

Socialization and Organized Political Violence: Theoretical Tools and Challenges

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Abstract:

Socialization – or the process of inducting new members into the norms and rules of a given community – has a long history in the social sciences. Early work by sociologists and anthropologists was followed by a political socialization research program in political science. After a lull in the 1990s, interest has revived among political scientists. Work by both IR scholars and comparativists treats socialization as a key dynamic fostering order and disorder at the international, national and sub-national levels. A review of contemporary socialization research shows that earlier theoretical and methodological weaknesses are being addressed, and that the utility of the concept has been established. However, within political science, there is still a clear need for cross fertilization. Collaboration among IR theorists and comparativists will produce better arguments about socialization – including in studies of civil conflict.

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I. Introduction¹

A disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program being implemented in the wake of a civil conflict offers jobs and schooling to former combatants, but it does not work. A rebel group despite operating in a relatively resource-rich environment thought to create incentives for violence treats civilian populations as non-combatants. An international peacekeeping force with both sufficient resources and political backing fails in its mission to restore peace.

The above vignettes, while depicting different phases of civil conflicts and highlighting the roles of different actors, share a common feature. They are situations where agents seemingly fail to understand properly the incentives and signals emanating from their environments. Why might this happen? One possibility is these are conflict/post-conflict settings, where information and signals are being filtered and distorted through the fog of (civil) war; actors would like to access such information, but have trouble so doing. Another possibility one explored in this paper is these agents, instead of being asocial information seekers, are social, part of a community that may lead them to think in ways that may change or even over-ride objective incentive structures. Put differently, they have been socialized.

Indeed, why not socialization in civil war? We know that it is a powerful force in our every-day lives, where schools, families, national militaries and religious organizations to name just a few transmit new values to individuals. These arenas of socialization all have an underlying group/organizational basis. And the latter clearly play roles in civil war as well, be it rebel groups fighting or international organizations intervening. While much of the contemporary

¹ This paper was prepared for a workshop on Socialization and Organized Political Violence, held in September 2013 at the School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University. Thanks to Michael Barnett for pushing me to address the topic and to Martha Snodgrass for research assistance.

civil-war literature has analytic groundings in political economy (Blattman and Miguel 2010) or views organizations through an economics lens (Weinstein 2007), this does not mean that socialization dynamics are absent as a smaller but important body of work suggests (Wood 2008; Autesserre 2009, 2010).

Socialization as a process or concept such dynamics within schools and the like; that claim was not pulled from thin air. An extensive body of research by sociolo

II. Socialization Disciplinary Foundations

My purpose here is not to provide a detailed review of all socialization research. Rather, the more modest goal is to chart how this literature across several disciplines developed over

With these definitional clarifications in hand, I now turn to the original home discipline for studies of socialization – sociology. Through the 1970s, a micro-perspective prevailed, where sociologists explored the role of interpersonal interactions in driving socialization and an self (Cerulo 1997).² Such interactions might play out in families (Burt,

-Lopez 2002, 346).

Unfortunately, such arguments seem to be the exception.

For reasons not entirely clear, this early and promising sociological work on socialization lost steam by the 1980 and 1990s. The micro-

Third, age matters. The primary focus in earlier socialization research was children and young adults; this made sense individual-

III. Political Science Mark 2 IR Theorists Discover Socialization

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, political science re-discovered socialization, albeit with different conceptual (causal mechanisms) and methodological (qualitative) orientations. IR scholars were the first out with this new research, but were quickly followed by comparativists.

As seen above, sociologists and anthropologists had long recognized that groups are powerful social institutions, with an ability to shape individuals and collective outcomes. An extensive literature developed in the 1960s and 1970s on various arenas of possible national-level socialization, including militaries, schools and churches. The IR 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 15 years, this focus has been a key one for so-called constructivists, who in turn drew upon earlier arguments about socialization found in the English School within international relations (Finnemore 1996a, ch.1). To the non-IR specialist, this choice might seem odd; however, it is readily explained 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 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). In its relative neglect of process and mechanisms, this early constructivist literature exhibited commonalities with sociological research, both older and more recent (sociological institutionalism).

Over the past decade, the focus has shifted to how socialization occurs. In turn, this led to unpacking the concept in four 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 behavior, 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*; see also Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 2013, chapter 15).

