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Social Constructivism Meets Globalization

by

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1. **Introduction**

Writing about what social constructivism contributes to the study of globalization represents a challenging task. The main reason for this difficulty is that the meanings of both "social constructivism" and of "globalization" are far from clear. Both have become common catchwords that can be interpreted rather differently. First, social constructivism is often treated as a theory of international relations making substantive claims about the real world. In the following, however, I use social constructivism as a social ontology, a meta-theory about the social world and our knowledge about it (see also Adler 1997, 2002; Fearon and Wendt 2002). As a result, there cannot be a "social constructivist theory of globalization" as, e.g., there could be a Marxist approach to globalization. Rather, as I will argue in the following, social constructivism provides a particular view on globalization processes, a lens which allows us to interpret globalization in distinctive ways and which leads us to ask specific questions about it.

If social constructivism is an unclear term, this is even more true for "globalization," as a brief look at the usage of the concept immediately reveals (see e.g. Beisheim and Walter 1997; Held et al. 1999; Kofman and Youngs 2003). For some, globalization means the internationalization of financial markets and of production networks. Others understand globalization as the erosion of borders and the end of the nation-state as we know it. Last not least, some focus on the global diffusion of norms and other cultural scripts. These are very different social and political processes that might or might not be causally linked. If the concept of globalization is used in very different ways, explanations for its origins as well as its consequences are equally varied.

So, what can social constructivism add to this confusion? I suggest two ways in which social constructivism can enlighten our understanding of globalization. First, it allows a critical view on the taken-for-grantedness of many globalization discourses. "Globalization" itself is far from an innocent concept, but contains a particular discourse about international reality which can be uncovered if one cares about the social construction of reality. Second, on more substantive grounds, a social constructivist understanding of globalization emphasizes the non-material forces at work here and focusses on processes of meaning construction and interpretation as constitutive for globalization. A social constructivist lens also helps to bring the political back into the globalization discourse by emphasizing the potential for change rather than the inevitability of global processes.

This chapter proceeds with the following steps. It begins with a clarification of social constructivism as a meta-theoretical approach and some initial thoughts on what this means for the study of globalization. I then proceed with discussing three contributions of social constructivism to understanding globalization. The first contribution focusses on the globalization of culture and

norms from a sociological perspective. The second value-added concentrates on language and the discursive construction of globalization. A third perspective focusses on deliberative global governance as a political response to globalization. I conclude with a short summary of the argument.

2. **What Is Social Constructivism?**

There is considerable confusion in the field on what precisely constitutes social constructivism and what distinguishes it from other approaches to international relations.[1] As a result, it has become fairly common to introduce constructivism as yet another substantive theory of international relations, such as realism, liberalism, or institutionalism. Yet, it should be emphasised at the outset that social constructivism as such does not make any particular claims about international politics, let alone globalization. Constructivists may adhere to an institutionalist reading of international regimes and institutions as the central way to understand global politics. They may equally join the liberal crowd emphasising domestic politics and domestic institutions as central explanatory variables for great power politics. Many social constructivists would also feel comfortable as critical theorists in favor of various emancipatory projects.

It is equally misleading to claim, as some have argued, that social constructivism subscribes to a "post-positivist" epistemology (how can we know something?), while conventional approaches are wedded to positivism and the search for law-like features in social and political life. Unfortunately, terms such as "positivism" are often used as demarcation devices to distinguish the "good self" from the "bad other" in some sort of disciplinary tribal warfare (for an excellent discussion of this tendency in International Relations theory see Wight 2002). However, if "post-positivism" means,

1) a healthy scepticism toward a "covering law" approach to social science irrespective of time and space and instead a strive toward middle-range theorising,

2) an emphasis on interpretive understanding as an intrinsic, albeit not exclusive, part of any causal explanation, and,

3) the recognition that social scientists are part of the social world which they try to analyse ("double hermeneutics" see Giddens 1982, but first and foremost Habermas 1968),

– is anybody still a "positivist" then (to paraphrase an article by Legro and Moravcsik 1999)?

