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Social Constructivism and the Contemporary World

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Abstract

Social constructivism is legitimately considered as one of the most common approaches to international relations nowadays and perhaps even the most important one. Such concepts and terms as, anarchy, discourses, norms, institution, interests, socialisation, identity, are frequently invoked in debates over the International Relations. Therefore, these are important for understanding the debate around international society. Many studies are focusing on the explanation of the concept of constructivism and its theorisation. The goal of this article also is not that far from that last as its aim to explain social constructivism and its entails theory. The different brought in the case of our study is that we shed light on its capacity to explain the structure of the contemporary world. Its impact on the international affairs, important standards and institutions from a constructivist prospective with radical ideology and evolutions applied to organizations are also discuss in this paper.

Keywords: Social constructivism, norms, institutions, EU, NATO, Theory.

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Introduction

There are several different classifications of theories of international relations. Most, however, draw a distinction between general theories, namely the three philosophies which have proposed a normative, historical and relatively global explanation of international relations - realism, liberalism and Marxism - and other theories. This second category brings together the partial theories specific to the various fields of specialization of international relations and the critical normative conceptions of general theories. However, among the latter, others have emerged in other disciplines. This is the case of constructivism. We will not be able to speak about constructivism without evoking its conception in other sciences. But when it comes to social constructivism in international relations, what is important here is how can we analyse this approach in the light of contemporary interactions? But above all, to what extent can we find an explanation from the constructivist approach to the interstate and supra-state relations of the contemporary world? While keeping in mind that the concept of constructivism is used in many areas and as a result is very often confusing, we are going in this study to better refocus our work to speak first about the concept of constructivism in other disciplines then in international relation. Moreover, since constructivism is positioned among the critical theories of rationalist theories, we will then discuss the place of State and the role of institutions and norms for social constructivists. And to have a clear vision of the constructivist approach in international relations, we will finally set out the

contribution of constructivism to the understanding of contemporary society. So, its manifestation on the international scene through concrete examples.

I- Analysis of the Concept of Social Constructivism

Constructivism is a current that emerges in various disciplines (philosophy, education, mathematics, sociology, architecture, ...) according to which its use and meaning vary. This heterogeneity of thinking has contributed to confusion over what is meant by terms such as "constructivism", "social construction" or "reality", the meanings of which may vary considerably from one author to another and from one discipline to another. After a brief historical detour, it is the constructivism in international relations which will be discussed later.

A- Historical Analysis of Social Constructivism

Historically, we can say that constructivism comes from the philosophy of science. This field of study seeks in particular to understand what grounds the knowledge and in particular the criteria which make that an activity is called scientific. Constructivism is part of a debate that opposes it to empiricism and realism. The object of the confrontation is how knowledge is acquired and in particular the role of the researcher in this process. The empiricist approach postulates that experience is at the origin of knowledge: the researcher observes, and from his perception of reality, he can draw theories unlike rationalism, where it is in reason that knowledge is born. With regard to realism, it assumes the existence of an objective reality independent of the human:

the objects of research are considered as independent of the observer and the influence that it can have on its object is ignored. Constructivists do not deny the existence of reality, but claim that it cannot be known. For them, the knowledge of reality is a construction: the researcher participates in constructing his object, by the way he observes, by his representations, etc. The researcher does not have direct access to the real world, but only to a representation of it, which everyone builds, and which is influenced by his ideas or culture. Knowledge is not independent of the context in which it is created, it depends on human action.

In sociology, constructivism is an approach that views social reality as a social construct. More specifically, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann are the first to develop this approach in a reference book: « *The Social Construction of Reality* » (1996). They propose to show how social reality (norms, values, culture, ...) is built by social actors. In this sense, reality is not a metaphysical entity cut off from individuals' perceptive capacities, and Berger and T. Luckmann's definition of reality is "quality belonging to phenomena that we recognise as having existence independent of our own will "[1]. Thus, social construction is done through two processes: outsourcing (the human being constructs the social reality) and internalisation (through socialisation, the human being internalises this reality). This book has had a huge impact on contemporary sociology, is one of the most widely

[1] Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Paris: A. Colin, 1996, 288 p.

read and is considered one of the most important sociology books of the 20th century.

As examples of social construction, let us take the case of the social construction of gender. The masculine and the feminine seem to us natural, since they are based on biological differences between men and women. A constructivist analysis will say that it is social processes such as social reproduction or education that make individuals acquire feminine or masculine characteristics, and that gender relations are therefore contingent rather than natural. Indeed, the sociology of gender is the science that studies social relations of sex. She sees the masculine and the feminine as the result of a social construction and not as a notion peculiar to physiology. Robert Stoller, American psychiatrist of the 60s, summarises the two approaches "Sex is biological, gender is social". The sociology of gender thus distinguishes the concept of sex from that of gender[2]. However, this socio-constructivist approach faces criticism. Note that the criticism often made of constructivism in sociology is that of relativism[3]. The constructivist answer is that most of the work on social construction is not relativistic. Another criticism is that everything is social construction. The constructivists retort that they do not pretend that reality does not exist and that everything is social, but that the "constructivist approach bears first and foremost the gaze on

[2] On this subject see Robert Stoller, *Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Feminity*, Sc. House, NY, 1968.

[3] Everything is relative. There are only points of view that are all equally valid because the reality is unattainable.

the historical and social processes of the production of meaning and their effects in return on the "Social reality"[4].