Second, moving beyond correlations, IR scholars began to theorize the causal mechanisms that result in socializing outcomes. These include persuasion and social influence (Johnston 2001, 2008); arguing (Risse 2000; Lynch 2002); social learning (Price 1998; Checkel 2001); rhetorical action (Schimmelfennig 2001); role playing (Beyers 2005); and instrumental calculation (Hooghe 2001, ch.1; Schimmelfennig 2005).⁴ 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?

Moreover, in several cases, the IR scholars have gone a step further. That is, they not only theorize particular mechanisms of socialization, but also the conditions under which they are expected to operate – so called 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).

⁴ Although no connection is made, there is a striking degree of overlap between this roster of socialization mechanisms and those elaborated conceptually by Aronfreed three decades earlier (Aronfreed 1968).

Third, despite group pressures, we have abundant evidence that socialization often fails; this has led constructivists to explore those factors that might facilitate it. These include age (young is good, but not too young – there appears to be an inflection point), cognitive priors (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, 2008; Checkel 2007, chs.1, 8). This emphasis on exploring both successful and failed socialization is a progressive advance on earlier work.

Fourth, there is a growing recognition that socialization is a two-way street, which means that one must also theorize and give agency to those socialization targets. If early constructivist research could be justly criticized for over-emphasizing the agency of international actors (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999), newer work problematizes the relationship between the socializing agency and its target, exploring, for example, the cognitive, cultural, local normative, and institutional factors that allow a target to resist socialization (Cortell and

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. Put differently, much of the constructivist work has been devoted to how socialization can create patterns of order and cooperation.

Third, IR scholars studying socialization have systematically neglected a fundamental unit of social analysis – power. This has happened for a number of reasons. Partly it is a function of epistemology. The constructivist work reviewed here is positivist in orientation and thus less attuned to the workings of power as captured by more critical, interpretive scholarship (Epstein 2012, for a superb critique along these lines; see also Gheciu 2005). In addition, the above-noted selection effect has played a role. When studying Western Europe and the European Union – as done by much constructivist socialization research – it is all too easy to lose sight of and neglect power, as it is often embedded in and works through (those ubiquitous in Europe) institutions (Checkel 2014).

Fourth, recent IR work on socialization has not been particularly ambitious in a theoretical sense.⁵ Typically, scholars have started with a puzzle or problem about socialization they wish to understand, and then develop – in close correspondence with their empirics – a set of mechanisms that explain the case at hand. If nearly everyone within a research program proceeds in this way, the result is that theoretical cumulation is replaced by proliferating lists of causal mechanisms. Perhaps this is not such a worrying state of affairs, as much IR theory is rather useless for explaining the world as it really works. At the same time – and as I argue in the conclusion – a case can be made for a theoretical middle ground that is empirically rich and case

then highlight its contributions; I close with a plea for more dialogue across subfield (IR, comparative) lines.

The study of civil conflict has become a growth industry in political science over the past 15 years. At first largely quantitative in method and with a grounding in (materialist) political-economy theories (Blattman and Miguel 2010, for an excellent review), the last decade has seen a growing amount of rigorous qualitative and, increasingly, mixed method work (Tarrow 2007, for review). Within the qualitative work, a smaller group of scholars has sought to move beyond political economy, instead focusing on what one might call the social dynamics of civil war. The latter include the roles played by emotions (Wood 2003) cultural framing (Autesserre 2009, 2010), social networks (Parkinson 2013), and language operationalized as both discourse (Hansen 2006) and persuasion (Lynch 2013).

As the civil-war literature progressed, scholars began to disaggregate. For quantitative researchers, this signaled a move to new, sub-national data sets; in a similar fashion, qualitative scholars took central actors in such conflicts international peacekeepers, rebel groups and began to look inside them. For some, this was just another opportunity to apply political economy models to a new object of study rebel groups (Weinstein 2007; Salehyan 2009). However, such a perspective obscures the social interaction within such groups, thus making it virtually impossible to answer questions with key significance for theory and policy. Does participation in the group matter (see also Tarrow 2007)? Is retention of group members marked by a process different from their recruitment (Gates 2002)? Are levels and types of violence explained by the presence (or absence) of certain social dynamics within the group?

This focus on the group and interactions within it has led several researchers to turn to the concept of socialization. If the constructivists employed it to theorize better order and cooperation, then the comparativists have done nearly the opposite, exploring how socialization may foster violence and death, and enhance combat effectiveness in civil wars. Consider international organizations and their interventions in civil conflicts; hers is not a happy story of cooperation and institutional effectiveness. Rather, it is about how framing and socialization lead to organizational pathologies and failed interventions, where certain taken-for-granted understandings of how to resolve conflict locally are so deeply

embedded that they are never questioned (Autesserre 2009, 2010; see also Barnett and Finnemore 2004, ch.5).