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[1] This part builds on Risse 2002, 2003.

In sum, while there are some radical constructivist positions denying the possibility of inter-subjectively valid knowledge claims in the social sciences, this view is by no means a defining and unifying characteristics of social constructivism as a meta-theoretical approach to the study of social phenomena (on this point see also Adler 2002; Ruggie 1998).

Defining social constructivism

So, what then is "social constructivism" (for the following see, e.g., Adler 1997, 2002; Checkel 1998; Fearon and Wendt 2002; Wendt 1999)? It is a truism that social reality does not fall from heaven, but that human agents construct and reproduce it through their daily practices – "the social construction of reality" (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Yet while this is a core argument of social constructivism, as a truism it does not provide us with a clear enough conceptualization. Therefore, it is probably more useful to describe constructivism as based on a social ontology which insists that human agents do not exist independently from their social environment and its collectively shared systems of meanings ("culture" in a broad sense). This is in contrast to the methodological individualism of rational choice according to which "(t)he elementary unit of social life is the individual human action" (Elster 1989, 13). The fundamental insight of the structure-agency debate, which lies at the heart of many social constructivist works, is not only that social structures and agents are mutually co-determined. The crucial point is to insist on the mutual *constitutiveness* of (social) structures and agents (Adler 1997, 324-325; Wendt 1999, ch. 4; see also Giddens 1984). The social environment in which we find ourselves, defines ("constitutes") who we are, our identities as social beings. "We" are social beings, embedded in various relevant social communities. At the same time, human agency creates, reproduces, and changes culture through our daily practices. Thus, social constructivism occupies a – sometimes uneasy - ontological middleground between individualism and structuralism by claiming that there are properties of structures and of agents that cannot be collapsed into each other.

This claim has important, if often overlooked, repercussions for the study of globalization processes. Many approaches to globalization are committed to an overly structuralist ontology. Structuralists tend to argue that some anonymous forces – be it financial markets, be it global production networks – command the global economy as a result of which states and political decision-making have lost almost all autonomy and freedom of choice (e.g. Ohmae 1990; Gill 1995; Gill and Law 1993; Altvater and Mahnkopf 1996; also Strange 1996; for an excellent review of this literature see Beisheim and Walter 1997). All they can do is to adapt and to conform to the forces of the neoliberal world economy. These trends result into a "race to the bottom" with regard to social poli-

cies and to the end of the welfare state as we knew it. Some praise these forces in line with the neo-liberal discourse itself, others try to save as much of the welfare state as possible by propagating a "third way." Finally, globalization critics paint such a fundamentally negative picture of globalization that only revolutionary changes appear to present a way out. Yet, it is interesting to note that many authors take "globalization" as a given as the dominant social structure of the contemporary international system.

From a social constructivist viewpoint, there is very little "given" about economic globalization. First, one would emphasize that the globalization discourse constitutes itself a social construction in the sense that making economic globalization inevitable serves particular purposes and interests (see below). Depriving anomymous market forces of human agency overlooks, e.g., that the liberalization of capital markets occurred at certain points in time by concrete political decisions, i.e., human agency was involved here. This is not to imply that these decisions can easily be taken back. But it is to suggest that globalization is reinforced and reproduced by and through social and political practices. And these practices can change as a result of which the course of globalization will change.

Second, at a deeper level, social constructivists would probably insist that the concept of "globalization" itself constitutes a particular interpretation of a social reality which is itself being interpreted and re-interpreted by social agents. Moreover, the concept has long lost its analytical innocence (if it ever had one) and has become part of the standard interpretations of the global reality which political, economic, and social actors routinely use to make sense of their world. In that sense, "globalization" as a discourse reifies globalization as a social structure. Describing the international system as "globalized" not only overlooks the fragmented and uneven nature of globalization (is the world economy globalized, or rather "OECDized?"; see Zürn 1998). The consensual knowledge generated by the concept of "globalization" also constitutes our worldviews. If we construct the world as globalized, we focus on inter-connectedness, networks, and complex interdependence (Keohane and Nye 1977). At the same time, we de-emphasize those forces in the current world order that contribute to fragmentation and (cultural) difference. Furthermore, one does not have to be a realist to notice that globalization and inter-connectedness of the world cannot be reconciled easily with a worldview of unipolarity emphasizing American hegemony. How can a global order with one single state sitting at the top of the international pecking order be described as "globalized" at the same time without the concept losing much of its meaning (see also chapter by G. John Ikenberry)?

