Socialization and Violence: A Framework Essay

Jeffrey T. Checkel
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 by the Simons Foundation.

Series editor: Jeffrey T. Checkel
Managing editor: Martha Snodgrass


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 T. Checkel, jtcheckel(at)sfu.ca.
Socialization and Violence: A Framework Essay

Abstract:
This article sets the stage – substantively, theoretically and methodologically – for a proposed journal special issue. Its analytic focus is socialization, or the process through which actors adopt the norms and rules of a given community. I argue that it is key to understanding violence in civil war (rebel groups and society), national militaries, post-conflict societies, and urban gangs. Socialization has a long history in the social sciences, but has been little used to study groups and organizations in conflict settings. This article and the project it introduces thus rethink core features of socialization, drawing upon insights from several disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, political science, and organization-institutional theory. We explore the link between socialization and violence in a number of cases – para-military patrols in Guatemala, inter-communal relations in the Bosnian civil war, gangs in post-conflict Nicaragua, rebel groups in Sierra Leone and Columbia, and the Israeli military, among others.

I begin by reviewing the key literatures to which we speak – socialization and civil conflicts. The next section – the article’s substantive core – adapts theories of socialization to the study of violence. Here, I also survey the methods contributors utilize to capture and identify socialization as a discrete phenomenon in the various empirical contributions. I conclude by highlighting several cutting-edge challenges for students of the socialization/violence nexus and introduce the nine essays that comprise the remainder of the special issue.

About the author:
Jeffrey T. Checkel holds the Simons Chair in International Law and Human Security at Simon Fraser University and is a Global Research Fellow at the Peace Research Institute Oslo. He 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), co-editor (with Peter J. Katzenstein) of European Identity (Cambridge University Press), editor of Transnational Dynamics of Civil War (Cambridge University Press) and co-editor (with Andrew Bennett) of Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool (Cambridge University Press).

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.
Socialization and Violence: A Framework Essay

Introduction

A disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program offers jobs and schooling to former combatants, but it does not work, and in fact fuels a return to violence. New gang recruits with no prior record of violent behaviour come to use violence on a daily basis, practices that often endure long after they leave the gang. A rebel group mistreats and sexually abuses civilian populations, despite operating in an environment where the use of such violence clearly undercuts its broader strategic goals. Units of a national military deploy to the field, a context radically different from boot camp and basic training; yet, soldiers continue to carry the lessons of such training, in this case, the need for and use of lethal violence.

These vignettes—while quite diverse—share a common feature. All these actors are part of a group or community that may lead them to learn new practices or to think in new ways, about themselves or others. Put differently, they are prime candidates for socialization. This potential for socialization also points directly to the analytic gap this special issue addresses: explaining group-level and within-group dynamics in violent settings. In recent years, conflict studies has embraced disaggregation down to the level of the armed group. Building upon this work, we go a step further, exploring interaction within the group, particularly how it may lead to the use of violence—or its rejection. We argue this is indispensable for understanding how armed groups, militaries and other potentially violent groups can and do change in the course of conflict.

The analytical focus of this special issue is thus socialization, or the process through which actors adopt the norms and rules of a given community. We argue that it is useful to think of soldiers, rebel combatants and gang members as embedded in social environments, which not only constrain and provide incentives to act, but also may reshape interests and identities. Empirically, we explore the link between socialization and violence in a number of cases—paramilitary patrols in Guatemala, inter-communal relations in the Bosnian civil war, gangs in post-
conflict Nicaragua, rebel groups in Sierra Leone and Columbia, and the Israeli military, among others.

The goal is to provide new insight on the production of organized violence. For national militaries, this means to understand better the conditions under which recruits who have been socialized to fight sometimes fail to do so, or how highly trained soldiers come to use violence in ways their training is meant to prohibit. For non-state groups, it means to shed new light on issues of central concern to civil war studies – from the nature and extent of rebel group cohesion to variation in the repertoires of violence employed by combatants; it also means to link conflict research to contemporary work on gangs – in particular, how violent norms are transmitted within them.

In exploring the relation of group processes and socialization to violence, we formulate not some broad theory, but rather well-specified arguments on how socialization does – or does not – produce violence in various contexts. In doing this, we are neutral in terms of social theory – privileging neither rationalist nor constructivist ontologies – and we embrace different theories and assumptions about human action, from principal-agent models to the intersubjective creation of meaning and identity.

While socialization theory has a long history in the social sciences, the contributions in this special issue do not simply pull it off the shelf and apply it to new – conflict – settings. Instead, we draw upon insights from several disciplines – sociology, anthropology, political science, organization-institutional theory – to rethink core features of it. Our analytic focus is on organizations that socialize to produce violence, and on the processes of socialization. We distinguish the intentional and strategic aspects of socialization from the spontaneous, less formal dynamics of group and cross-group interaction that also socialize. We explore norms and practices of violence wielded within the group as well as the use of violence toward externals, enemies or others. If the former are possible mechanisms of socialization, then the latter appear to be the outcome of it.

Finally, as socialization is essentially a story of conformity, there is an analytic danger of neglecting agency, which has been an enduring problem in the broader literature. To counter
such bias, we reconsider agency’s role in three different ways that capture both formal, intentional socialization processes as well as a less appreciated informal kind.

