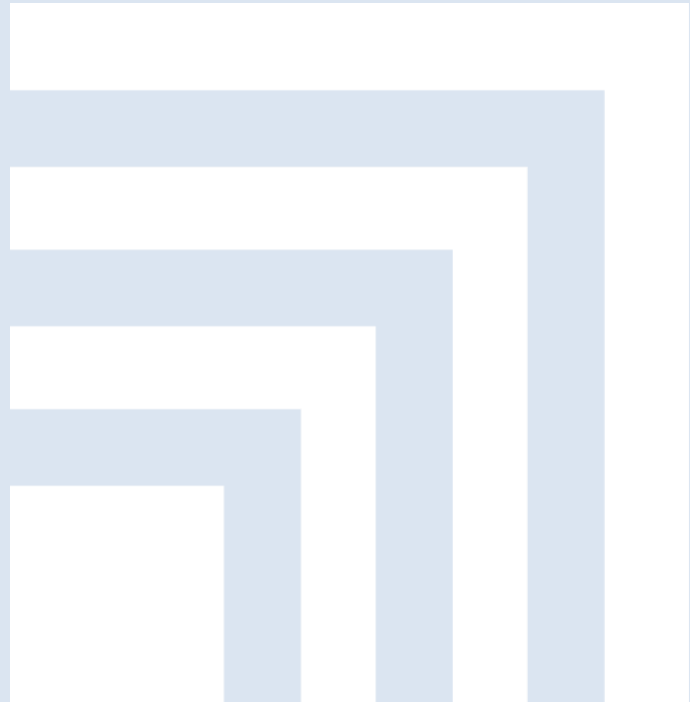




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Socialization and Organized Political Violence: Theoretical Tools and Challenges

Jeffrey T. Checkel



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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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Socialization and Organized Political Violence: Theoretical Tools and Challenges

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 – is not new. Above, I wrote that ‘we know’ about such dynamics within schools and the like; that claim was not pulled from thin air. An extensive body of research by sociologists, stretching back to the early 1960s, stands behind it. Yet, by the 1980s, the interest in socialization had declined, with sociologists instead emphasizing more aggregate concepts and measures (social movements, say).

This ‘rise and fall’ of socialization leads to the following structure for the essay. I begin – in section II – with a brief review of research on socialization since the 1960s. Most importantly, this includes work by sociologists and that on military sociology; however, for a number of years, political scientists also played a (smaller) role, theorizing and seeking to document a closely related phenomenon – political socialization. In section III, I chart the re-discovery – beginning in the late 1990s – of socialization by IR scholars within political science. These researchers did a good job disaggregating socialization into its component mechanisms and exploring its role in creating international community and order. However, they were blind to its potential dark sides, where socialization might lead to disorder and worse (genocide, ethnic cleansing).

Section IV examines new work on socialization in civil war, largely conducted by comparativists in political science. The section’s subtitle – ‘Let’s Talk’ – hints at its main message: that IR scholars (III) and comparativists (IV) have much to gain from crawling out of their sub-field cubby holes as they explore socialization dynamics in the contemporary world. In the concluding section (V), I highlight several issues about which current students of socialization might want to reflect. These include a (theoretical) danger of splintering and non-cumulation; and a (methodological) warning about the difficulty of measuring process.

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 time, and the theoretical and methodological moves this entailed. Basically, the story in brief is as follows. Socialization, as a concept and object of study, was first and most extensively studied by sociologists and, to a lesser extent, anthropologists. It was then briefly discovered – and soon forgotten – by political scientists who were primarily interested in how polities could foster democratic qualities in their younger citizens; the key catch-phrase for these scholars was political socialization.

Sociology and Anthropology. When the concept of socialization was first invoked by sociologists in the 1950s, it was intended to help address some foundational issues. How do groups arise? How is society possible? (Brezinka 1994, 9-10) In 1969, Dawson and Prewitt 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 (Dawson and Prewitt 1969, see also Hooghe 2001, ch.1). This conceptualization, which I will use here, has several strengths. First, it highlights the processual dimension to socialization; it does not happen overnight and, indeed, may take considerable time. Second, the end result is not simple behavioral adaptation, but a deeper change in the core properties of actors – hence the stress on norms and rules, and on internalization. Third, the phrase given community alerts one to an important level of analysis issue. The socializer may be a group, a larger aggregate of groups (a school, a military), the state, or even the international community.