In the field of education, constructivism, as a theory of learning, was first developed by Piaget in reaction to behaviourism which, in his view, limited learning to stimulus association too much. Indeed, well before Piaget, authors such as James (1892/1958) or John Dewey (1859-1952) have already talked about the phenomenon of social construction. The first modern theorist, however, to synthesize all these varied ideas is Jean Piaget. The constructivist approach emphasizes the activity and the capacity inherent to each subject, which enables him to apprehend the reality that surrounds him. Constructivism supposes that the knowledge of each subject is not a mere "copy" of reality, but a "reconstruction" of it. The epistemic constructivism developed by the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980). For him, learning is a progressive construction of an increasingly complex system of knowledge and know-how. The interaction between the individual and his environment is a necessary condition for his cognitive development. The social constructivism of the Russian psychologist Lev Vigotsky (1896-1934) in his work adds that this learning is necessarily done in a group, so it is a collaborative learning. And the radical constructivism of Ernst Von Glaserfed (1917-2010) meanwhile that all reality is built and does not exist in itself. This theory calls into question any externally

[4] Marc Loriol, *The Construction of The Social: Suffering*, work and categorization of users in public action Rennes: Rennes University Press. 2012, p.13.

guided learning and is therefore difficult to apply to teaching, unlike the two other currents.

The constructivism thus approached in the disciplines mentioned above, note that it developed as a theory in other sciences as well, but that it is appropriate in the context of our study not to dwell on it because our principal object of study is constructivism in international relations. Let's see how it came into being in this area.

B- Social Constructivism as a Discipline of International Relation

Social constructivism is one of the youngest approaches in International Relations. it tries to occupy a middle place in International Relations as it situated between the two major debates. Actually, "its main attraction as well as its main difficulty is that it tries to occupy the 'middle ground' in International Relations"[5]. In fact, the first debate was between realism and idealism and the second one was between behaviouralists and traditionalists. Therefore, constructivism as a form of "reflectivist" critique of the scientific approach to the study of social sciences, that was initially developed as a mostly interpretive metatheory can take place in the third debate in so far as reflectivists and rationalists are[6].

[5] Jill Steans et al., *An introduction to international relations theory, perspectives and themes*, 3thd ed, Pearson, 2010. p.183.

[6] "Metatheory" refers to a type of epistemological as contrasted with ontological theorisation dealing broadly with the subject of theory itself, or "[a] theory the subject matter of which is another theory." (Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite, (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010). Put in a more precise manner, it refers, according to Griffiths et al., to "the criteria that are used to adjudicate among the different meanings of theory and which privilege particular meanings over

But in the 1980s both realism and liberalism (idealism) were revamped. The debate moved between neo-realism and neo-liberalism. And author like Ole Wæver, counts the neo-neo-debate as the third debate, and therefore sees the debate between rationalists and reflectivists as the fourth one. He also argues that at the extremes of the fourth debate there was little to gain for the future development of International Relations[7]. So, there is even about the place taken by constructivism in International Relation some confusions. As Jill Steans and colleague's puts it in their study of theory, "During the second half of the 1980s International Relations as a discipline was dominated by what is sometimes called the 'third', sometimes the 'fourth' debate"[8]. Thomas Christiansen, Knud-Erik Jorgensen and Antje Wiener in a review of social constructivist work on European integration, have therefore used the image of an arch between the poles of rationalism and reflectivism to symbolise the 'middle ground[9].

To study social constructivism, mean that we need foremost to ask our self, why this approach is called social constructivism? As theory of International Relation, Constructivism means that to do not

others." For example, questions about the limits of human knowledge and the way, as well as the certainty with which, human beings can know things are questions of metatheory. Metatheoretical debates in International Relations draw heavily on social and political philosophy. See Martin Griffiths, Terry O'Callaghan and Steven C. Roach, *International Relations: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p.313; For further details on details between substantive theory and metatheory especially with respect to constructivism, see Fred Chernoff, *Theory and Metatheory in International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), p.151-53.

[7] Jill Steans et al., p.185.

[8] Ibid, p.185.

[9] Ibid, p.186.

accept any social features of life as given. Instead, authors acknowledge that human beings are always situated in particular contexts which inform their actions, the world we live in is therefore always contextual and human being reproduce, or construct, their 'world' through their actions. There are no 'standard' facts. They see the process of constructivism as a 'social' process that cannot be done by one person alone, but only in the engagement with others. Peoples are always part of broader settings which they can shape, but only within the specific context. Social constructivists are interested also on discourse. How? by the way that the focus on language as a central category which helps them to explain foreign policy. For them, language can be observed in the many different practices of actors engaged in international politics[10]. Constructivism has been regarded by some theorists as belonging to, or being an "outgrowth" of, the critical discourse of international relations theory, as "many of its pioneers explicitly sought to employ the insights of that theory to illuminate diverse aspects of world politics."[11]

Several writers have accomplished important works that have influenced the constructivist current. Many social constructivists in International Relations take their inspiration from the work of Anthony Giddens. He made many academics search concerning the "Middle

[10] Ibid, p.183.

[11] Christian Reus Smit, "Constructivism," in *Theories of International Relations*, 3rd ed. Scot Burchill et al., Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005, p.194-95; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 4.

ground" and helped formulate the 'third way' as the ideology of New Labour in the United Kingdom[12]. Hedley Bull (1932-1985) also influenced social constructivism current. In his main book *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, when he says that we can create conditions of solidarity between States, he therefore balanced the hard thought of realism[13]. These authors so mentioned, in the following lines, we will talk about scholars of social constructivism.

Properly speaking, social constructivism was established as recently as the late 1980s and early 1990s by such thinkers as, Emanuel Adler, Alexander Wendt, Nicholas Onuf, Friedrich Kratochwil, John Gerard Ruggie and Peter Katzenstein and Martha Finnemore. The common point that they share is that constructivism is a "social theory of international politics" that emphasises the social construction of world affairs as opposed to the claim of neo-realists that international politics is shaped by the rational-choice behaviour/decisions of egoist actors who pursue their interests by making utilitarian calculations to maximise their benefits and minimise their losses, hence the materiality of international structures. Constructivism is seen as a "distinctive approach" to international relations that stresses the social, ideational and intersubjective character of world politics. The major thesis of

[12] Anthony Giddens is a sociologist who from 1997 to 2003 was the director of the London School of Economics and Political Science. One of the most influential parts of his work sets out the idea of structurationism: that action is influenced and constrained by social structures, which in turn are reproduced by agency. There have since been many critiques and variations of this theme, but for International Relations, Giddens' formulation still remains most important.