This introductory essay proceeds as follows. Next I review the literatures on socialization and civil conflicts, highlighting the cutting edge issues and challenges. In the third section – the essay’s substantive core – I rethink and adapt theories of socialization to the study of violence. This is in part a deductive exercise, responding to logical gaps in the literature; equally important, though, it is informed by our own research – a so-called abductive strategy (Zuern and Checkel 2005, 1046; see also Josephson 2000). In particular, I highlight socialization’s layered and multiple nature; examine the role of instrumental calculation in it; identify several relevant mechanisms; theorize the agency of those being brought into a new group; and explore the staying power of norms and practices for an individual who leaves the group. The final part of the section turns from theory to method, the collective challenge being to recognize socialization if it were to ‘walk through the door.’

The concluding section highlights key challenges for theory and method that lie ahead, and introduces the nine essays that comprise the special issue.

Socialization and Violence – State of the Art

This section reviews key work on socialization and civil conflicts. Our understanding of socialization as both process and outcome is developed, and the group/organizational turn in studies of conflict is highlighted.

Socialization

While the literature on socialization is vast (Checkel 2014a for a multi-disciplinary review), most relevant here is work in sociology and political science – the former because of its core theoretical contribution and the latter because of recent efforts to disaggregate causal processes and mechanisms.

When the concept of socialization was first invoked by sociologists in the 1950s, it was intended to address foundational issues (Brezinka 1994, 9-10). How do groups arise? How is society possible? In the 1970s, Dawson, Prewitt and Dawson (1977) built on these foundations to
offer a more precise definition: Socialization is a process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community, the endpoint of which is internalization. Socialization – in other words – is a process, whose intended result is not simple behavioral adaptation, but a deeper change in an actor’s sense of self.

While this definition – which we adopt – is an excellent starting point, it did sow the seeds for a problem that has bedeviled subsequent work: The agency of the targets involved. Too often, they are construed as blank slates on which new values are inscribed. Yet, the empirical reality is that agents often actively resist attempts to socialize them. It is likely this blind spot arose from the initial subject of study – children (Draper 1974).

In sociology, the most important work on socialization was done nearly half a century ago. For our purposes, the literature on national militaries is a logical starting point.¹ These studies were fundamentally concerned with the organizational factors promoting cohesion or breakdown within military units; scholars designed surveys and interpreted the data to provide policy advice, not to advance theory or method – or to explain socialization’s role specifically in producing violence (Bachman, Sigelman and Diamond 1987; Wamsley 1972; Winslow 1999; Mendee 2012). Thus, one classic study examined the Viet Cong, seeking to understand unit cohesion and weaknesses so as to better inform American military actions (Davison and Zasloff 1966).

The term socialization itself was not often used. Instead, the analytic focus was task and social cohesion (Kier 1998; MacCoun and Hix 2010), or related concepts like trust (Ben-Shalom et al 2005) and communication (King 2006). However, cohesion was typically defined in a very broad and process-oriented way that strongly suggests a role for socialization (Siebold 2007, 288–89). Another feature of this work is that it had little to say about the targets of socialization (Garrett and Baquedano-Lopez 2002). Rather, the emphasis was on the structural context – say a military organization – producing conformity in an individual (Wamsley 1972, 407; Winslow 1999, 435).

¹ This glosses over early and important research on socialization within families and schools – for example, Parsons 1959; and Inkeles 1966.
Reading across this scholarship, it would seem that both formal military structures (command and control, say) and senses of community were prerequisites for effective unit cohesion. Lacking further specification and scope conditions, however, this is a rather shaky foundation on which to build arguments about socialization.

Socialization research by political scientists has followed two strands. Since the early 1960s, work on so-called political socialization has been concerned with exploring how political attitudes are transmitted to young people (Searing, Schwartz and Lind 1973; Cook 1985, 1089; Torney-Purta 2000, 88; Sapiro 2004) and, in a few instances, to adults (Sigel 1989). Like their colleagues in sociology, these researchers granted little or no agency to the targets of socialization; in many cases, the assumption appears to be that attitudes and values take hold through exposure to a specific environment (Torney-Purta 2000, 94; Cook 1985, passim). This echoes the proposition by social psychologists – now shown to be seriously under-specified if not simply untrue – that it is the amount of contact that drives identification with the group and thus socialization (Beyers 2005). This work also exhibited a mismatch between theory – a concern to capture the process by which new norms and values were internalized – and method, with the latter being overwhelmingly quantitative (Sigel 1995, 20; see also Cook 1985, 1090).

These are among the reasons for the decline in political socialization research pointed out by Cook in his 1985 stock-taking essay (Cook 1985; see also Sapiro 2004, 4 [Figure1]). He and others criticized researchers for treating the targets of socialization as infants unable to resist, and for failing to employ the qualitative methods appropriate for measuring the interaction at the heart of it (Cook 1985, 1088-1091; see also Niemi and Hepburn 1995, 14; and Sigel 1995, 18-20). These problems remain largely unaddressed in more recent work (Sapiro 2004; Abendschoen 2013).