Seeking to gain analytic leverage on the internal dynamics of rebel groups, Wood and Cohen advance arguments on combatant (Wood) and combat socialization (Cohen). Wood builds upon earlier sociological work on military socialization, and accomplishes something the IR constructivists have never managed to theorize conflictual and violent socialization mechanisms, including hazing and dehumanization (Wood 2010, 309; see also Wood 2008, 546-47). Like the sociologists of the 1950s and 1960s, she finds that age is crucial: Child recruits are more susceptible to socialization (Wood 2010, 310; see also Gates 2011, 50). Wood and Gates thus fill a theoretical lacuna in the econometric/survey work (Blattman 2007; Annan, Blattman, *et al.* 2009; Beber and Blattman 2013), which documents and seeks to explain in political

nothing else, socialization is a process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community. The language of causal mechanisms in empirical research, as Cohen does, requires the use of a particular method to measure them in action: process tracing (Beach and Pedersen 2013).

Recent work by Gates presents an important fusion of the comparative and IR perspectives. Building upon implicit arguments about the role of socialization within rebel groups in an earlier study (Gates 2002, 111-16), he considers the case of child soldiers, arguing that teaching and learning mechanisms emphasized by the IR constructivists and more violent ones such as hazing and dehumanization stressed by the comparativists all play a role (Gates 2011, 57-60). Gates thus nicely integrates themes from the older, sociological military-socialization literature and newer work by political scientists. And the integration is important: Just because one is studying groups whose mission is the production of violence, there is no reason to rule out *a priori* the use of non-violent socialization mechanisms to achieve that end.

At the same time, one must consider 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. For example, with teaching and learning which facilitate internalization one might expect a greater degree of compliance. -is-just-the-way-we-do-

Summary ó Ngvøu"Vcmm# As the above demonstrates, we currently have two sets of political scientist theorizing the same term socialization

socialization research program, where there was a mismatch between theoretical concept (socialization) and method employed (quantitative).

V. Conclusions

nce, then the work reviewed here indicates that socialization is an essential part of the story. Key actors and processes in civil war – from rebel groups, to international interveners to post-conflict DDR programs – inevitably have a social dimension. Perhaps it is not always relevant; however, it should be ruled out on empirical grounds and not by theoretical fiat or methodological fashion.

This said, future work, while building on the achievements of recent research, needs to reflect on several issues. These include a theoretical danger of splintering and non-cumulation; and a methodological warning about the difficulty of measuring process.

Taking Theory Seriously. Over the past decade, IR constructivists

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 in contemporary political science are silent on these scores (Katzenstein and Sil 2010a, b).

In fact, middle-range theory has three potential drawbacks. For one, it will indeed often be over-determined. That is, with several independent variables or mechanisms in play, it is not possible to isolate the causal impact of any single factor. One way to address and minimize this problem is by emphasizing research design at early stages of a project. This may sound like Grad Seminar 101 advice, but it needs nonetheless to be stressed.

In addition, when large parts of a research program are characterized by mid-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. Now,

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Whatever the case, one promising possibility for addressing these analytic problems is typological theory, or theories about how combinations of mechanisms interact in shaping outcomes for specified populations. 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; stimulates fruitful iteration between cases, the specification of populations, and theories; and creates a framework for cumulative progress. On the latter, 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 (Bennett and George 2005, ch.11). For example, in a recent project on civil war, it was demonstrated that typological theorizing is one way to promote cumulation, even in the hard case of mid-range, theoretically plural accounts (Checkel 2013a, ch.8).

Contemporary students of socialization, be they IR scholars or comparativists, have turned to causal mechanisms to capture its underlying process foundations. This move is explicit and shared by virtually all if not all the authors reviewed above. Less explicit is the methodological implication of this conceptual-analytic choice. Simply put, to document empirically the workings of causal mechanisms requires the use of process tracing. There is now a growing literature seeking to systematize and establish good standards for this method (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 nd, ch.1; Pouliot nd), and future work on socialization and organized political violence needs for three reasons to embrace it.

First, new work on process tracing emphasizes the need carefully and fully to theorize the observable implications, without which process tracing is virtually impossible. Put dirgrETBT1 09 259.25 Tm[0

employ process tracing in an operational and systematic manner, and not fall prey to the buzzword problem, which is currently endemic in the broader discipline.⁷

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