At the same time, the definition helped sow the seeds for a problem that has bedeviled socialization research until the present day: the agency of the targets involved. Too often, they are viewed as passive actors, waiting to adopt – unquestionably – new values from their environment. Yet, the empirical reality is that agents often actively resist attempts at being socialized. It is likely this lacuna arose from the initial objects of study – children (Draper 1974). A young child is more malleable and socializable than, say, a 45-year old. Indeed, some scholars studying socialization modify the above definition by talking about ‘inducting new actors’ – novices – into those norms and rules (Johnston 2005).

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 individual's sense of self (Cerulo 1997).² Such interactions might play out in families (Burt, Simons and Gibbons 2012), schools (Parsons 1959) or militaries (Wamsley 1972).

On militaries, there were a number of studies of so-called military socialization, which were often published in the journal *Armed Forces & Society*. While providing interesting descriptions and narratives about possible socialization dynamics, they were typically weaker – at least by today's standards – in specifying the theoretical argument, the methods employed, and the specific process through which socialization occurred (Wamsley 1972; Winslow 1999; Vigil 2003; Stretesky and Pogrebin 2007; Mendee 2012).

Moreover, much of this work had a basic design flaw in that it failed to control for self-selection (Bachman, Sigelman and Diamond 1987, for a rare exception). That is, those who were supposedly being socialized into adopting military values already possessed such beliefs before they entered the armed forces. This particular design issue and how to address it continues to be a challenge, with recent work – for example, on socialization in European institutions – still failing to control for self-selection (Beyers 2005, for an excellent discussion).

Another feature of the early sociological work is that it had little to say about the targets of socialization. Rather, the emphasis was on the structural context – say an organization – producing socialization in an individual (Wamsley 1972, 407; Winslow 1999, 435). The problem with such an analytic choice is it risks replicating the suspect finding of social psychologists studying groups in laboratory experimental settings – that it is simply the amount of contact that drives identification with the group and thus socialization. However, this so-called contact hypothesis has found little confirmation in the real, social world (Beyers 2005). Some anthropological work argues that the targets must be studied as well, invoking the notion of “bidirectionality in socialization – that is, the idea that novices are not just passive recipients, but

² This micro-perspective of the early sociological work has been a source of theoretical inspiration for more recent efforts by political scientists. See below.

have the potential to socialize experts” (Garrett and Baquedano-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-focus was replaced by one more macro in nature, with a corresponding change in key topics of study – from (individual) socialization to social movements, social networks, and other forms of collective action (Cerulo 1997, *passim*; Burt, Simmons and Gibbons 2012; della Porta 2008).

One group of sociologists, sociological institutionalists, does still invoke the term socialization. However, consistent with the broader disciplinary move, this research has been pitched very much at the macro-global level. These scholars explore how global culture and cultural templates diffuse in the contemporary world, leading many states to adopt similar bureaucratic innovations or policies, say (Meyer, Boli, Thomas and Ramirez 1997; Boli and Thomas 1999; see also Finnemore 1996a, 1996b).

For these researchers, socialization – or the process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community – is about how Western cultural scripts (the given community) are diffusing across the globe and creating similar values and patterns of behaviour. While they theorize the various processes through which socialization may occur, their reliance on quantitative methods makes it difficult if not impossible to capture this dynamic, process dimension (see also Vigil 2003, 237). In addition, very little agency is given to state-level adapters, which makes it difficult to explain the striking degree of cross-national variation in the degree to which cultural scripts actually do diffuse.

Political Science Mark 1 – Political Socialization. At nearly the same time as sociologists – the late 1950s – a small group of American political scientists developed an interest in and a research program on what came to be called political socialization (Cook 1985, 1089). These scholars wanted to know how political attitudes were transmitted to young people and school students; answers to this question would allow them to better understand diffuse support for the US political system (Torney-Purta 2000, 88).

Early research adopted a so-called direct transmission approach, exploring which agent of socialization – the family, the school, the media? – was most responsible for the inculcation of values in youth. Like their colleagues in sociology, these researchers granted no agency to the targets of socialization; they were structural idiots in the sense that their attitudes and values were dictated by the surrounding environment (Torney-Purta 2000, 94; Cook 1985, *passim*).

This work also exhibited a mismatch between theory – a concern to capture the process by which new norms and values were internalized – and method. The latter were overwhelmingly quantitative, typically “pencil-and-paper surveys” utilizing “fixed-choice questionnaires” (Sigel 1995, 20; see also Cook 1985, 1090).

