamics for the better part of 15 years. What have they learned? In particular, are there traps to be avoided or gaps and omissions to be rectified? Below, I suggest four lessons, at the levels of theory and method.

Lesson #1: Evil is also a Social Construction. As already noted, constructivists have often shied from theorizing the dark side of politics, be it group dynamics that result not in deliberation but violence, or transnational relations defined not by civil society NGOs but by violent cross-border mobilization (Salehyan 2009; Checkel nd). By utilizing new literatures – for example, on military socialization – students of civil war have already begun to correct this state of affairs.

⁶ The overall weakness of socialization at the international level likely explains why IR scholars have been more attentive to the conditions under which it fails. Checkel 2007, chs. 7, 8.

Yet, more could still be done. On rebel groups, work on urban gangs or criminal networks (see also Gates 2002) might be relevant as such units face the same challenge of moulding the individual to the group, where the desired outcome is some level of controlled violence. On the discursive context of action, the work of interpretive constructivists offers important insights. In particular, these scholars focus on the ability of dominant discourses to discipline (and thus harm); they also typically view identity relations in more conflictual terms (Neumann 1999; Hopf 2002, ch.1).

Lesson #2: Social Construction Ain't the Whole Story. When developing any theoretical argument, it is all too easy to overlook other variables that may be at work. While early constructivist work was equally guilty of this sin, more recent efforts have sought to overcome it by developing integrated analytic frameworks that combine elements of social construction with other variables. Thus, in seeking to explain how identity discourses shape great power behaviour, Hopf (nd) integrates discourse with an historical institutionalist emphasis on how institutions can be powerful promoters for particular ideas. In a similar fashion, Pouliot explains Russian policy towards NATO by integrating discourse with practice (Pouliot 2010). In explaining why states may abide by international norms, Risse and collaborators develop a synthetic, sequenced argument on socialization that combines social construction with instrumental action (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999; see also Checkel 2007, *passim*).⁷

Such approaches are part of a broader move towards theoretical bridge building. This involves up-front attention to how different theories might be combined – domains of application? sequencing? – and has been endorsed by prominent rational choice and constructivist theorists (Fearon and Wendt 2002). Instead of addressing such questions indirectly at later points in the research process (by considering alternative explanations or thinking in terms of counterfactuals), bridge-builders consider them directly and as part of their basic research design.

While the verdict is still out on the pluses and minuses of these efforts, they clearly have generated better (in the sense of more complete) arguments on a range of global actors –

⁷ More generally, see Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, 910-12) on strategic social construction.

including NGOs and international institutions (Checkel 2010). Those civil war scholars who theorize both the instrumental and socially constructed (Hoover Green 2010; Wood 2010), as well as those who explore the relation between instrumental manipulation and emotions (Petersen and Zukerman 2010; Staniland 2010) would seem well placed to contribute to such debates, demonstrating the benefits of theoretical pluralism at the domestic level as well.

Taken together, my first two lessons suggest a more general point. Our theories on social dynamics – applied to civil war or elsewhere – will be incomplete without consideration of standard variables such as institutions, interest, and power.

Lesson #3: Taking Theory Seriously. Over the past decade, constructivists have made a concerted effort to develop theories that are both better specified and closer to reality in that they do not rely on ‘as if’ assumptions. One result has been to think theoretically in terms of causal mechanisms. Many in the civil war research program (Sambanis 2004; Kalyvas 2006), as well as those specifically interested in its social dynamics (Cohen 2007; Lynch 2008; Wood 2003, 2008, 2010) have made a similar move.

Often, the reaction to such efforts is some version of ‘hooray – finally, theories that capture and explain the world as it really is.’ Yet, what kind of theory results? After all, a roster of causal mechanisms is not the same as a theory with some level of generalisability (see also Gates 2008). One way to address this problem is straight forward and involves encouraging communication across subfield lines. Thus, constructivists and civil war scholars working on socialization really need to compare notes and explore possible synergies in their efforts.

Unfortunately, this will not resolve the underlying problem, which is one of theoretical cumulation. Many who theorize mechanisms claim their work results in mid-range theory. However, more often than not, the claim ends with that phrase. What does it really mean? How do we develop multi-causal arguments – for that is the essence of middle-range approaches (George 1993) – without simultaneously producing over-determined outcomes? Can such approaches combine elements of interpretism (textual analysis) with positivism (causal process tracing) in one overall design (Hopf 2002)? Or is that to mix apples and oranges? Sadly, even

leading proponents of a move to mechanism-based thinking in contemporary political science are silent on these scores (Katzenstein and Sil 2010a, b).

Lesson #4: It's the Process (Tracing), Stupid! To speak about social dynamics is ultimately to theorize and measure process. Depending upon a scholar's philosophical starting point, the measurement challenge may be one of capturing how discursive structures constitute and reshape identity, or measuring how a particular socialization mechanism causes a change in agent preferences. For many constructivists, the methodological answer to such measurement queries is to employ – or better said invoke – process tracing.