[13] See Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977.

constructivism is that the international system is "socially constructed".[14]

According to Adler, the central argument about constructivism, relates not to the theoretical clash between "science" and "literary interpretation or 'stories'", but to "the nature of social science itself and, therefore, the discipline of International Relations." "In other words," he elucidates, "the issue pits a naturalist conception of science, almost entirely based on contested philosophies of science and on physical concepts and theories that physics has long since abandoned, against a concept of social science that is social."[15]. Concerning the place occupied by constructivism, Emanuel Adler, in an influential article, published in 1997 by the European Journal of International Relations, identified social constructivism as occupying the space between the individualist account of rationalism, which starts from the individual subject, and the holism of structuralism, which focuses on all-encompassing accounts of world politics; between the agency-oriented explanations of rationalism and the focus on structure in structuralism; and between the materialism integral to rationalism and the ideationalism in cognitive approaches[16]. He contends that, the true middle ground between rationalist and relativist interpretive approaches is occupied neither by an interpretive version of rationalism, nor by

[14] Martin Griffiths, *International Relations: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p.51.

[15] Emmanuel Adler, *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005, p.88.

[16] Jill Steans et al., p.185.

some variety of 'reflectivism' as described by Keohane[17], nor even by all sorts of critical theories as imprecisely portrayed by Mearsheimer[18], but by constructivism. Constructivism is the view that the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world[19].

Martha Finnemore in her 1996 book: "National Interests in International Society" proposes a different approach to constructivism as a systemic theory. Her version of the theory is based on the assumptions that: "States are embedded in dense networks of transnational and international social relations that shape their perceptions of the world and their role in the world."[20] Her assumption is that: "States interests are defined in the context of internationally held norms and understanding about what is good and appropriate"[21] and "that states are socialised to accept new norms, values, and perceptions

[17] Adler refers to the following article by Robert Keohane in which he uses the term "reflectivist" to describe, as he notes, "all interpretive International Relation scholars, including constructivists" as opposed to rationalists: Robert Keohane, *International Institutions: Two Approaches, International Studies Quarterly,* 1988, p. 32.

[18] Adler's reference here is to John J. Mearsheimer, *The False Promise of International Institutions*, International Security no. 3, 1994-95, p.19; The article has also been included in Michael E. Brown et al., *Theories of War and Peace*, Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1998, p.83.

[19] Emmanuel Adler, *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005, p.90.

[20] Martha Finnemore, National Interests in International Society, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1996, p.2.

[21] Ibidem.

of interest by international organisations" the supposition being here that "the international system can change what states 'want'"[22]. Her view of the structure of the international system is that it is a socially constructed one from the common shared view on rules, principles, norms of behaviour and shared beliefs[23]. Her analysis is based on three case studies. First, how UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) has influenced states into adopting science policy bureaucracies. Second, how states accepted rule-governed norms on warfare. The incentive here, being that the Red Cross International Committee has prescribed what is considered as 'appropriate behaviour' of 'civilised' states involved in war. The last case study being focused on how Third World states accepted poverty alleviation as a central economic norm.

For Alexander Wendt, constructivism is a structural theory of the international system. Wendt published many articles and the most famous of them is 'Anarchy is what states make of it', published in the journal International Organisation in 1992. That article sets out the consequences of Giddens' structuration theory for the analysis of international relations. In fact, "He argues that anarchy is not simply a given, but is moulded over time through the behaviour of states"[24]. Wendt criticises neo-realists and neoliberals for reifying the structure of states system and taking for granted its ontological and ideational

[22] Ibid, p.5.
[23] Ibid, p.15.
[24] Jill Steans et al., p.195.

properties, which precludes us from considering and assessing the potentials for structural and institutional change in the international politics. He contends that states are intentional and corporate actors whose identities and interests are in important part determined by domestic politics rather than the international system, and as states change so does the international structure. Indeed, it is in his main book, Social Theory of International Politics (1999), that Wendt argues that there are 'three cultures of anarchy. He labels these three cultures of anarchy as following: Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian. For him, the Hobbesian culture is closest to the neo-realist image of anarchy, in which power and interests dominate, while the Lockean version states, although rivals, recognise each other's sovereignty, and therefore submit to a minimum standard of common norms. the Kantian system meanwhile is for the fact that, the scope of shared norms is much more extensive, and states no longer see themselves primarily as rivals[25]. Moreover, Wendt, criticise neorealism and neoliberalism as "under socialised" in the sense that they understate the social construction of actors in world politics[26]. According to Wendt, there are two principal conceptions that fundamentally distinguish constructivism from the traditions of realism and liberalism. First, for constructivism, international structures consist both of social and material components, and second, these social factors influence actors' identities and interests

[25] See Alexander Wendt, *Anarchy is what states make of it, International Organisation*, 46/2, 1992, pp. 391-425.

[26] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp.1-4.

along with material factors[27]. The vision of these authors so summarised, what about that of Nicholas Onuf?