For these and likely other reasons as well, political socialization research was in sharp decline by the 1980s. In 1985, the *American Political Science Review (APSR)* published an essay entitled “The Bear Market in Political Socialization,” seeking to return the research to its previous status as “a growth stock” (Cook 1985, 1079). A decade later, a journal symposium was devoted to the theme of “Revitalizing Political Socialization Research” (Hepburn 1995). Such (siren) calls were to no avail. The conclusions of Cook’s 1985 stock-taking essay were telling in this regard. He berated existing scholarship 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).

Summary. This review of earlier work highlights several lessons and insights for contemporary students of socialization. First, while interest in the topic undoubtedly declined sharply in recent decades, this had less to do with any fatal flaw in the research program and more to do with disciplinary trends in sociology (away from the micro and individual) and political science (emphasis on quantitative methods). Second, current work should seek to avoid problems in the earlier scholarship, especially its failure adequately to theorize and document process,³ and an unwillingness to capture the interaction between the socializing agent and target.

³ Early work did explore the mechanisms and processes of socialization in a conceptual, experimental sense (Aronfreed 1968), but to my knowledge there was little effort to operationalize it for empirical applications.

Third, age matters. The primary focus in earlier socialization research was children and young adults; this made sense given the sociologists' concern for better understanding the individual-level processes that made society possible, and the political scientists' interest in how good, democratic citizens were formed. This focus contributed to the above-mentioned neglect of agency; the assumption was that children were more malleable and susceptible to socializing impulses from their environment. From this analytic perspective, their agency could justifiably be bracketed (although see Garrett and Baquedano-Lopez 2002, 346).

The effects of socialization, however, will likely be weaker on older individuals (see also Johnston 2005). They carry more cognitive baggage and may be more set in their ways. Thus, contemporary work on socialization that explores its role on older individuals – say, international civil servants (Hooghe 2005) – should take care in extrapolating from research findings primarily focused on children.

Fourth, socialization requires time. This is a difficult and complex issue, one not adequately addressed in earlier work. Everyone agrees that it does not occur overnight, but how long, then, does it take? Perhaps intensity compensates for time, with intense interactions possibly leading to faster socialization (Beyers 2005). Or, perhaps the time required is a function of the socialization mechanism, with 'shock' mechanisms (dehumanization strategies, witnessing a group rape) working faster than others (hectoring by a drill sergeant, intensive debate within a group). At a minimum, researchers need to address this issue, justifying and explaining their theoretical logic for expecting a fast or slow socialization process.

Finally, to the extent that the mechanisms of socialization are theorized or documented in earlier research, they are overwhelmingly viewed as non-violent. One reads about states, schools and families socializing through the media, textbooks, or learning processes. Even the literature on military socialization focuses largely on boot camp experiences 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). This blind spot on the role played by violence and conflict has had direct and, I would argue, negative consequences for newer research by political scientists on socialization.

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 ('blank minds' are easier to socialize), status of the socializer, intensity of the interaction, and quality of the interaction (interactive back and forth is better than lecturing or hectoring) (Johnston 2005, 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 Davis 1996, 2005; Checkel 1999; Johnston 2001; see also Wood 2010). Given that a lack of local agency was an ongoing problem in the original sociological work on socialization, this is a clear case where political scientists have pushed further, in a way that makes for both more robust theory and empirically accurate portrayals of the social world.

While these moves by the IR scholars are welcome, there are clearly issues requiring further thought; I see – again! – four. First, why is socialization always so non-conflictual and nice? Look again at the causal mechanisms noted above; they are about calm social interaction, persuasion, and learning. If socialization is about inducting actors into the ways of a given community, there is no theoretical reason to exclude, *a priori*, violent, conflictual mechanisms of induction. A far better way forward would be to develop a more encompassing theory of socialization, one that included both non-violent and violent mechanisms, and then to specify scope conditions for (say) the operation of the violent ones; yet, this has not happened, perhaps because the theoretical ambitions of the IR scholars have been so modest (see below).

Second, much of this constructivist work is premised on the presence of strong, functioning and legitimate institutions. Part of the explanation for these biases is that many constructivists are liberals in the IR sense, which means they have a broadly optimistic view of

global politics. However, equally relevant is a selection effect in their choice of empirical case material, too much of which comes from contemporary (western) Europe where institutions are functional, broadly legitimate and omnipresent. 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 specific, and generalizable in a ‘small g’ sense.

IV. Socialization Research and Civil War – Let’s Talk!

IR scholars are not the only political scientists to have re-discovered socialization; comparativists – mainly those studying civil war – have also made an important contribution. In this section, I first set the stage for this new comparative/socialization work on civil war, and

⁵ In the few cases where this work has been more ambitious, the theory on offer is so complex that it is not clear what one does with it. See Flockhart 2006, for example.