Beginning in the mid-1990s, a different group of political scientists took up questions of socialization, and in a way that clearly built on the sociological core of the concept. These international relations (IR) scholars have focused on how socialization occurs, drawing upon arguments about world society and culture developed in the English School (Finnemore 1996a, ch.1) and by sociologists (Finnemore 1996b; Meyer, Boli, Thomas and Ramirez 1997; Boli and Thomas 1999). Their real value added has been to bring process to the fore (Price 1998;
Simons Papers in Security and Development

Schimmelfennig 2003; Johnston 2001, 2003); to theorize in terms of causal mechanisms (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999, 2013; Risse 2000; Gheciu 2005; Checkel 2007; Vermeij 2014); to explore cases where socialization efforts fail (Checkel 2003); and to theorize socialization targets, thereby giving them agency (Epstein 2012; Adler-Nissen 2014).

These advances suggest two areas requiring further thought. First, while IR scholars have generated a growing set of plausible mechanisms, they have not been particularly ambitious in a theoretical sense. Their work has focused on socialization in international organizations and human-rights associations – which is fine. Yet, we have little sense of whether and under what conditions these arguments might be applicable to a broader set of cases.

Second, the analysis has almost exclusively focused on nonviolent social interaction, such as persuasion and learning. Are nonviolent and violent socialization mechanisms any different in their effects? Even the literature on military socialization focuses largely on boot camp experiences and noncombat life together, as opposed to socialization occurring during combat or through the commitment of violent acts. Likewise, research on urban gangs talks of street socialization as a process producing violence while not necessarily being violent itself (Vigil 2003, 230, 235 – but see Rodgers 2013 on the mixture of violent and nonviolent techniques).

Civil Conflicts

While contemporary work on civil war is extensive (Tarrow 2007; Blattman and Miguel 2010; Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013), my concern is the disaggregation move embraced by political scientists beginning some 10 years ago. A growing number of scholars have sought to improve on early analysis that used state-level, aggregate measures (Fearon and Laitin 2003) – for example, by developing more disaggregated databases on the sub-national actors and dynamics that are clearly key in explaining civil wars. Some disaggregated geographically and spatially, using so-called geo-referenced conflict data (Buhaug and Rød 2006; Raleigh et al 2010).

More important for my purposes, others disaggregated by collecting and coding data on the attributes of non-state conflict actors (Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salehyan 2006; Salehyan
Socialization and Violence: A Framework Essay

This move permitted analysis of factors that enable collective action and which shape these groups’ interactions with others. It also highlighted the empirical reality that rebel groups are not all alike and that they can and do change their practices and fighting capabilities over time, as well as their declared aims. As a result, we now have important data on conflict actors and violence, including that on repertoires of violence, variation in the use of violence, non-violent resistance and sexual violence (Raleigh 2012; Chenoweth and Cunningham 2013; Cohen and Nordås 2014, 2015).

Yet, the largely quantitative orientation of this research – datasets built on structural, organizational or leadership features or on events in the group’s interactions with the state – could not unpack the social processes that can and do cause change within rebel units (Salehyan, Siroky and Wood 2014). To be fair, such limitations were not solely a function of (quantitative) methodological choice. Weinstein’s (2007) important study of rebel group strategy, which includes a rich qualitative component, also bracketed process and dynamics within the group – in his case, though, due to prior ontological (structure over agency) and theoretical (political economy) commitments (see also Tarrow 2007, 591).

Two bodies of recent research focus particular attention on dynamics inside armed groups and thus set the stage for our own approach: work by civil war scholars that draws from military sociology and organizational studies; and studies of violence in non-civil war settings. Beginning with the former, Wood (2008) has argued that socialization is one of several ‘social processes’ neglected by students of civil war (see also Wood 2010). Investigating the role of ideology in rebel group violence, Hoover Green (2011) and Gutiérrez-Sanin and Wood (2014) provide operational content to socialization, while establishing the variation of its effect on individuals’ behavior.

Perhaps the greatest recent interest in the conflict-studies/socialization nexus has come from those studying child soldiers (Gates and Reich 2010; Blattman 2012). This is not surprising, as a core finding from the classic socialization literature is that children are much more susceptible to socialization than adults (Draper 1974; see also Blattman 2007). Gates and Vermeij, in particular, argue that we need to theorize and explore a broad range of mechanisms – teaching, learning, hazing and dehumanization, for example – at work in the socialization of
child soldiers (Gates 2011, 57-60; Gates 2002, 111-16; Vermeij 2011; Vermeij 2014, ch.2). This is an important analytic move, one on which we build in this project.

At the same time, these arguments need sharpening. Are there certain scope conditions for the use, say, of the violent mechanisms? This matters, for compliance and socialization induced through coercion are likely to have less staying power than that brought about by the learning of new values (Hurd 1999). At an operational level, it will also be important to specify the observable implication of the different mechanisms and utilize methods appropriate for measuring them. For example, with teaching and learning – which facilitate internalization – one might expect a greater degree of unreflective, this-is-just-the-way-we-do-thing responses among interviewees.

