Socialization Ain’t Always Nice: Cooperation and Conflict in the Post-Cold War World

By

Jeffrey T. Checkel

Simons Chair in International Law and Human Security, School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, BC

&

Global Fellow, Peace Research Institute Oslo

Earlier versions of this essay were presented at a workshop on Socialization and Organized Political Violence, Simon Fraser University, September 2013, and at seminars at the SFB 700, Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood, Free University Berlin, December 2013; the Research College Transformative Power Europe, Free University Berlin, January 2014; the Security Studies Program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, February 2014; and the Global Governance Research Unit, Social Science Research Center Berlin, March 2014. For helpful comments, I thank participants at these meetings and, especially, Juan Diez Medrano. Special thanks to Michael Barnett for pushing me to address the topic and to Martha Snodgrass for research assistance.
Abstract: Socialization has a long history in the social sciences. Early work by sociologists and anthropologists on socialization within families and schools was followed by a political socialization research program in political science that explored how societal values were transmitted to teenagers and young adults. Yet, by the early 1990s, silence reigned, especially among political scientists. However, the past 15 years has seen a revival of interest, with international relations scholars and, more recently, comparativists exploring socialization as a key dynamic fostering order and cooperation – but also violence and conflict – at the international, national and sub-national levels.

I review this work and make two arguments. For one, contemporary socialization research has learned from the past, avoiding many of the problems that bedevilled earlier work. At the same time, there is a clear need for cross fertilization: The various scholars studying socialization – across subfields and disciplines – will make better arguments about it if they collaborate.

This dissection and reconstruction of the concept informs the substantive questions at the core of this project. Considering anew four aspects of socialization, I ask what role it plays in the social production of organized violence. What are the limits of socialization? How do we theorize and capture the role of cross-level socialization? How deep is it? Specifically for studies of civil war, I argue that to address such questions will shed new light on central issues – from the nature and extent of rebel group cohesion to variation in the repertoires of violence employed by combatants.
I. Introduction

Why such a title – “Socialization Ain’t Always Nice” – for my paper? It goes back to an observation by a colleague a few years back: “For you international relations people, socialization is always, well, so … nice. It happens calmly – through persuasion, deliberation and the like – and always leads to a nicer outcome – more inclusive identities, the spread of human-rights norms, or higher levels of regional cooperation. Where I study socialization [the Middle East – JC], people die during it and because of the violence it begets.” My colleague had a point. My own work on socialization had been inspired by so-called constructivism in international-relations (IR) theory. This constructivism was in part a reaction to the deep pessimism (realism) and asocial methodological individualism (neo-liberal institutionalism) of nearly all American IR scholarship circa the mid-1990s (Checkel 1998). Yet, this reaction had blinded many constructivists to the fact that their toolkits – including socialization – might be equally applicable to the social construction of violence and conflict.

Consider a few examples. 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, and in fact fuels a return to violence. A rebel group – despite operating in an environment thought to create dis-incentives for violence – mistreats and sexually abuses civilian populations. An international peacekeeping force – with both sufficient resources and political backing – not only fails in its mission to restore peace, but actually exacerbates communal tensions.

While depicting different phases of civil conflicts and highlighting the roles of different actors, these vignettes share a common feature. They are situations where states and organizations fail to understand the incentives emanating from their environments. Why might this happen? One possibility is these are conflict/post-conflict settings, where
information is being filtered and distorted through the fog of (civil) war. Another possibility – one explored in this paper – is these actors, 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 existing incentive structures. Put differently, they have been socialized – but often through mechanisms and with outcomes that have generally been ignored by IR constructivists.

Indeed, why not socialization in civil war? We know that it is a 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 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 (Viterna 2006; Wood 2008; Manekin 2013; Gutierrez Sanin and Wood 2014; Autesserre 2009, 2010, 2014).

Socialization – as a process or concept – is not new. An extensive body of research by sociologists, stretching back to the early 1960s, stands behind it. Yet, by the mid-1990s, the interest in socialization had declined, especially among political scientists. It was re-discovered by IR constructivists in the late 1990s, who viewed it mainly as a benign force and thus failed to build upon earlier and highly relevant work on, say, military socialization and socialization and gang violence.