However, beyond a sense of historical reconstruction, it is often unclear what researchers mean by the term, which in fact has been articulated quite clearly (Hall 2002; Bennett and George 2005, ch.10; Bennett 2008; Checkel 2008). This work links process tracing to the theoretically driven specification of causal mechanisms, suggests specific strategies for answering the question of how much is enough (that is, when to stop the process tracing), and highlights the design challenges of dealing with equifinality (where the outcome may be the result of multiple causal pathways). By addressing such issues, researchers interested in the social dynamics of civil war can maximize the likelihood they employ the technique in an operational and systematic manner, and not fall prey to the 'buzz phrase' problem.

References

- Adler, Emanuel. 2002. "Constructivism and International Relations." In Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, Beth Simmons, Eds. *Handbook of International Relations*. London: Sage Publications.
- Annan, Jeannie, Christopher Blattman, Dyan Mazurana, Khristopher Carlson. 2009. "Women and Girls at War: 'Wives,' Mothers and Fighters in the Lord's Resistance Army." Mimeo. New Haven, CT: Department of Political Science, Yale University (October).
- Autesserre, Severine. 2009. "Hobbes and the Congo: Frames, Local Violence and International Intervention." *International Organization* 63/2: 249-80.
- , 2010. *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*. NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Barnett, Michael. 2002. *Eyewitness to a Genocide: The United Nations and Rwanda*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Barnett, Michael and Martha Finnemore. 2004. *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Bennett, Andrew. 2008. "Process Tracing: A Bayesian Approach." In Janet Box-Steffensmeier, Henry Brady and David Collier, Eds. *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bennett, Andrew and Alexander George. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Beyers, Jan. 2005. "Multiple Embeddedness and Socialization in Europe: The Case of Council Officials." *International Organization* 59/4: 899-936.
- Blattman, Christopher. 2007. "The Causes of Child Soldiering: Theory and Evidence from Northern Uganda." Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Chicago, IL (March).
- Blattman, Christopher and Edward Miguel. 2010. "Civil War." *Journal of Economic Literature* 48/1: 3-57.
- Carpenter, R. Charli. 2003. "'Women and Children First': Gender, Norms and Humanitarian Intervention in the Balkans, 1991-95." *International Organization* 57/4: 661-94.
- Checkel, Jeffrey T. 1997. *Ideas and International Political Change: Soviet/Russian Behavior and the End of the Cold War*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- , 1998. "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory (A Review Essay)." *World Politics* 50/2 (January).

- , 2001. "Why Comply? Social Learning and European Identity Change." *International Organization* 55/3: 553-88.
- , 2003. "'Going Native' in Europe? Theorizing Social Interaction in European Institutions." *Comparative Political Studies* 36/1-2: 209-31.
- , 2008. "Process Tracing." In Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash, Eds. *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- , 2010. "Theoretical Synthesis in IR: Possibilities and Limits." *Simons Papers in Security and Development*, No. 6. Vancouver, BC: School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University (September).
- Checkel, Jeffrey T. Ed. 2007. *International Institutions and Socialization in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- , ND. *Mobilizing across Borders: Transnational Dynamics of Civil War*. Unpublished manuscript. Vancouver, BC: School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University.
- Cohen, Dara Kay. 2007. "Explaining Sexual Violence During Civil War: Evidence from the Sierra Leone War (1991-2002)." Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL (August).
- Fearon, James and Alexander Wendt. 2002. "Rationalism v. Constructivism: A Skeptical View." In Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, Beth Simmons, Eds. *Handbook of International Relations*. London: Sage Publications.
- Finnemore, Martha. 1996a. *National Interests in International Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- , 1996b. "Norms, Culture, and World Politics: Insights from Sociology's Institutionalism (A Review Essay)." *International Organization* 50/2: 325-347.
- Finnemore, Martha and Kathryn Sikkink. 1998. "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change." *International Organization* 52/4: 887-917.
- Fujii, Lee Ann. 2010. "Shades of Truth and Lies: Interpreting Testimonies of War and Violence." *Journal of Peace Research* 47/2: 231-241.
- Gates, Scott. 2002. "Recruitment and Allegiance: The Microfoundations of Rebellion." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46/1: 111-30.
- , 2008. "Mixing It Up: The Role of Theory in Mixed-Methods Research." *Qualitative Methods: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 6/1: 27-29.
- George, Alexander. 1993. *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.