Turning to literature in settings other than civil war, work on urban gangs offers important insights on the group-based production of violence. For one, so-called street socialization clearly involves a mixture of violent and nonviolent processes (Rodgers 2013; Vigil 2003, 230, 235; see also Rodgers, this special issue). For another, examination of initiation rites and identity-making practices of urban gangs (Stretesky and Pogrebin 2007; Vigil 2003; Rodgers and Hazen 2014, 10; Utas 2014) illuminates the connection between violent practices internal to the group and violence toward externals – which is precisely our concern.

**The Social Production of Violence**

The literatures reviewed above provide an excellent starting point for understanding the social production of violence. However, at the same time, to understand more fully the process through which socialization occurs and how it facilitates violence, it is important to address gaps and weaknesses in this work. I therefore: (1) highlight socialization’s layered and multiple nature – capturing the key role of multiple group contexts; (2) examine the role of strategic choice in socialization – alerting us to its calculative/individual aspects; (3) identify several relevant socialization mechanisms, both within and outside the group – thus better specifying the processes creating pro-group behaviour and attitudes; (4) theorize the agency of those being brought into a new community or group, which can balance or counteract the power of (group) structure; and (5) explore the staying power of the norms and practices learned in a group for an
individual who leaves that group. In the final part of the section, I discuss the various methods that move our arguments from the abstract and conceptual to the applied and operational.

**Socialization as Layered and Multiple**

Any particular individual may be embedded in several different groups – in sequence or perhaps simultaneously. This observation goes beyond the distinction in the literature between primary and secondary socialization, which assumes a temporal ordering – from the family, to broader, social institutions such as schools, professional associations or the military (Dawson, Prewitt and Dawson 1977; Johnston 2005).

To begin, targets of socialization efforts are never blank slates. That is, prior to group recruitment, they are situated in a local normative context that will likely shape socialization dynamics in the group. For example, socialization could be hindered in cases where local and group norms were in conflict (Wood 2010). Anthropological studies make a similar point when they talk of a cultural match – or lack thereof – between a socializer and his/her target (Checkel 1999; see also Marks 2014).

However, a neat temporal ordering breaks down in many of the cases studied here. Consider a new recruit to a rebel group. He/she experiences the group’s socialization process while in some cases simultaneously being a target of international attempts at socialization – think of the decade-long campaign to prevent rebel group recruitment of child soldiers (Achverina and Reich 2009). How – through what mechanisms – do such efforts interact with and shape socialization dynamics within the group (Jo and Bryant 2013)? Does one site trump another? Is the end result some kind of hybrid socialization (Johnston 2005, 1020)? Or, is one site more dominant, with individual’s enacting behavior appropriate to that particular setting (Rodgers, this special issue; Fujii, this special issue)?

Furthermore, the norms and values embedded in these multiple arenas may differ in important ways, thus diminishing the effect of socialization in any given group. In work on socialization and European identity, one sees precisely this dynamic at work. Transnationalized European political elites are being socialized into an inclusive, tolerant European identity; yet, at the same time, these elites actively participate in other, national based and much more robust
socialization arenas promoting a less inclusive and less tolerant identity. The latter is minimizing the effects of the former (Checkel 2014b; see also Favell 2009).

**Socialization and Strategic Choice**

While socialization theory has often had an uneasy relation to strategic action and rational choice, we see this a false dichotomy. From a principal-agent perspective, socialization is a relatively costless way for principals to insure compliance by subordinates (see also Wood and Gates, both this special issue; Gates 2002). After all, compliance because ‘it’s the right thing to do’ (socialization) will – for the principal – be less costly than ensuring it through force (coercion) or material incentives (instrumental calculation) (Hurd 1999).

In addition and at a more micro-level, instrumental calculation may well be a socialization mechanism. For sure, when instrumental mechanisms operate alone, there can be no socialization that ends in internalization: Individuals will simply adapt their behavior to the norms and rules favored by the group, but have little reason to keep up the behavior once outside it (see also Fujii 2009; Krause 2015). However, it is possible that what starts as behavioral adaptation, may – due to various cognitive and institutional lock-in effects – later be followed by sustained compliance that is strongly suggestive of internalization.

Indeed, research on self-persuasion and cognitive dissonance suggests that internalization can occur even when socialization efforts are minimal. In particular, human beings have a tendency to resolve such dissonance by adapting their preferences to the behavior; that is, they internalize the justification (Zuern and Checkel 2005; see also Fearon 1998, 54; Littman and Paluck 2015, 88; Martens et al. 2010). This dynamic is suggested by Cohen and Fujii (both this special issue), where what begins as a rational search for physical security in a violent environment becomes internalized.

**Mechanisms of Socialization**

Causal mechanisms have been defined as “the pathway or process by which an effect is produced or a purpose is accomplished” (Gerring 2007a, 178; see also Falleti and Lynch 2009, 1149 and Hedstroem and Ylikoski 2010). In exploring the mechanisms that socialize to violence, it is important to recognize that both violent and nonviolent ones play a role. We thus theorize
the roles played by persuasion (Johnston 2001, 2008; Lynch 2013); collective violence (Cohen 2013a, b); social learning (Price 1998; Checkel 2001; Hoover Green 2011); hazing and dehumanization (Kelman and Hamilton 1989; Wood 2010; Manekin 2013); role playing (Beyers 2005; Bateson, this special issue); and as noted above – instrumental calculation (Hooghe 2001, ch.1; Schimmelfennig 2005; Wood 2014; Gates, this special issue).