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 Autesserre's research on 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-economy terms – the relative ease of indoctrinating younger combatants and child soldiers compared to older recruits.

If Wood's essay is more a conceptual exploration, then Cohen integrates her argument on combat socialization with rich quantitative-qualitative data, mainly drawn from the Sierra Leone civil war. For her, a key and violent mechanism of socialization – for rebel groups with forcibly recruited members – is gang rape, as it builds bonds of loyalty and esteem in the group (Cohen 2013a, 391-93). Theoretically, the argument is at the cutting edge. Not only does it clearly spell out the analytic logic as to why this particular kind of rape should build a sense of community; it also delimits the argument by specifying a key scope condition for its operation – forced recruitment. Social-theoretically, by adopting an underlying rational-choice framework (Cohen 2013b, 465), the author – perhaps unknowingly – is taking a stance in a debate among contemporary students of socialization. Simply put, can rational, cost/benefit calculations lead one to adopt (and internalize?) group norms (Hooghe 2001, ch.1; Schimmelfennig 2005; Checkel 2007, ch.1)?

Empirically, one would ideally want more process-level data, with the key evidence here being limited to 34 interviews (Cohen 2013a, 394-95). Perhaps this is sufficient, but the reader is not sure as the method for measuring process is never specified; as a result, Cohen presents no real evidence on it (Cohen 2013b, 474-75). This is an important limitation to the argument, for, if

nothing else, socialization is a process – ‘of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community.’ Moreover, newer scholarship in qualitative methods argues that to invoke 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, Gates’ arguments could be sharpened in future research. 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. For example, with teaching and learning – which facilitate internalization – one might expect a greater degree of unreflective, ‘this-is-just-the-way-we-do-things’ responses among interviewees.

Summary – Let’s Talk! As the above demonstrates, we currently have two sets of political scientist theorizing the same term – socialization – but in somewhat different ways. Utilizing insights from the military socialization literature, the arguments by comparativists have a decidedly harder edge. IR constructivists, drawing upon very different sources (Habermas, institutional theory, communications research), have advanced a set of non-violent socialization mechanisms centered on language’s ability to create group cohesion. Yet, with the partial exception of Gates, there is no cross referencing or mutual learning; sub-field boundaries seem to be as impermeable as ever.

Clearly, then, some boundary-crossing is in order. In the real world – including that of civil war – the processes producing socialization are likely to be both violent and non-violent. Indeed, for certain kinds of rebel groups – those headed by charismatic leaders, those with an ideological mission – one might expect acts of persuasion to play a central role in shaping recruits’ interests and identities. And, here, the empirical work of the IR constructivists has much to offer on the data sources (interviews, memoirs, secondary accounts) and methods (triangulation, checking for audience effects, process tracing) needed to document persuasion’s causal effect (Johnston 2001, 2008; Checkel 2008). In addition, the constructivists have devoted considerable attention to what was a significant gap in the earlier sociological work: the agency of the socialization targets. These targets – including recruits to rebel groups – have a prior life and (cognitive, institutional, cultural) context. Without better specifying it, it will be all too easy to over/under-estimate the causal role played by group socialization.⁶

For their part, the IR constructivists should draw upon the comparative work to theorize a more complete roster of socialization mechanisms. It is truly odd that, for such a problem-driven set of scholars, socialization always works in such a nice way, especially since real-world problems are many times not nice at all. In addition, they need to work harder at embedding their socialization arguments in a broader analytic frame. At a minimum, this means not to forget about the role played by power, in its material, institutional or discursive forms (Barnett and Duvall 2005, for a superb discussion). Finally, these IR scholars – who tend to focus on international sources and loci of socialization – need to recognize that in many cases the socialization target may be the subject of multiple socialization attempts. So, one way to think about (some) DDR programs is that they are attempts by the international community to (re-) socialize former combatants. Yet such efforts are likely to fail unless they control for prior, local socialization of those same ex-combatants (see also Blattman 2012, 408).

I should close by noting one thing that unites the two sets of contemporary political scientists studying socialization – their emphasis on qualitative methods for documenting the process element of socialization. They are thus not repeating the mistake of the earlier political

⁶ Among the comparativists, Wood’s discussion of the “particular cultural settings” from which rebel group recruits are drawn is an important move in this direction (Wood 2010, 307).