Nicholas Greenwood Onuf was the first theorist who introduced the term "constructivism" in International Relations theory in 1989, contending that states much the same as individuals are living in a "world of our making," as the title of his famous book bears,(Nicholas G. Onuf, *World of Our Making,* Columbia: University of South California Press, 1989.) where many entities such as "social facts" are made by human action, as opposed to "brute facts" that do not depend for their existence on human action but rather are phenomena of human condition[28]. The fact that constructivism emerged as a metatheory about how social sciences in general operate appears to have been the main reason the practice of constructivism in International Relations drew a good deal of criticism at the outset. Critics charged that "constructivism had provided little in the way of substantive knowledge, or even hypotheses, about the behaviour of states or state systems."[29] It was in the middle of 1990s that the alternative works of some International Relations theorists helped to develop and present constructivism as a substantive "theory" of international behaviour. Onuf and other researchers relied on earlier

[27] Fred Chernoff, *Theory and Metatheory in International Relations*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008, p.69.

[28] John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, London: Allen Lane, 1995; Cited in Chris Brown with Kirsten Ainley, *Understanding International Relations*, 3rd ed. London and New York: Palgrave, 2005, p.49.

[29] Fred Chernoff, p.68.

critiques of structural realism in International Relations : those found in the theory of regimes, transnationalism, the McDougal School of International Law, the theory of the system-world and various currents of social theory. The proponents of the latter and the specialists of international law thus accused the structural realism of being a-historical and congenitally incapable of explaining change[30].

The idea of each authors studied, which is to remember is that, in International Relations, constructivism has been singled out as a critical theoretical approach, both implicitly in the face of classical theory and explicitly by invoking Habermas and the importance it attaches to intersubjective arrangement[31], as Anthony Giddens and his concept of structuring[32]. Constructivism denounces the shortcomings of structural realism and rationalism and calls for critical social theory to question the political and discursive elements of power.

[30] See, John G. Ruggie, *International Regimes, Transactions, And Change : Embedded Liberalism In The Postwar Economic Order,* in Stephen Krasner (ed.), International Regimes, Ithaca, Cornell UP, 1983, and *Continuity And Transformation In The World Polity : Towards A Neorealist Synthesis*, World Politics 35, january 1983 ; Friedrich Kratochwil, *On The Notion Of "Interest" In International Relations* , International Organisation 36, winter 1982, *Norms And Values : Rethinking The Domestic Analogy* , Ethics & International Affairs 1, 1987, and *Of Systems, Boundaries, And Territoriality : An Inquiry Into The Formation Of The State System* , World Politics 39, october 1986 ; Kratochwil and Ruggie, *International Organisation : A State Of The Art On An Art Of The State*, International Organisation 40, 1986.

[31] See, Friedrich Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions. On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1989.

[32] Refer to Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making*, Columbia (SC), University of South Carolina Press, 1989; Alexander Wendt, *The agent-structure problem in international relations theory*, International Organisation 41, 1987.

By studying constructivism, there are also differences in approaches between actors that need to be illuminated. Loosely speaking, as a widely discussed theory of International Relations, constructivism has appeared in two major varieties, North American and European, which differ principally in the questions they ask about international relations and foreign policy-making as well as the methods they use to answer them. The North American variant emphasises the role of "social norms" and "identities" in constructing international politics and determining foreign policy outcomes and is dominated by "positivist" scholars who are interested in "uncovering top-down/deductive mechanisms and causal relationships between actors, norms, interests and identity."[33] In this camp, which prevails mostly in the United States and might be dubbed "conventional," "standard" or "American" constructivism, are such theorists as Alexander Wendt, Emmanuel Adler, Nicholas Onuf, John Gerard Ruggie, Peter Katzenstein and Martha Finnemore[34]. The European variant, on the other hand, pays attention largely to the role of "language," "linguistic constructions" and "social discourses" in constructing social reality, and is dominated by "post-positivist" or "interpretivist" scholars who are interested not in explaining the causes and effects of (identity) change through deductive research methods, as conventional constructivists are, but in exploring the conditions of

[33]Jeffrey T. Checkel, *Constructivism and Foreign Policy*, in *Foreign Policy: Theories. Actors. Cases*, ed. Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield and Tim Dunne, Oxford University Press, 2008, p.72.

[34] Fred Chernoff, Op cit., p.69.

possibility for such change and the ways in which they are created in the first place, using "inductive (bottom up)" research strategies. Such theorists as Friedrich Kratochwil and Ted Hopf belong to the camp of "interpretive/interpretative constructivism."[35] Differences among constructivists notwithstanding, they are all common in giving "greater weight to the social – as opposed to the material – in world politics."[36]

Constructivists are interested in the interplay of interests and ideas, as well as in the impact of norms, culture and institutions on international politics. Typical themes addressed by social constructivist work are, therefore, the construction of national interests, the spread of human rights, the impact of international organisations on state identities as well as the impact of States on international organisations, or the development of different forms of international society. So, we will not be able to understand constructivist approach without highlighting the place of States and the role of norms and institutions.

II- The Place of States and the Role of Institutions and Norms

According to constructivists, international relations are complex phenomena, so normative aspects such as culture, identity, norms and institutions need to be addressed. These conceptions are very important

[35]Jeffrey T. Checkel, p.73.
[36] *Ibid*, p.72.

when studying social constructivism. We cannot study this approach without underlining the role of norms and institutions and how the States acting in international society.