At the same time, the broader political and social context in which the group operates may influence its practices and norms – be this the physical insecurity of irregular warfare (Cohen, this special issue), social exclusion/marginalization (Rodgers and Hazen 2014), sexism and exploitative sexual norms (Wood 2014; Marks 2014), or racism (Wildt 2002). Thus, Fujii (this special issue) documents how the mechanism of violent, public display – by reshaping prevailing social norms – may play a critical role in later facilitating socialization to violence within a group (see also Krause 2015; Vargas Castillo 2015). In addition – and as discussed below – the mechanisms of learning and imitation can be seen to bridge this macro-structural context and group dynamics by facilitating the spread of norms and practices between groups.2

It is important not only to theorize particular mechanisms of socialization, but also the conditions under which they are expected to operate – so-called scope conditions (Risse, Ropp, Sikkink 2013). Using slightly different language, Falletti and Lynch discuss the critical role of context in explanations using causal mechanisms.

[W]e define context broadly, as the relevant aspects of a setting (analytical, temporal, spatial, or institutional) in which a set of initial conditions leads (probabilistically) to an outcome of a defined scope and meaning via a specified causal mechanism or set of causal mechanisms. From this definition, it follows that a causal explanation requires the analyst to specify the operative causal mechanism and to delineate the relevant aspects of the surroundings – that is, those that allow the mechanism to produce the outcome (Falletti and Lynch 2009, 1152-53).

Whether one calls it context or scope condition, the necessity of this particular analytic move cannot be stressed enough. Scholars who disaggregate socialization into one or more causal

---

2 On this group-to-group dynamic, see also recent work on gang networks and violence (Rodgers and Muggah 2009; Krause 2015), and on diffusion (Simmons, Dobbin and Garrett 2007; Wood 2013).
mechanisms typically have little interest in relating the mechanisms to one another in some broad, encompassing theory. However, their analyses – typically labeled partial or middle range theory (Johnston 2005) – often suffer from under-specification, which is where the articulation of scope conditions can provide a key remedy (Hoover Green; and Wood, both this special issue).

**Agency’s Role**

Recognizing that socialization is a highly contingent process, it is important to theorize the agency of those being brought into a new community or group; we do so in three ways. A first is top-down and focuses on leaders – rebel commanders, say – and the techniques they use to socialize group members. Agency of this type is well captured in earlier work, particularly that on military socialization. Group leaders employ mechanisms such as hazing and dehumanization in their efforts to socialize; however, it is also possible they will use ‘softer’ tools such as education, drills and persuasion (see also Manekin and Gutiérrez-Sanín, this special issue). The latter might be especially relevant for rebel groups that are ideological in nature, as leaders would hope to instill such thinking in recruits (Hoover Green 2011; Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2014), but it is also key for socialization effects in non-ideological groups with a charismatic leader, including gangs (Marks 2013; Rodgers, this special issue).

A second type of agency – one too often missed in work on socialization – is bottom-up. It focuses on the socialization targets, who may resist or be otherwise unreceptive to a socializer’s message, or on individuals seeking to join the group. This fact – that socialization is a two-way street – has been a persistent gap in the literature (Kelman and Hamilton 1989, ch.5; and Cortell and Davis 1996, 2005). Even in cases of military socialization or that within rebel groups and gangs – where limited agency is more likely – resistance still occurs, albeit perhaps through more indirect and discrete forms (see also Manekin, this special issue).

Whatever the case, it is important to problematize the relation between the socializing agency and its target, exploring, for example, the roles of age and so-called cognitive priors that lead a target to resist. Consider age, where a core finding of the early sociological studies was

---

3 Anthropological work highlights a similar dynamic when it talks of “bidirectionality in socialization”. Garrett and Baquedano-Lopez 2002, 346.
that young people – and especially children – were the most susceptible to socialization. In the
civil war context, it is thus not surprising that it is child soldiers who appear highly susceptible to
socialization, as Vermeij’s (2014) detailed study suggests. Yet, recent work on regional
organizations (Checkel 2007), on rebel groups (Cohen 2013a, b) and on participation in mass
political violence (Wildt 2002; Krause 2015) suggests that socialization can in fact occur at more
advanced ages.

Why might this be the case? Perhaps age matters less when an individual is a novice,
with few cognitive priors that might block a socialization message (Johnston 2001; Gheciu
2005)? Or maybe age matters less where the primary socializing agencies (schools, families,
churches) are weak or absent – as in many conflict/post-conflict settings. In this case, primacy
effects will be trumped by recency effects (Johnston 2005, 1019-1020). In plain language, this
might mean that rebel or gang recruits – no matter what their age – will be highly susceptible to
socialization because of the weak nature of primary organizations.