This rise, fall and incomplete return of socialization provides the structure for this essay. Section II reviews work on socialization since the 1960s, including the contributions of sociologists and the literature on military socialization. However, for a number of years,
political scientists also played a 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. However, they were blind to its potential dark sides, where socialization might lead to violence and conflict.

Section IV examines new work on socialization by comparativists in political science. The section’s subtitle – Let’s Talk – hints at its main message: The various scholars studying socialization have much to gain from leaving their sub-field and disciplinary cubby holes to explore together such dynamics in the contemporary world. This dissection and reconstruction of socialization then informs – Section V – the substantive questions at the core of this project. Considering anew four aspects of socialization – its depth, mechanisms, socialization failures, and multiple socialization – I ask what role it plays in the social production of organized violence. What are the limits of socialization? How do we theorize and capture the role of cross-level socialization? How deep, or ‘sticky,’ is it?

Specifically for studies of civil war, I argue that to address such questions will shed new light on central issues – from the nature and extent of rebel group cohesion to variation in the repertoires of violence employed by combatants. At the same time, there are challenges ahead, including a danger (for theory) of non-cumulation and a caution (for method) on measuring process.

II. Socialization – Early Contributions

My purpose 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. 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 younger citizens; the key catch-phrase for these scholars was political socialization.

**Sociology & 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, page #; see also Hooghe 2001, ch.1). This conceptualization, which I will use here, has several strengths. First, it highlights the process dimension to socialization; it does not happen overnight and, indeed, may take considerable time. Second, the intended result is not simple behavioral adaptation, but a deeper change in an actor’s very sense of self – 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, an aggregate of groups (a school, a military), the state through its institutions, or even the international community.

At the same time, the definition sowed the seeds for a problem that has bedeviled socialization research until the present: The agency of the targets involved. Too often, they are construed as passive actors, waiting to adopt – unquestioningly – new values from their socializers. Yet, the empirical reality is that agents often actively resist attempts at being socialized. It is likely this blind spot arose from the initial objects of study – children (Draper 1974). A young child is more malleable and socializable than, say, a 45-year old. To be clear, the issue here is not so much biological age as (lack of) experience or familiarity...
with the given environment, group or norms. Indeed, some scholars studying socialization modify the above definition by talking about inducting new actors – so-called 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). Such interactions might play out in families (Burt, Simons and Gibbons 2012), schools (Parsons 1959) or militaries (Wamsley 1972).

On militaries, a number of studies of so-called military socialization were published – often in the journal *Armed Forces & Society*. These were fundamentally concerned with the factors promoting cohesion and breakdown within military units; scholars were less interested in theory and method and more focused on providing narratives and prescriptive policy advice (Wamsley 1972; Winslow 1999; Vigil 2003; Stretesky and Pogrebin 2007; Mendee 2012). This made sense since a good bit of this literature – at least in America – was a response to the US experience in Vietnam. Thus, one classic study examined the Viet Cong, seeking to understand unit cohesion and weaknesses in it that could then be exploited by the American military (Davison and Zasloff 1966).

While the importance of the individual in the military unit was recognized (Kenny 2011), the focus was more on group and structural factors to explain socialization (Siebold 1999). Moreover, the very term socialization was often more implied than used; instead, the analytic focus was task cohesion, social cohesion or primary group cohesion (Kier 1998; MacCoun and Hix 2010), or related concepts like trust (Ben-Shalom *et al* 2005) and
communication (King 2006). However, cohesion was typically defined in a very broad and process-oriented way that strongly suggests a role for socialization.¹

Reading across this scholarship, it would seem that both formal military structures (command and control, say) and senses of community are prerequisites for effective/high unit cohesion. Lacking further specification and scope conditions, however, this is a rather shaky – and over-determined – foundation on which to build arguments about socialization.