A- The Place of States

Constructivists challenge the variants of the realistic view that institutions are only the epiphenomenal reflections of the interests of the great powers. However, they do not refuse to admit that states play an important role in the process of constructing international norms, but the postulate of the primacy of the great powers cannot be justified either conceptually or empirically[37]. For the constructivist movement, all sorts of state and non-state actors compete to make certain norms prevail and establish more formal organisations to spread these social arrangements. International relations evolve within this global social context. Indeed, for the neo-realists, the international system presents quasi-mechanistic characteristics: the structure of the system obliges to behave in this way. While from a constructivist point of view, there is nothing universal or automatic. States behave as they do, because they are socialised in the institutions of international politics. International politics is not strictly governed by power and interests. There are fundamentals norms in international politics. In this context, the constructivist approach is based on the intersubjective dimension of political relations in general. States are "existing" cultures with the

[37] Refer to Audie Klotz, *Norms in International Relations* and Cecelia Lynch, *Beyond Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics*, Ithaca, Cornell UP, 1999.

capacity and the will to adopt deliberate attitudes towards the world and to give it meaning. It is this capacity that gives birth to social facts, facts that depend on the agreement of rational partners, human institutions to exist[38]. The identity and interest of the actors are socially constructed. The very nature of actors on the world stage depends on the prevailing social context. The system of states is enshrined in a state society that includes a set of rules, values and institutions that are commonly accepted and regulate international life. The concrete type of anarchy is therefore context-specific: it changes over time, and according to region. Following the logic of structure and agency in a social constructivist view, states shape anarchy through their interactions, and the concrete form of anarchy prevalent in a given historical and spatial context shapes the nature and behaviour of states[39].

To speak about the place of state according to the constructivist approach leads us to speak about the concept of interest. As far as the notion of interests is concerned, constructivists also contest several postulates of traditional theories of international relations. For them, for example, states' interests cannot be simply deduced from the global distribution of material power: there is also a component of social power[40] . To scrutinise the social construction of the international

[38] see John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, Gallimard, Paris, 1998, pp.35-45.

[39] Jill Steans et al., p.195.

[40] Conceptions of social power periodically reappear in different social science currents in general and International Relations in particular. An example is found in Rodney Bruce Hall, "Moral authority as power resource," International Organization 51, 1997.

reality, constructivism advances two well-developed hypotheses by J. Checkel: the environment in which the actors operate is both social "and" material; this framework can provide actors with the intelligibility of their interests[41]. The question of how interests are formed or what defines the interest of states has provoked debates within the thinkers of the constructivist movement. Together, constructivists reject the mere juxtaposition of norms and interests. They examine the relationships that bind them. According to them, intersubjective arrangements constitute interests as well as identities. However, not all constructivists agree on a number of issues. For example, for authors like Wendt, interaction between states leads to the construction of interests. Nevertheless, most constructivists emphasise the importance of international institutions, global social structures, as components of the international system. It is the case of social constructivists like Klotz and Finnemore.

The interaction of structure and different kinds of agents is essential to understanding and explaining interests and institutions. Therefore, the question of norms and institutions seems fundamental for the constructivist approach. The place of the state and interest according to the constructivist approach so situated, what about the role of norms and institutions.

[41] Jeffrey T. Checkel, "*The Constructivist Turn in International Relations*," World Politics, Vol 50, No. 2, 1998, pp.324-348.

B- The Role Of Norms And Institutions

Already in the 1970s, the English school was differentiated from the US-dominated neorealism, not only by its methodology, but also by the question of the role that norms, and in particular international law play in international politics. To this end, the English school has clear social constructivist characteristics. An important figure in the English school, Hedley Bull in 1977, presents his idea of an international society, its main norms and institutions. Bull agrees with the realists that modern international society is anarchic in the sense that it is not governed by formal hierarchies, but insists that this does not mean that there are no standards and that, there is therefore a societal aspect of international politics. According to Bull, the five principal institutions of international society are the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, war, and the existence and role of the great powers. Thus, for Bull, institutions and norms such as sovereignty and non-intervention were guarantors of the order. For him, human rights are important in international society. This had to be weighed against sovereignty and non-intervention[42].

> We can say that social constructivism is similar to the English school, like the old approach. For constructivists, society is characterised by the existence of mutually agreed norms and common institutions. Thus, social constructivists because of the existence of norms and institutions at the international level prefer to speak of an international society

[42] See Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 1977.

> rather than an international system. The conceptualisation of institutions in terms of "sets of practices" found in constructivists differs substantially from the positivist notion of objectivity and also differs from the more relativistic currents of post-positivist thought. The importance attached to intersubjectivity draws attention, beyond international organisations, to a wider social context of norms, rules, cultures and ideas. These ideal factors are not reducible to individual beliefs and values: for example, norms are inherently shared modes of behaviour. Institutions and "structures" are fundamentally social constructions, with both discourses and formal organisations[43].

Hence, rules and norms play a vital role in guiding the behaviour of international actors and structuring international life in general. As already mentioned, many studies have demonstrated, empirically and theoretically, the importance of "intersubjective arrangements" by studying how they are developed, the contexts in which they are situated, and their consequences on the behaviour of agents and the formation of institutions in international politics[44]. Audie Klotz, for example, indicated that the "standard of racial equality" was

[43] Alexander Wendt, and Raymond Duvall, *Institutions and International Order*, in Ernst-Otto Czempiel and James N. Rosenau (ed.), *Global Changes and Theoretical Challenges: Approaches to World Politics for the 1990s*, Lexington, Lexington Books, 1989.

[44] See John G. Ruggie, "Embedded liberalism ...", Friedrich Kratochwil, "Norms and values ...", Audie Klotz, Norms in International Relations, The Struggle Against Apartheid, Ithaca, Cornell UP, 1995.

disseminated throughout world politics, with real effects on the maps of South Africa's apartheid system. Friedrich Kratochwil said that the outcome of the missile crisis in Cuba was linked to the development of mutual arrangements; and John Ruggie, comment on the intersubjective agreement on a global economy "enshrined in liberalism" and guide their actions in the immediate aftermath of the war.