A third element of agency and its effect on socialization is different and might best be
called horizontal. If the first two explore an agent’s role in a process of formal, intentional
socialization (or resistance to it), the third captures a more subtle and informal kind. The idea is
that norms and practices may well spread within and beyond groups through learning and
imitation, among peers (Rogoff et al. 2003; see also Wheeler 1961). Norms and practices spread
not from the top down, but sideways, as it were. These peers may be the group leaders, learning
from other groups (Rodgers and Muggah 2009). However, in some cases, this informal, cross-
group socialization may occur among the targets/recruits as well (Wood, this special issue).

Socialization Outcomes

Our starting point is to recognize the variable staying power of the norms and practices
learned in a group on an individual who leaves it. Here, one can theorize three distinct
socialization outcomes that may occur.\(^4\) When the socialization is based on rational calculation
of the group member in response to incentives – coercive or not – we might logically label it
“Type Zero” (see also Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2014, 218), as no internalization occurs. The

\(^4\) This echoes Kelman and Hamilton’s (1989) typology of compliance, role playing and internalization.
individual would thus not be expected to uphold the group’s norms and practices once she leaves the group.

Types I and II then distinguish two levels of internalization (Checkel 2007; see also Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 2013, ch.15). With type I, an individual exhibits pro-group behavior 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 behavior, then, means simply that conscious instrumental calculation has been replaced by conscious role playing. In contrast, type II socialization is deeper. An individual 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.

This distinction matters not only for theory. Say that members of a rebel group have undergone type I socialization; once they leave the group and the specific environment that creates particular roles, they should drop their “rebel group” behavior. Many DDR programs seem implicitly to be built on such a model of socialization, reducing re-integration to a matter of offering economic opportunities, of getting the incentives right, as it were (see also Vermeij 2014, ch.9). However, if rebel combatants have undergone the deeper, type II socialization, then DDR programs will need to focus more long-term on ways to de-socialize these individuals (see also Littman and Paluck 2015).

Methods and Data

Arguments about socialization often face a skeptical ‘how do you really know’ reaction. Especially when it comes to detecting and measuring internalization, the challenges would seem daunting, as one is accessing the internal mental states of actors. However, such concern is misplaced, as scholars have now explicitly addressed the methodological challenges involved in measuring norms, practices and (possible) identity change, be it in socialization processes more generally (Checkel 2007, ch.1) or in civil war (Wood 2003, ch.2).

Contributors to this special issue draw upon a variety of methods – including participant observation, interviewing, life histories, cross-national data analyses and process tracing – to
measure and draw inferences about socialization and its various mechanisms. This moves their arguments from the abstract and conceptual to the applied and operational. While the details of how this is carried out are best left to the individual articles, all contributors strive to make visible both the empirical foundation and the logic of inquiry undergirding their arguments.\(^5\)

To begin, all articles indicate their sources fully and clearly, including clear specification of archival sources, full interview details, \textit{etc}. More important, contributors provide an operational discussion of their methods. That is, readers are informed about how the data were gathered and organized, and how any given method was utilized to reach conclusions. On the latter, there are now a number of best practice discussions in the literature – on case methods (Gerring 2007b), discourse analysis (Hansen 2006), ethnography (Schatz 2009), process tracing (Bennett and Checkel 2014), and the like – upon which contributors draw. An operational application of any method means authors not only describe it and its planned execution, but also clearly explain how its use accords with community best practices.

Clearly, transparency of this sort is essential. At the same time, intensive field research in violent settings – as carried out by several of our contributors – places ethical and practical constraints on just how public and how shared data may be. Thus, whether field notes or interview transcripts are made publicly available – say, in an on-line appendix or ‘transparency index’ (Moravscik 2014) – is a matter of (justified) researcher choice and not editorial fiat.\(^6\)

Summary

This dissection and reconstruction of socialization informs the substantive questions at the core of this project, all of which revolve around the social production of violence. What role do group dynamics and, more specifically, socialization play in the production of organized violence? What places limits on socialization, where we see that it fails or is actively resisted? How do we theorize and capture the role of cross-level socialization, where social actors may be subject to multiple socializing impulses arising from both internal/domestic and

\(^5\) The following builds on Wood 2003; Checkel 2007; Symposium 2014; Symposium 2015; as well as the qualitative transparency policies recently established by the \textit{American Political Science Review} and \textit{Journal of Peace Research}.\(^6\) Parkinson and Wood 2015 for an excellent and nuanced discussion.
external/transnational sources? How persistent are the effects of socialization once an individual leaves the group?

**Socialization in Action – Challenges Ahead and Preview of the Special Issue**

In this concluding section, I highlight key challenges for theory and method that lie ahead, and introduce the nine essays that comprise the special issue.

**Challenges Ahead**

Rethinking socialization in the ways outlined above promises to advance our knowledge of its dynamics as well as the social production of violence more generally. However, in doing this, there will be challenges – the first of which concerns theory.

The past decade has seen students of socialization increasingly think in terms of causal mechanisms. Yet, a roster of causal mechanisms is not the same as a theory with some level of generalizability (Gates 2008; Checkel 2013b, 233-34). Many who theorize socialization mechanisms claim their work results in mid-range theory. But what does this 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? Sadly, even leading proponents of a move to mechanism-based thinking are silent on this score (Katzenstein and Sil 2010a, b).