In terms of research design, work on military socialization often failed to control for self-selection (Bachman, Sigelman and Diamond 1987, for a rare exception). That is, some of 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 this sociological work on militaries 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 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 have the potential to socialize experts”

¹Cohesion is “a social-relationship product or form generated by the interactions and experiences of the group members in the context of their daily military activities, combat and noncombat.” Siebold 2007, 288-89.
(Garrett and Ba quedano-Lopez 2002, 346). Unfortunately, such arguments seem to be the exception.

This early and promising sociological work on socialization – be it within families, schools or militaries – 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 networks and other forms of collective action (Cerulo 1997, passim; Burt, Simmons and Gibbons 2012; della Porta 2008). For sure, socialization was still part of the sociological lexicon, but its study was embedded in broader analytic concerns, for example, the rise of social movements (Snow and Machalek 1984).2

One group of sociologists – sociological institutionalists – do still invoke the term socialization. However, this research has been pitched very much at the macro-global level, with scholars exploring how global culture and cultural templates diffuse in the contemporary world, leading states to adopt similar bureaucratic innovations or policies, say (Meyer, Boli, Thomas and Ramirez 1997; Boli and Thomas 1999; see also Finnemore 1996a, 1996b; and Autesserre 2010, 2014).

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 state-level 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.

2 Thanks to Juan Diez Medrano for discussions on this point.
**Political Science.** At nearly the same time as the sociologists – the late 1950s – a number of American political scientists developed 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 (Searing, Schwartz and Lind 1973; Torney-Purta 2000, 88). More rarely, this general approach was applied to adult socialization (Sigel 1989).

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 little or no agency to the targets of socialization; in many cases, 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* 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 calls were to little avail. The conclusions of Cook’s 1985 stock-tacking 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). A recent effort to revitalize work on political socialization does begin to address some of these failings, but still limits its empirical focus – like earlier research – to value transfer to youths in democracies via schools and families (Abendschoen 2013).

Summary. This review of earlier work highlights several lessons and insights for contemporary students of socialization. First, while interest in the topic undoubtedly declined 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, and an unwillingness to capture the interaction between the socializing agent and target.

Third, the target of socialization 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 emphasis 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 or be attenuated in the case of older, more experienced individuals. This is especially likely if those same

---

3 Early work did explore the mechanisms and processes of socialization in a conceptual, experimental sense (Aronfreed 1968), but there was little effort to operationalize it for empirical applications.
individuals live in settings with well-functioning primary socialization units (see Section V below). 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) or soldiers (Kenny 2011) – should take care in extrapolating from research findings primarily focused on children.

Fourth, being a process, socialization requires time. This is a difficult 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 leading to faster socialization (Beyers 2005). Or 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). Maybe there are differing levels of socialization, with full internalization requiring the most time? (See also the discussion of type I and type II socialization below.) At a minimum, researchers need explicitly to address this temporal dimension, 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 and noncombat life together, as opposed to socialization occurring during combat or through the commitment of violent acts.\(^4\) Likewise, research on urban gangs talks of street socialization as a process producing violence while not necessarily being violent itself (Vigil 2003, 230, 235 – but see Rodgers 2013). This blind spot on the role

\(^4\) Ben-Shalom et al 2005 is a partial exception. They examine cohesion/socialization during military operations; yet, the actual mechanisms invoked remain non-violent.
played by violence and conflict has had direct and negative consequences for newer research by international-relations specialists on socialization.

III. Socialization – IR Theory and the Constructivist Turn

As seen above, an extensive literature had developed in the 1960s and 1970s on various arenas of national-level socialization, including militaries, schools and churches. The value-added of the IR constructivists – beginning in the late 1990s – was to extend such thinking to the system level, arguing that socialization could apply to a given international community as well.

For the past 15 years, this focus has been a key one for constructivists in political science, who – in turn – draw 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. Studies were designed to show 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 \( t = 1 \).