There are a variety of definitions of the norm in international relations, which, however, contain elements of convergences. A norm is standard of appropriate behaviour for actors who have a given identity[45]. It is possible to distinguish between the nature of the norms: regulatory, constitutive or prescriptive[46]. Constructivism focuses on the theory of constitutive rules[47]. The seizure of the distinction constitutive rules - regulatory rules (among neo-realists and neo-liberalist) dates back to John Rawls[48]. John Searle takes it up again in a book that marks his constructivist turn and the shift to social philosophy[49]. Some rules only harmonise the development of an activity. They can appear before, during, or after creating an activity. They are regulatory rules[50].

[45] Defined by Peter Katzenstein et al., The Culture of National Security, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996.

[46] Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, *International Norm Dynamics and Political Change*, International Organisation, Vol.52, No. 4, 1998, pp.887-917.

[47] John G. Ruggie, *"What Makes the World Hang Together?" Neo-utilitarism and the Social Constructivist Challenge*, International Organisation, Vol.52, No. 4, 1998, pp.855 -885.

[48] John R. Rawls, *Two Concepts of Justice,* Philosophical Review, Vol 64, No. 1, 1955, pp.3-32.

[49] John R. Searle, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Gallimard, 1999, Cl, Tiercelin, pp.20-55

[50] Ibid, p.46.

Constitutive rules, on the other hand, have a more "fundamental" status because they are endogenous to the conduct of the designated activity. They "create the possibility" of the activity itself. According to Searle, institutional facts are present only within the constitutive rules. It is the whole, the backbone, the arsenal of constitutive rules that is the condition of existence of institutional facts[51]. The institutional fact is accompanied by collective intentionality and agentive rules. For example, the UN's "agentive" rule is the promotion of peace, and the "agentive" rule is the "essential" function assigned to an entity. Institutions have the capacity to regulate the international behaviour of states through socialisation and the constitutive rules are the institutional foundation of social life. Sovereignty, international egoism, the State, the United Nations are, each at their level, institutions. Their existence depends on constitutive and regulatory rules. Standards are therefore not defined solely in terms of regulation. They are more than constraints, elements of the cost-benefit calculation of the actors. They can therefore define the nature of the interests. The "rules of the game" and the "intersubjective arrangements" not only frame the behaviors but make them possible. This vision has an impact on international relations in that it also has practical consequences: the change in world politics occurs when "the actors, by their practices, change the rules and norms of international interaction"[52].

[51] Ibid, p.47.

[52] Rey Koslowski and Friedrich Kratochwil, *Understanding change in international politics: The Soviet Empire's demise and the international system*, International Organization, Vol.48, 1994, pp. 222-223.

Neither norms nor institutions are born in a vacuum. The question is not only that of the assumption that, if reality is "socially constructed," it is easily changed when agents desire it, as some object[53]. On the contrary, norms must be constantly formulated, defended and legitimised by social agents. That is to say, they are reproduced or changed by them. For constructivists, it is the agents who try to justify such or such rules, norms or actions; who discuss it, combine it and defend it in public space. Agents act within a pre-existing network of meanings, and their discourses can either justify or transcend established practices and norms.

This approach thus broadens the debate on the nature of the different agents at work on the international scene. It raises the question of the relevance of states and other types of actors as social agents.

The state, group and individuals are therefore in perpetual relationships with their structural environments. The interest of the actors emerges "from" and is endogenous "to" the interaction with the structure at the first level, and other actors, at the second level, without any one having the analytical primacy over the other. Everything happens through practice and norms that give meaning to the action. In the absence of this framework of practice, this normative structure, actions would be meaningless. Anarchy cannot socialise states to the demands of the structure of the international system if there are no

[53] See John J. Mearsheimer, *The false promise of international institutions*, International Security, Vol 19, 1995.

norms and practices[54]. Anarchy, let's repeat it, is what the actors make of it. There are several visions of international anarchy, which means that the actions of states, to speak of this precise actor, are more varied than the simple selfishness in which neo-realism had frozen them.

If norms are not respected by these actors, that does not mean the absence of norms. The example of the non-intervention principle is relevant to this subject. Of course, states have always broken this norm, and sometimes very blatantly so by invading other states. At the same time, however, such invasions have regularly been condemned by other states, and sometimes justified military interventions to return to the status quo before the invasion. Even the governments of the invading states are often at pains to justify their violation of the norm of non-intervention, for instance, by making historical claims about the territory occupied, or by reference to security concerns. If the norm of non-intervention did not exist, there would be no need to go through the motions of justifying such an occupation[55]. For Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, rationality cannot be separated from the influence of norms and their changes[56]. Thus, we find that in general, according to the constructivist approach, social norms and dominant institutions exist because the actors reproduce them. There is an importance attached to the "constitutive" and which calls into question many

[54] See Ronald L. Jepperson et al., *Norms, Identity, and Culture National Security*, and *Peter* J. Katzenstein et al., *The Culture of National Security*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1996, pp.33-78.

[55] Jill Steans et al., p.192.

[56] Matha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, p.888-889.

fundamentals postulate of traditional theories of International Relations. The actors get into relations in which they define the rules and follow them.

III- The Contribution of Constructivism to the Understanding of Contemporary Society

Many theories tried and still trying to explain the structure of international relations. It is in this perspective that the constructivist approach is also aligned. It seeks just as, theories of integration (intergovernmentalism, Neo-fonctionalism) to explain the shaping of the international society. All these theories have their main ideas when it comes to analyse the contemporary society. Specialy when it comes to dicuss about why states decide to enter in cooperation or not with others. Social constructivism as we said it before, put an accent on identities, norms and institutions in their analysis. The case of EU and NATO will be particularly studied here. How constructivist insights as applied to Europe are shedding light on issues of the nature of political order, the reconstruction of identity, the formation of political community?