Thus, when large parts of a research program are characterized by middle-range approaches, the production of cumulative theoretical knowledge may be hindered. Specifically for work on socialization, the various middle-range efforts are not coalescing into a broader theoretical whole. Instead, we have proliferating lists of variables and causal mechanisms.

In addition, there is a tendency with middle-range approaches to adopt a micro-focus, where one theorizes (interacting) causal mechanisms in some temporally or spatially delimited frame (Haas 2010, 11). The danger is then to miss the macro level – although, see Fujii and Hoover Green (both this special issue) – where material power and social discourses fundamentally shape and predetermine the mechanisms playing out at lower levels. More
generally, and as Nau has argued, middle-range theories “inevitably leave out ‘big questions’ posed from different or higher levels of analysis” (Nau 2011, 489-90).

One promising possibility for addressing these analytic problems is typological theory, or theories about how combinations of mechanisms shape outcomes for specified populations (Bennett and George 2005, ch.11; Elman 2005). Compared to middle-range approaches, this form of theorizing has several advantages. It provides a way to address interaction effects and other forms of complexity; it stimulates fruitful iteration between cases, the specification of populations, and theories; and it creates a framework for cumulative progress.

Subsequent researchers can add or change variables and re-code or add cases while still building on earlier attempts at typological theorizing on the phenomenon. For example, a recent project on civil war showed how typological theorizing could be used to promote cumulation, even in the hard case of mid-range, theoretically plural accounts (Checkel 2013a, ch.8).

Turning from theory to method, a second challenge involves how to measure the workings of the causal mechanisms proposed by contemporary socialization theory. The methodological requirements of process tracing, the tool of choice for many students of socialization – including several in this special issue – are often not fully appreciated. There is now a sizeable body of scholarship that seeks to systematize and establish best-practice standards for this technique (Hall 2002; Bennett and George 2005, ch.10; Bennett 2008; Checkel 2008; Collier 2011; Guzzini 2012, ch.11; Beach and Pedersen 2013; Bennett and Checkel 2014), including – most recently – in situations marked by violence and conflict (Bakke 2014; Lyall 2014). Future research on socialization and organized violence needs to embrace it.

For one, good process tracing requires that the causal mechanisms in play be fully and carefully theorized. The more care at this stage, the clearer will be those mechanisms’ observable implications, without which process tracing is virtually impossible. In addition, good process tracing requires that scholars address equifinality, where multiple causal pathways may lead to the same outcome. This means to specify these other candidate mechanisms, identify their observable implications and conduct some process tracing on them (Bennett and Checkel 2014, ch.1). Done properly, this takes time (and resources) and should thus be integrated into research designs at an early stage.
Finally, good process tracing must be transparent. At a minimum, researchers need to be explicit on how observations are drawn and data generated; to explain precisely how process tracing is used to reach conclusions; and to share – when ethically and practically possible – their data (Elman and Kapiszewski 2014: 45; Bennett and Checkel 2014, ch.10). These are relatively straightforward injunctions by which to abide, but they are rarely followed in the qualitative case study literature, including that on socialization.

**Preview**

The special issue is comprised of nine contributions. After this opening essay, five articles – by Gutiérrez-Sanín, Bateson, Wood, Cohen and Gates – explore the socialization-violence relation among rebel and para-military groups in civil war and post-conflict settings. The next four articles (Rodgers, Hoover Green, Manekin and Fujii) draw on cases of gangs, state militaries and mass violence to expand the theory and analysis in several key directions – in particular, structural and social context and forms of agency.

In his contribution, Gutiérrez-Sanín focuses on the FARC – Colombia’s oldest guerrilla organization – and its ability to survive and persist despite relative isolation, lack of a substantial national constituency, and persistent inferiority vis-à-vis the Colombian state with regard to technology and manpower. He argues that the FARC’s militaristic organizational blueprint provides the socialization and coordination mechanisms that ensure its survival. Drawing on in-depth interviews with members of the FARC, judicial proceedings, intelligence reports from the Colombian Army, and a wealth of internal FARC documents, Gutiérrez-Sanín shows how organizational socialization – which includes pervasive planning and assessment routines, iron discipline and ideological indoctrination – provides templates for improvised, automatic and local coordination that are necessary for military efficiency. Equally, his documentation of alienation and exit by numerous rank-and-file recruits suggests these socialization mechanisms lead to partial internalization, at best, of the rebel group’s political goals and norms of violence.

The next article – by Regina Bateson – explores the continuing existence and acceptance of civil patrols (military-run civilian militias) in post-war Guatemala, nearly twenty years after the country’s civil war ended. Using process tracing to analyze historical documents and
interviews with former civil patrollers, she argues that two distinct socialization processes have contributed to the persistence of Guatemala’s civil patrols. For one, selective socialization operated within the civil patrols. Just as important, however, the military ran an aggressive, sustained program of civilian socialization during the civil war. In the war-stricken highlands of western Guatemala, daily life was thoroughly militarized, and many local residents came to see the military and the civil patrols as the appropriate providers of order – likely through sustained behavioral adaptation and forced compliance rather than persuasion. Thus, to fully understand the emergence and persistence of armed groups, it is important to consider socialization within both armed groups and the broader civilian population, and to realize that the interaction of the two is what shapes events.