- Gheciu, Alexandra. 2005. "Security Institutions as Agents of Socialization? NATO and Post-Cold War Central and Eastern Europe." *International Organization* 59/4: 973-1012.
- Hall, Peter. 2002. "Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Politics." In James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Eds. *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hall, Peter and Rosemary Taylor. 1996. "Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms." *Political Studies* 44: 936-57.
- Hansen, Lene. 2006. *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. London: Routledge.
- Hooghe, Liesbet. 2001. *The European Commission and the Integration of Europe: Images of Governance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoover Green, Amelia. 2010. "Repertoires of Violence Against Noncombatants: The Role of Armed Group Institutions and Ideologies." Dissertation Synopsis and Annotated Chapter Outline. New Haven, CT: Yale University, Department of Political Science (September).
- Hopf, Ted. 2002. *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- . 2007. "The Limits of Interpreting Evidence." In Mark Lichbach and Richard Ned Lebow, Eds. *Theory and Evidence in Comparative Politics and International Relations*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- . 2010. "The Logic of Habit in International Relations." *European Journal of International Relations* 16/4: 539-62.
- . ND. *Reconstructing the Cold War*. Unpublished manuscript. Columbus, Ohio: Department of Political Science, Ohio State University.
- Johnston, Alastair Iain. 2001. "Treating International Institutions as Social Environments." *International Studies Quarterly* 45/4: 487-516.
- . 2005. "Conclusions and Extensions: Toward Mid-Range Theorizing and Beyond Europe." *International Organization* 59/4: 1013-44.
- . 2008. *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980-2000*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kalyvas, Stathis. 2006. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2008. "Ethnic Defection in Civil War." *Comparative Political Studies* 41/8: 1043-68.

- Katzenstein, Peter and Rudra Sil. 2010a. "Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics: Reconfiguring Problems and Mechanisms across Research Traditions." *Perspectives on Politics* 8/2: 411-31.
- , 2010b. *Beyond Paradigms: Analytical Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Keck, Margaret and Kathryn Sikkink. 1998. *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Laitin, David. 1998. *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Lake, David. 2007. "State-Building after Civil Wars." Mimeo. La Jolla, CA: Department of Political Science, University of California, San Diego (17 September).
- Lewis, Jeffrey. 2005. "The Janus Face of Brussels: Socialization and Everyday Decision Making in the European Union." *International Organization* 59/4: 937-72.
- Lynch, Marc. 2002. "Why Engage? China and the Logic of Communicative Engagement." *European Journal of International Relations* 8/2: 187-230.
- Lynch, Meghan. 2008. "Am I My Brother's Killer? The Social Psychology of Violence against Civilians." Paper presented at the Graduate Student Conference on Order, Conflict and Violence. New Haven, CT: Yale University (Spring).
- March, James and Johan P. Olsen. 1984. "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life." *American Political Science Review* 78/3: 734-49.
- , 1998. "The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders." *International Organization* 52/4: 943-70.
- Milliken, Jennifer. 1999. "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods." *European Journal of International Relations* 5/2: 225-54.
- Neumann, Iver. 1999. *Uses of the Other. The 'East' in European Identity Formation*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- , 2008. "Discourse Analysis." In Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash, Eds. *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Petersen, Roger and Sarah Zukerman. 2010. "Anger, Violence, and Political Science." In Michael Potegal, et al., Eds. *International Handbook of Anger*. Boston, MA: Springer Publishers.
- Pouliot, Vincent. 2010. *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russian Diplomacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Price, Richard. 1998. "Reversing the Gunsights: Transnational Civil Society Targets Land Mines." *International Organization* 52/3: 613-44.
- Risse, Thomas. 2000. "'Let's Argue!': Communicative Action in World Politics." *International Organization* 54/1: 1-40.
- Risse, Thomas, Stephen Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink. Eds. 1999. *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Risse-Kappen, Thomas. 1995. *Cooperation among Democracies: The European Influence on U.S. Foreign Policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Salehyan, Idean. 2009. *Rebels without Borders: Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Sambanis, Nicholas. 2004. "Using Case Studies to Expand Economic Models of Civil War." *Perspectives on Politics* 2/2: 259-280.
- Schatz, Edward. Ed. 2009. *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Schimmelfennig, Frank. 2001. "The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union." *International Organization* 55/1: 47-80.
- , 2005. "Strategic Calculation and International Socialization: Membership Incentives, Party Constellations and Sustained Compliance in Central and Eastern Europe." *International Organization* 59/4: 827-60.
- Sikkink, Kathryn. 1991. *Ideas and Institutions: Developmentalism in Brazil and Argentina*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Staniland, Paul. 2010. "Humpty Dumpty in Belfast: How Emotions Exacerbate Splits and Feuds in Insurgent Movements." Paper presented at a Workshop on Emotions and Civil War. Paris, France: College de France and PRIO/CSCW (10-11 June).
- Tarrow, Sidney. 2007. "Inside Insurgencies: Politics and Violence in an Age of Civil War (Book Review Essay)." *Perspectives on Politics* 5/3: 587-600.
- Weinstein, Jeremy. 2007. *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Wendt, Alexander. 1995. "Constructing International Politics." *International Security* 20/1: 71-81.
- Wood, Elisabeth Jean. 2003. *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*. NY: Cambridge University Press.

----- 2008. "The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks." *Annual Review of Political Science* 11: 539-61.

----- 2010. "Sexual Violence During War: Variation and Accountability." In Alette Smeulers and Elies van Sliedregt, Eds. *Collective Crimes and International Criminal Justice: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. Antwerp, Netherlands: Intersentia Publishers.