A- Social Constructivism as an Approach to European Integration

From the earlier English school, one force that Bull identified as a potential challenge to the society of states was European integration[57]. Constructivism makes it possible to address several problems that have remained neglected in European studies. These include the change of

[57] Jill Steans et al., p.193.

national identities of the Member States; the impact of standards on decision-making processes at European Union (EU) and national level; the process of internalisation of the goals of European integration; the socialisation of the member states and, by extension, the neighboring countries through direct participation in the process of integration. Indeed, research on state identities and European integration shows that identities do not change easily and that socialisation is a long process. Peter Katzenstein shows the importance of ideas in understanding strategic influence, and the meaning that actors place on material elements, and at the same time insists that the international environment constrains and constitutes actors[58].

We had emphasised the central concept of norm in this study. It is important both internally and in terms of EU foreign policy, since the legitimacy of its action depends on it. To observe how standards, depend on the EU's internal social preferences, and are defended more broadly, we will rely on a simple example. The EU's environmental policy and its relation to risk illuminate the link between European power, preferences and standards, in an area where European social preferences have totally changed in just a few years. In this area, the preferences vary from one country to another. In Great Britain, the protection of the environment implies keeping away from the places to be preserved, while a French approach proposes to stay close to the

[58] See Peter Katzenstein et al., *The Culture of National Security. Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996.

landscapes in order to protect them. Nevertheless, what must be observed here is the creation of a norm but from a moving preference.

On another side, Jeffrey T. Checkel in his study of Constructivist approaches to European integration set out that, Constructivist approaches to the study of Europe are trendy. So, he distinguished among conventional, interpretative and critical/radical variants of constructivism[59].

Conventional constructivism, is the school dominant in the US. It examines the role of norms and, in fewer cases, identity in shaping international political outcomes. Within EU studies, conventional constructivism has been applied in a variety of ways. Lewis for example has examined the causal effect of norms by focusing on mechanisms of persuasion and role playing, and done so in a hard case for constructivism – the EU's highly intergovernmental Committee of Permanent Representatives, or COREPER[60]. But a little before this Lewis study Caporaso, Jupille and colleagues, have explored the functioning of EU institutions with the explicit goal of building bridges between rationalist and sociological work[61]

[59] Jeffrey T. Checkel, *Social Constructivism's in Global and European Politics: A Review Essay*, Review of International Studies, Vol 30 (2), 2004, pp.230-31.

[60] Jeffrey Lewis, *The Janus Face of Brussels: Socialization and Everyday Decision Making in the European Union.* International Organisation, Vol 59 (4), 2005 pp.937-72.

[61] James A. Caporaso et al., *Integrating Institutions: Rationalism, Constructivism and the Study of the European Union*. Special Issue of Comparative Political Studies, Vol 36 (1-2), 2003, pp.5-231.

Concerning interpretative and critical/radical constructivists, they have similar features. In fact, the key sources of their theoretical inspiration lay in linguistic approaches. Interpretative constructivism, explores the role of language in mediating and constructing social reality. Interpretive analyses offering highly structural readings of European identity focused on discourses[62]. Interpretative constructivists are committed to a deeply inductive research strategy that targets the reconstruction of state/agent identity, with the methods encompassing a variety of linguistic techniques. While, critical/radical constructivists maintain the linguistic focus, but add an explicitly normative dimension by probing a researcher's own implication in the reproduction of the identities and world he/she is studying. They put emphasis on the power and domination inherent in language[63].

The constructivist approach also helps to understand the emergence of new policies and the ways in which they evolve. The fundamental distinction between "us" and "them" is thus made in the context of the EU's report and its "neighborhood". This can be measured by the study of the Commission's speech during the development of this policy (from 2002). While the first document of 2003 referred to the "Wider Europe", the 2004 strategy paper speaks of a "European

[62] Ben Rosamond, *Discourses of Globalisation and European Identities*. In Thomas Christiansen, Knud Erik Joergensen, and Antje Wiener (Eds.), The Social Construction of Europe, London: Sage Publications, 2001, pp.158-75.

[63] Jeffrey T. Checkel, *Constructivist approaches to European integration*, Working paper, ARENA, 2006, Available at: http://www.arena.uio.no.

Neighborhood Policy", which shows a clear decrease in starting ambitions[64].

Thus states, norms, institutions and identities play a very important role in European integration. The mere expression of the politics of integration itself already refers us to norms and institutions. And, as we said above, neither norms nor institutions are born in a vacuum. These are the result of a social construction. It is in this logic that we propose to study NATO as well.

B- The Case of NATO

Constructivist theory attempts to explain the functioning of international relations with focus on the concepts of anarchy, interest, system, structure and institution. Therefore, constructivism is essential for understanding and analysing the transformation of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Indeed, from 1991, NATO's perspective on its members and relationships changed. After implementing the dialogue and cooperation policy on the Alliance's agenda as one of the main goals in order to create an environment of stability and peace, cooperative security has become the dominant thinking of the organisation. Thus, we saw relations with Russia, which was the former enemy of NATO completely altered by creating instruments for

[64] Parmentier Florent, *The Reception of EU Neighbourhood Policy*, in Zaki Laïdi (eds), *The EU Policy in a Globalised World*, Londres, Routledge, 2008, pp.103-117.

consultation and dialogue[65]. In addition, NATO played an important role in the Crimean conflict by creating a dialogue between Russia and Ukraine with the desire to promote confidence.

Moreover, speaking of NATO and its enlargement according to the constructivist approach, it is important to underline that, in order to remove the hostile frontiers between East and West, enlargement has become a necessity for the organisation to remain as the essential stone of European security. The acceptance of new members not only expanded NATO's security frontiers but helped to create a transatlantic link between the United States and these former communist countries. More, in the constructivist perspective, the enlargement of an international organisation is primarily conceived of as a process of international socialisation. In general, "socialization" means the internalization, by a social actor, of the constitutive beliefs and practices of a social community. In this way, the actor acquires the collective identity of the community[66]. In international socialisation, an international community and its organisations "teach" their constitutive norms and values to states and societies[67].