Elisabeth Wood looks at Colombia’s paramilitary groups and the wide variation one observes in their violence against civilians and prisoners of war. Drawing upon 50 oral history interviews with former members of the paramilitary groups, as well as judicial records and other governmental and non-governmental documents, she advances a principal-agent framework to capture un-ordered as well as ordered violence, and formulates a typology of types of violence, which allows for theorizing about scope conditions for various mechanisms to be effective. She then assesses the extent to which variation in socialization explains variation in violence, and traces variation in the former to differences in the origins and ideologies of the groups.

In her contribution, Dara Cohen argues that non-state armed groups utilize wartime rape to help foster what she calls combatant socialization. Drawing on literatures from a variety of disciplines and her own work on Sierra Leone, Cohen shows how gang rape is a form of group violence that increases social cohesion, thus enabling armed groups with forcibly recruited fighters to create bonds of loyalty and esteem from initial circumstances of fear and mistrust. Violent socialization and the creation of cohesion are important as well from the perspective of the members of the armed group. The article thus offers an argument about how armed groups use violence instrumentally both to integrate new members and to organize the structure of the group. In important ways, Cohen offers a theoretical complement to the cross-national comparison of socialization mechanisms and violence outcomes explored by Hoover-Green in this special issue.
The starting point for the article by Scott Gates is that all violent groups face critical problems of desertion and non-compliance. Making a key analytic distinction between recruitment and retention, he argues that it is processes of socialization that transform a recruit into a full-fledged member of an organization. Put differently, the mechanisms of retention cannot be discovered by extending the logic of the initial decision to join. Similar to Rodgers and his work on gangs (this special issue), Gates shows that a person might join a violent group for a particular set of reasons, but stay on for others. He then tests the argument against data drawn from the Lord’s Resistance Army, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, and the Movement for a Democracy in Liberia, comparing recruitment, which ranged from highly coercive to largely voluntary, with patterns of desertion and retention – and the role played by socialization – across these groups.

The articles by Rodgers, Hoover Green, Manekin and Fujii extend our arguments and analysis in several key directions. Dennis Rodgers explores the role that gangs play in socializing individuals into violence. Drawing upon longitudinal ethnographic research in a poor urban neighbourhood of Managua, Nicaragua, he considers the transmission of violent norms and practices within gangs, and the enduring impact that this socialization can have on individuals after they leave the gang. Rodgers explores the connection between different types of gang violence and distinct forms of socialization, from context-driven to group dynamics to particular relationships with the leader. He also examines typical occupational trajectories of ex-gang members, and the way some of these are associated with continued practices of violence while others are not. Throughout, Rodgers highlights how socialization into violence is a fundamentally embedded and layered process, dynamically interacting with other forms of (non-violent) socialization – a finding echoed by Manekin’s study of resistance in the IDF (this special issue), an organizational setting that could not be more different.

Amelia Hoover Green, in her contribution, extends our arguments in a different way, examining the role of socialization in a typology that includes both non-state and state armed organizations. She begins by observing (as do Bateson, Wood and Rodgers, all this special issue) that socialization actually comprises several overlapping processes and institutions, and these vary considerably across armed groups; yet this variation has never been systematically
explained. Hoover Green goes on to argue that, because the constraints and incentives that affect institution-building differ between state and non-state armed groups, we should expect their socialization processes to differ in systematic ways. In particular, she advances hypotheses relating institutional variation and socialization to patterns of armed group violence against civilians (see also Cohen and Manekin, both this special issue), and then presents initial evidence from a new cross-national dataset.

Continuing the focus on state organizations, Devorah Manekin explores a key issue – the limits of military socialization or how some soldiers come to resist the normalization of violence. Drawing on the case of the Israeli Defense Force in the Second Intifada and basing the analysis on in-depth interviews with former combatants, she argues that resistance is likely when soldiers are not able to reconcile the content of their training with the circumstances they encounter when deployed. Resistance is experienced not simply as disagreement with the organization but as a conflict of identity, implying as well the multiple and layered nature of these combatants’ socialization. Analysis of soldier resistance underscores the power of military socialization while drawing attention to the agency of its targets; it therefore challenges the prevailing view of socialization as a top-down process of domination. In this, she complements Wood’s findings (this special issue) on ordered and unordered violence by Colombian para-military forces.

Lee Ann Fujii, in the special issue’s final contribution, reminds us that while socialization is a group-based process, it is important not to overlook the broader structural context within which it plays out. Specifically, she argues that to understand fully people’s participation in violence, we need to explore the role of situational logics that push or pull people toward collective forms of it. Fujii considers one such logic – the logic of display – which is about constructing meaning through violent acts and practices that people do to be seen. These violent displays inscribe new meanings by casting everyone into various roles, from reluctant spectators to instant stars. By acting out these roles, actors literally embody these new meanings, making them real. This is a powerful if understudied mechanism through which socialization may be occurring in a more dynamic, episodic way rather than as an intentional, sustained activity. To buttress the argument, Fujii considers examples of violent display across diverse settings, from the Bosnian war and the genocide in Rwanda, to lynchings in the US.


References