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

V. Conclusions

If one's goal is to understand better the dynamics of organized political violence, 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 studying socialization have made a concerted effort to develop theories that are both better specified and closer to reality in that they do not rely on 'as if' assumptions. One result has been to think theoretically in terms of causal mechanisms. Many in the civil war research program (Kalyvas 2006), as well as those specifically interested in socialization and social dynamics (Cohen 2013a, b; Lynch 2013; Wood 2008, 2010) have made a similar move.

Often, the reaction to such efforts is some version of 'hooray – finally, theories that capture and explain the world as it really is.' Yet, what kind of theory results? After all, a roster of causal mechanisms is not the same as a theory with some level of generalizability (Gates 2008; Checkel 2013b, 233-34). One way to address this problem is straight forward and involves encouraging communication across subfield lines. Thus, as argued in the previous section, constructivists and comparativists theorizing socialization really need to compare notes and explore possible synergies in their efforts.

Unfortunately, this will not resolve the underlying problem, which is one of theoretical cumulation. Many who theorize socialization mechanisms claim their work results in mid-range theory. However, more often than not, the claim ends with that phrase. What does it really mean?

How do we develop multi-causal arguments – for that is the essence of middle-range approaches (George 1993) – without simultaneously producing over-determined outcomes? 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, depending upon one's epistemological starting point, not having a 'broader theoretical whole' is no bad thing – certainly at least for critical and interpretive scholars. However, if 'small g' generalization is an issue even for the latter (Hopf 2007, for an excellent discussion), then surely it matters for the work surveyed here, which is largely positivist in orientation.

Finally, 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, where material power and social discourses, say, fundamentally shape and predetermine the mechanisms playing out at lower levels. This is precisely the trap into which Checkel and collaborators fell in their project developing theoretically plural, middle-range theories of European institutions and socialization. A global search of the resulting volume reveals virtually no hits for either power or discourse (Checkel 2007, *passim*). More generally and as Nau has argued, middle-range theories "inevitably leave out 'big questions' posed from different or higher levels of analysis"; they may thus "not get rid of 'isms' [but] just hide them and make it harder to challenge prevailing ones" (Nau 2011, 489-90).

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).

It's the Process (Tracing), Stupid! 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 mechanisms in play. The more care at this stage, the clearer will be those mechanisms' observable implications, without which process tracing is virtually impossible. Put differently, “[t]heory must take primacy over method. Theory offers the perspective through which we can interpret empirical observation ... [T]he interpretation of events in a process-tracing case study are shaped by theory” (Gates 2008, 27). As Jacobs argues, “[t]ightly specified theories with detailed mechanisms can substantially enhance the discriminating power of process [tracing] analysis by generating crisp and unique empirical predictions” (Jacobs nd, 3).

Second, the literature on process tracing reminds scholars studying socialization from a mechanism-based perspective that they must address fully the challenges raised by 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 nd, ch.1). It is not sufficient to carry out process-tracing on one's preferred mechanism, or to run through a list of alternative explanations. Done properly, this takes time (and resources) and should thus be integrated into research designs at an early stage.

Moreover – and to link back to my first point – full, robust theorization of these various mechanisms will only facilitate this task. The point is not to eliminate equifinality; that is not possible given the complex social world we inhabit. Rather, by explicitly addressing it, the researcher increases readers' confidence in the validity of the mechanism-process story he/she relates. This is the design elaborated in Schimmelfennig's (2003) study of European institutions, enlargement and socialization, with considerable success. Unfortunately, his work is more the exception than the rule at this level.

Third, process tracing should not be viewed as the only way of capturing the causal mechanisms of socialization. One promising strategy is to employ computer techniques known as agent-based modeling (ABM) to explore the logic and hypothesized scope conditions of particular mechanisms. For example, in recent, process-based work on civil war, scholars have used such modeling to analyze the transnational diffusion of social identities as a key process underlying the spread of civil conflicts. They disaggregate, and thus better specify, diffusion as occurring through two possible causal mechanisms: social adaptation in a transnational context, and transnational norm entrepreneurship. The simulations – the computer modeling exercise – indicate that norm entrepreneurship is the more robust mechanism of diffusion, which is an important confirmation of a finding in the qualitative, process-tracing work (Nome and Weidman 2013). In this case, ABM does not replace process tracing; rather, it increases confidence in the validity of the inferences drawn from it.

By addressing such issues, researchers interested in the role of various socialization mechanisms in shaping patterns of violence in civil war will maximize the likelihood they

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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⁷ By buzzword problem, I refer to a situation where the term process tracing is invoked, but with no clear sense of how it will be used in the research. Of the book manuscripts, journal articles and graduate papers I review, 75% fall into this category.

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