The relationship of states with the community and its organisations depends on the degree to which they base their identity

[65] Emmanuel Adler, *The Spread of Security Communities: Communities of Practice, Self-Restraint, and NATO's Post-Cold War Transformation*, European Journal of International Relations, Vol 14/2, pp.208-209.

[66] Frank Schimmelfennig, *NATO enlargement: A constructivist explanation*, Security Studies, Vol 8 (2-3), p. 211, 1998, DOI: 10.1080/09636419808429378

[67] Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society,* Cornell Studies in Political Economy, Vol 1(1-12.), 1996.

and their interests on the community values and norms. On the one hand, in order to become members, they have to learn the lessons taught by the community's organisations, that is, to internalise their values, norms, and practices. They also have to pass a probationary period during which the community assesses whether the applicants are internalising its identity or simply adapting to it superficially. Full membership is granted when socialisation has sufficiently progressed and the community regards the applicant state as "one of us". On the other hand, for an applicant state and society, accession to an international organisation mainly fulfils the needs of identification and legitimation. Being accepted as a member of a group of like-minded countries assures governments and societies of their identity and of the legitimacy of their political and social values[68].

Conceptual and practical modifications can be conceived as proof of NATO's constructivist change because it has not only redefined its security orientation according to new emerging threats, but has also adapted its military and political structure by broadening new frontiers and expanding its areas of action. Thus, through its cultural, intellectual, political and military modifications, NATO shows us that, firstly, international anarchy is under the control of States; secondly, by creating economic, political and social relations it is possible to establish a rapprochement between the states and finally the way of this environment is linked to cooperation and dialogue. According to

[68] Frank Schimmelfennig, p. 213.

Schimmelfennig, from a constructivist viewpoint, NATO is best understood neither simply as a form of alignment (as in neorealism) nor as a functional international institution (as in neoliberalism) but as an organisation of an international community of values and norms. NATO is embedded in the Euro-Atlantic or "Western" community and represents its "military branch." This community is most fundamentally based on the liberal values and norms shared by its members. Liberal human rights, i.e. individual freedoms, civil liberties, and political rights are at the centre of the community's collective identity[69]. Regarding NATO enlargement, constructivism then hypothesises: a state seeks, and is granted, membership in NATO if it reliably shares the liberal values and the multilateralist norms of the Western community. The faster it internalises these values and norms, the earlier it becomes a member[70].

Another very important point to note is that the actors in the international society are in perpetual cooperation, find compromises and adjust their policies according to the circumstances. In their work, Felix Berenskoetter & Bastian Giegerich emphasise the importance of international friendship and dissociative exploratory processes using a constructivist approach. It is the case of the German Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) / European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) objectives they present in order to improve the understanding of the forces shaping European security institutions and help to assess

[69] Ibidem.
[70] Ibid, p.216.

the current state and possible routes of transatlantic relations. States invest in international security institutions to achieve ontological security, specifically to negotiate the compatibility of national and international ideas, based on principles of the legitimate use of force, with significant people, or friends. As long as the interests are not consistent, the states will seek to detach from this set to integrate an organisation in which its identity is better reflected. This is the case of Germany emerging from the cold war, it integrates its ontological security into a relationship of friendship with the United States and through NATO. But because of disagreements between German and United States policymakers about the 1991 Gulf War and the conflict in Bosnia, the relationship becomes tense. This therefore encourages the German government to call for changes in national principles concerning the mandate, the missions and the appropriate means and to invest in the CFSP, with France, as a possible alternative to NATO capable of considering these adjustments.

These examples lead us to affirm that the constructivist approach as supported by certain authors provides clearer lines of study on the actors of the international scene and their interactions. Constructivists argue that since actors can regulate their conflicts through security institutions such as NATO, they can also create social, economic and political relations despite their social differences through means such as human rights, trade international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and other social institutions[71].

[71] Robert Jackson and Georg Sorensen, *Introduction to International*

Conclusion

A scientific domain such as International Relations is typically characterised by the presence of several competing paradigms. A paradigm is based on fundamental postulates about the world, common values, language, and scientific rules. In the framework of the paradigm studied in this article, we find that it emerged as a critique of traditional theories of international relations, that it develops with its own principles and is able to explain the relationships that individuals through changing and evolving structures create as well as the social facts that accompany them. Therefore, the work of constructivists generally deals with, the construction of national interests, the spread of human rights, the impact of international organisations on state identities and vice versa, or the development of different forms of international society.

What is important here is not whether constructivism as an approach better explains contemporary international relations, but if it is applicable with consistency to contemporary realities. We have seen through concrete examples that the constructivist approach can explain not only the role of institutions and norms but also explain the functioning, evolution and transformation of inter and extra-state relations. The case studied of the EU, NATO and the role it played in the Crimean conflict and Germany in its relations with NATO and the

Relations: Theories and Approaches, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 256.

ESDP are just a few examples that from constructivism point of view can be understand merely. Nevertheless, there still a confusion around the concept of social constructivism. Is it a theory in the proper sense of the term? Unlike neoliberalism and neorealism, social constructivism does not propose a set of coherent assumptions that would constitute a unified theory in the narrow sense of the term.

Instead, it works with a series of fundamental assumptions on the basis of which more specific assumptions and arguments need to be formulated. Therefore, the term "approach" is use to describe social constructivism, rather than "theory". But the term "theory" is often used in a much more wave way. In this sense, social constructivism is an approach that is part of the theory of International Relations. However, unlike to the neo-neo debate, social constructivism is not at all specific to International Relations, it is rather an approach that transcends disciplinary divisions in the social sciences[72].

[72] Jill Steans et al., p.186.

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