An example is Finnemore (1996a), who documents efforts by UNESCO to promote national science bureaucracies, followed by state-level adoption in the absence of any obvious need for them. 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. These include bringing process to the fore, theoretically and methodologically; thinking in terms of causal mechanisms; exploring cases where socialization efforts fail; and theorizing socialization targets – giving them agency, in the jargon.

While these moves by the IR scholars are welcome, there are clearly issues requiring further thought. First, why is the socialization they study always non-violent and nice? In nearly all cases, the causal mechanisms 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.

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.5 Put differently, much of the constructivist work has been devoted to how socialization can create 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.

---

5 Hafner-Burton and Ron (2009) note a similar selection effect shaping the optimistic findings of contemporary qualitative work on the spread of human rights, key parts of which have been authored by constructivists.
Partly it is a function of epistemology. The 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). Moreover, the above-noted selection effect has played a role. When studying Western Europe and the European Union, 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. 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. However, 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. As I argue in section V, a case can be made for a theoretical middle ground that is empirically rich and case specific, but still generalizable in a ‘small-g’ sense.

IV. Socialization – Let’s Talk!

IR constructivists are not the only social scientists to have re-discovered socialization. Comparativists – mainly those studying civil war – have also made an important contribution.

The study of civil conflict has become a growth industry over the past 15 years. Early work was largely quantitative and had a grounding in (materialist) political-economy theories (Blattman and Miguel 2010, for an excellent review), but the last decade has seen a growing amount of rigorous qualitative and, increasingly, mixed method work. Within the qualitative work, a 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

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 collective actors in such conflicts – international peacekeepers, rebel groups – and began to look inside them. For some, this has meant applying political economy or principal-agent models to a new object of study – rebel groups (Weinstein 2007; Salehyan 2009; Salehyan, Siroky and Wood 2014). 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 shape the values and identities of individual combatants (see also Tarrow 2007)? Is retention of group members marked by a process different from their recruitment (Gates 2002; Gates and Nordaas 2014)? Are levels and types of violence explained by the presence (or absence) of certain social dynamics within the group (Hoover Green 2013)?

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 regional cooperation, then the comparativists have done something quite different, 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, daily practice 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, 2014; 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; and Gutierrez Sanin and Wood 2014, 221). Like the sociologists of the 1950s and 1960s, she finds that age is crucial: Child recruits are more susceptible to socialization (Wood 2010, 310). This finding is echoed by 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, 68-69, passim), which documents – and seeks to explain in political-economy terms – the relative ease of indoctrinating younger combatants and child soldiers compared to older recruits. In policy terms, if a child’s participation in rebel groups can be shown to have such far-reaching consequences, then it behooves international and national agencies to invest more resources in “counterpropaganda and escape training” (Beber and Blattman 2013, 70, 101-02) to minimize a child’s chance of recruitment in the first place.

If Wood’s essay is more a conceptual exploration, then Cohen integrates her argument on combat socialization with rich quantitative and 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

---

6 There are important parallels here to anthropological work on violent socialization within urban gangs. Rodgers 2013.
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; see also Gates and Nordaas 2014)?

Empirically, one would ideally want more process-level data; the key evidence in this study is from 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 the actual socialization process (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.

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. As the above demonstrates, two sets of scholars are currently theorizing the same term – socialization – but in somewhat different ways. Utilizing insights primarily 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 - of subfields and disciplinary lines - is in order. In the real world, 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/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 (Adler-Nissen 2014, for example). These targets – including recruits to rebel groups and
gangs – have a prior life and (cognitive, institutional, cultural) context. Without better specifying these priors, it will be all too easy to over- or under-estimate the causal role played by group socialization (see also Wood 2010, 307). On this particular point, we might all learn from historians, as it is their studies of socialization that typically best capture the role of these prior life histories – in the Nazi security administration, say (Wildt 2002).

For their part, the IR constructivists should draw upon their comparative colleagues’ work on civil war – as well as that of anthropologists studying gangs – 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 – be it organizationally (Granovetter 1985) or structural. And on the latter, 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 individuals targeted by socialization may be the object 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. Such efforts are likely to fail unless they take account of prior, local socialization of those same ex-combatants (see also Blattman 2012, 408).

I close by noting one thing that unites nearly all contemporary scholars studying socialization – an emphasis on qualitative methods for documenting its process element. They are thus not repeating the mistake of the earlier political socialization research program, where there was a mismatch between theoretical concept (socialization) and

---

7 A review of all articles published by IR constructivists in *International Organization* and *International Studies Quarterly* in the period 2008-14 confirms that this particular bias remains.
method employed (quantitative). To be clear, I am not arguing that quantitative methods are irrelevant in studying socialization. Formal models (Gates and Nordaas 2014) and agent-based modelling (Nome and Weidman 2013), for example, can play key roles in specifying the logic of interaction producing it, but qualitative techniques will be needed to study the actual socialization process.

V. The Social Production of Violence

This dissection and reconstruction of socialization as concept and practice informs the substantive questions at the core of this project, all of which revolve around the social production of violence. What role do group dynamics and, more specifically, socialization play in the production of organized violence? What places limits on socialization, where we see that it fails or is actively resisted? How do we theorize and capture the role of cross-level socialization, where social actors may be subject to multiple socializing impulses arising from both internal/domestic and external/transnational sources? How sticky or deep is socialization? Is it like a sweater that can be removed, once one leaves the group? Or is it more like a skin?

Specifically for studies of civil war, to address such questions will shed new light on central issues – from the nature and extent of rebel group cohesion to variation in the repertoires of violence employed by combatants. Answers may not always require a turn to socialization; however, this type of explanation should be ruled out on empirical grounds and not by theoretical fiat or methodological fashion.

Socialization and Violence: The Way Forward. Our overall bet is that socialization is an important analytic lens for better understanding the production of both order and violence in conflict settings. However, the real value-added for both theory and our understanding of violence/conflict will come from a crossing of sub-field, disciplinary and epistemological boundaries. I operationalize this boundary crossing by considering
anew four aspects of socialization – its depth, mechanisms, socialization failures, and multiple socialization – and conclude with cautionary notes on theory and method.

First and on depth, it might be useful to theorize points in the socialization process prior to full internalization, distinguishing, for example, between type I and II socialization (Checkel 2007, passim; see also Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 2013, ch.15). With the former, an individual exhibits pro-group behavior by learning a role - acquiring the knowledge that enables him/her to act in accordance with expectations - irrespective of whether he/she likes the role or agrees with it. Appropriate group behavior, then, means simply that conscious instrumental calculation has been replaced by conscious role playing. In contrast, type II socialization is deeper and more thorough going. An individual accepts group norms as the right thing to do; he/she adopts the interests or even possibly identity of the community of which he/she is a part. Conscious instrumental calculation has now been replaced by taken for grantedness or full internalization.

This distinction matters not only for theory. Say that members of a rebel group have undergone type I socialization; once they leave the group, such individuals would be expected to change their behavior. That is, absent the specific group environment that creates particular roles, the latter should be discarded. Many (most?) DDR programs seem implicitly to be built on such a model of rebel group socialization, where re-integration is a matter of offering economic opportunities, of getting the incentives right, as it were.

However, if rebel combatants have undergone the deeper, type II socialization, then DDR programs will need to focus more long-term on ways to de-socialize these individuals. Thus for both academic and policy reasons, we need to know whether socialization is like a sweater that can be removed once one leaves the group, or more like a skin - integral to the self.
Second, scholars of socialization have begun quite explicitly to use the language of causal mechanisms, or “the pathway or process by which an effect is produced or a purpose is accomplished” (Gerring 2007, 178; see also Falleti and Lynch 2009, 1149). This move aligns their thinking on causality with many others (Hedstroem and Ylikoski 2010) and gets us a step beyond correlations. These mechanisms include persuasion and social influence (Johnston 2001, 2008; Lynch 2013); arguing (Risse 2000; Lynch 2002); group violence (Cohen 2013a, b); social learning (Price 1998; Checkel 2001); rhetorical action (Schimmelfennig 2001); hazing and dehumanization (Wood 2010; Gutierrez Sanin and Wood 2014); role playing (Beyers 2005); and instrumental calculation (Hooghe 2001, ch.1; Schimmelfennig 2005).

In several cases, recent work goes an important step further. That is, it not only theorizes particular mechanisms of socialization, but also the conditions under which they are expected to operate – so-called scope conditions (Risse, Ropp, Sikkink 2013). Using slightly different language, Falletti and Lynch discuss the critical role of context in explanations using causal mechanisms.

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

Consider the mechanism of persuasion, which a number of scholars have identified as playing a key role in socialization processes. In earlier work, I argued that for persuasion to have causal effect – to change the beliefs and views of an individual – a set of initial institutional scope or context conditions had to be met, specifically that it occur in insulated and de-politicized settings (Checkel 2001, 2003; see also Johnston 2008).
Whether one calls it context or scope condition, the necessity of this particular analytic move cannot be stressed enough. Scholars who disaggregate socialization into one or more causal mechanisms typically have little interest in generating some broad, encompassing general theory – which makes complete sense given their approach and research questions. If a label is applied to their theorizing, it is typically captured by the terms partial or middle range (Johnston 2005). Yet, as I discuss below, these latter types of theory are particularly prone to under-specification, which is where the articulation of scope conditions can play a key role.

Third, despite group pressures, socialization often fails or yields uneven results. Increasingly, this has led scholars to explore those factors that both facilitate and inhibit it. A – still incomplete – list includes age, where young is good for socialization, but not too young (Blattman 2007); cognitive priors or the idea that blank minds are easier to socialize (Johnston 2005, 2008); the status of the socializer, with his/her ability to socialize increasing with status/authority/prestige (Checkel 2007, ch.1); and the intensity and quality of the interaction, with interactive back and forth being better than lecturing or hectoring (Beyers 2005). The emphasis on exploring various kinds of socialization outcomes, including cases where an expected effect is completely absent, is an advance from earlier research – but more work is required.

Consider age, where a core finding of the early sociological studies was that young people – and especially children – were the most susceptible to socialization (see section II above). Yet, recent work on regional organizations (Checkel 2007) and on rebel groups (Cohen 2013a, b) suggests that socialization can in fact occur at more advanced ages. Why? Perhaps age matters less when an individual is a novice, with few cognitive priors that might block a socialization message (Gheciu 2005)? Or maybe age matters less where the primary socializing agencies (schools, families, churches) are weak or absent – as in many
conflict/post-conflict settings. In this case, ‘primacy’ effects will be trumped by ‘recency’ effects (Johnston 2005, 1019-1020). In plain language, this might mean that rebel group recruits – no matter what their age – will be highly susceptible to socialization because of the weak nature of primary organizations.

Fourth, there is always a danger that an analytic focus on one phenomenon – in this case, socialization – will overstate its importance. Put differently, we need to do better at delimiting arguments about socialization. To start, it is always very good practice to ask the counterfactual: Absent what I think to be important – socialization - would the outcome have been the same? This alerts us to the simple fact that multiple causal pathways may lead to the same outcome.8

In addition, we need to appreciate better that socialization is often a two-way street, where its targets actively resist. These targets thus have agency, and it needs to be theorized. Even in cases of military socialization or that within rebel groups and gangs – where limited agency is more likely – resistance is still likely, albeit perhaps through more indirect and discrete forms. Whatever the case, it is important to problematize the relation between the socializing agency and its target, exploring, for example, the cognitive, cultural, local normative, and institutional factors that allow a target to resist (Cortell and Davis 1996, 2005; Checkel 1999; Johnston 2001; Wood 2010). Given that a lack of local agency was an ongoing problem in the original sociological work (section II above), this is a clear case where scholars today must push further.

A final way to delimit our arguments about socialization in a particular site is to recognize that any given individual is likely embedded in multiple sites or groups. Earlier, I used the phrase cross-level socialization to capture this fact. For example, non-state actors like rebel groups are increasingly a target of international attempts at socialization – think of

---

8 More formally, this is the problem of equifinality. Bennett and Checkel 2014, ch.1.
the decade-long campaign to target their use of child soldiers (Achverina and Reich 2009). How – through what mechanisms – do such efforts interact with and shape socialization dynamics within the group (Jo and Bryant 2013)? Does one site trump another, or is the end result some kind of hybrid socialization (See also Johnston 2005, 1020)?

*               *               *

Addressing these four issues – depth of socialization, mechanisms, socialization failures, and multiple socialization – promises to advance our knowledge of socialization dynamics as well as the social production of violence. However, in doing this, there will be challenges – both theoretical and methodological.

**Challenges Ahead.** A first challenge concerns theory, with the past decade seeing students of socialization increasingly think in terms of causal mechanisms. 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).

Many who theorize socialization mechanisms claim their work results in mid-range theory. But what does this really mean? How do we develop multi-causal arguments – for that is the essence of middle-range approaches (George 1993) – without simultaneously producing over-determined outcomes? Sadly, even leading proponents of a move to mechanism-based thinking in contemporary political science are silent on this score (Katzenstein and Sil 2010a, b).

Thus, when large parts of a research program are characterized by middle-range approaches, the production of cumulative theoretical knowledge may be hindered. Specifically for work on socialization, the various middle-range efforts are not coalescing into a broader theoretical whole. Instead, we have proliferating lists of variables and causal mechanisms. Now, depending upon one’s epistemological starting point, having a broader theoretical whole is not necessarily a bad thing – say, for critical and interpretive
scholarship. However, if small g generalization is an issue even for the latter (Hopf 2007; Pouliot 2014, for excellent discussions), then surely it matters for the work surveyed here, which is largely positivist or scientific realist in orientation.

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

One promising possibility for addressing these analytic problems is typological theory, or theories about how combinations of mechanisms shape outcomes for specified populations (Bennett and George 2005, ch.11; Elman 2005). Compared to middle-range approaches, this form of theorizing has several advantages. It provides a way to address interaction effects and other forms of complexity; it stimulates fruitful iteration between cases, the specification of populations, and theories; and it creates a framework for cumulative progress. 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. For example, a recent project on civil war showed how typological theorizing could be used to promote cumulation, even in the hard case of mid-range, theoretically plural accounts (Checkel 2013a, ch.8).

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

For one, good process tracing requires that the causal mechanisms in play be fully and carefully theorized. The more care at this stage, the clearer will be those mechanisms’ observable implications, without which process tracing is virtually impossible. 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 by generating relatively sharp and unique empirical predictions” (Jacobs 2014, 42; see also Lyall 2014).

In addition, good process tracing requires that scholars address equifinality, where multiple causal pathways may lead to the same outcome. This means to specify these other candidate mechanisms, identify their observable implications and conduct some process tracing on them (Bennett and Checkel 2014, ch.1). 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 to my first point – full, robust theorization of these various mechanisms will only facilitate this task. The goal 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.

Finally, good process tracing must be transparent. At a minimum, researchers need to be explicit on how observations are drawn and data generated; to explain precisely how process tracing is used to reach conclusions; and to share their data (Elman and Kapiszewski 2014: 45; Bennett and Checkel 2014, ch.10). These are relatively straightforward injunctions by which to abide, but they are rarely followed in the qualitative case study literature, including that on socialization. And, increasingly, following them will matter, as there is a clear move underway – at least in political science – to systematize transparency requirements for qualitative methods.9

The point in addressing such issues is not to turn us into methodologists, but to move our applications of process tracing from the realm of metaphor to that of analytic tool (Bennett and Checkel 2014, passim). We will tell better substantive stories about the role socialization plays in producing order and violence if we recognize “there is substantial distance between the broad claim that ‘process tracing is good’ and the precise claim ‘this is an instance of good process tracing’” (Waldner 2011: 7).

9 The American Political Science Review recently adopted a qualitative replication/transparency policy; the journal International Organization will likely follow suit in 2015.
References