Agency, structure, and the constitutive effects of norms and rules

If we try to analyze the reality of globalization, social constructivist would probably take issue with an overly structuralist account as criticized above. In contrast, when it comes to the *impact* of globalization on the nation-state and its domestic polities, politics, and policies, the target of constructivist attack is likely to be the methodological individualism emphasised by rational choice and its overly agency-centered approach. The reason for this can be found in the way in which social constructivists conceptualise how social structures impact on agents and their behaviour. Rationalist institutionalism ("neo-liberal" institutionalism in International Relations jargon, see Keohane 1989) views social institutions as primarily constraining the behaviour of actors with given identities and preferences. These actors follow a "logic of consequentialism" (March and Olsen 1989, 1998) enacting given identities and interests and trying to realise their preferences through strategic behaviour. The goal of action is to maximise or to optimise one's interests and preferences. Institutions constrain or widen the range of choices available to actors to realise their interests. In a similar vein, economic globalization and global market forces can be analyzed as re-arranging the distribution of power among domestic political and social actors (see e.g. Keohane and Milner 1996). Globalization would lead to a redistribution of resources available to actors as a result of which some gain and some lose. Some authors analyze this process as a global shift in the power balance between labor and capital.

In contrast, social constructivism and sociological institutionalism emphasise a different logic of action, which March and Olsen have called the "logic of appropriateness:" "Human actors are imagined to follow rules that associate particular identities to particular situations, approaching individual opportunities for action by assessing similarities between current identities and choice dilemmas and more general concepts of self and situations" (March and Olsen 1998, 951). Rule-guided behaviour differs from strategic and instrumental behaviour in that actors try to "do the right thing" rather than maximising or optimising their given preferences. The logic of appropriateness entails that actors try to figure out the appropriate rule in a given social situation. It follows that social institutions can no longer be viewed as "external" to actors. Rather, actors including corporate actors such as national governments, firms, or interest groups are deeply embedded in and affected by the social institutions in which they act.

This relates to what constructivists call the *constitutive* effects of social norms and rules (Onuf 1989; Kratochwil 1989). Many social norms not only regulate behaviour, they also constitute the identity of actors in the sense of defining who "we" are as members of a social community. The norm of sovereignty, e.g., not only regulates the interactions of states in international affairs, it also

defines what a state *is* in the first place. Constructivists concentrate on the social identities of actors in order to account for their interests (e.g. Wendt 1999, particularly ch. 7; also Checkel 2001a). Constructivism maintains that collective norms and understandings define the basic "rules of the game" in which they find themselves in their interactions. This does not mean that constitutive norms cannot be violated or never change. But the argument implies that we cannot even describe the properties of social agents without reference to the social structure in which they are embedded.

What does this mean for our understanding of the impact of globalization? If we treat globalization as a global social structure, social constructivists would, first, insist that globalization does not only consist of global material (mostly economic) forces, but also of whole sets of collective understandings which need to be investigated as part of it (see below). Material and economic factors do not exist and emerge in an ideational vacuum. Rather, collective understandings and meaning structures offer interpretations to make sense of the material world. The concept of "globalization" itself is a prime example for such collective understandings that offer a peculiar interpretation of the international economy. I have also mentioned already the neo-liberal globalization discourse which is to be further examined below. In addition, sociological institutionalists in particular focus on processes of cultural globalization, namely the emergence of global normative structures with constitutive effects on nation-states and their domestic environments (see below).

Second, constructivists would focus on the constitutive effects of the various globalization processes. Economic globalization, for example, constitutes social actors in reference to their position in the global economy which shapes their interests and even identities. Notions such as "global players," for example, imply particular understandings and self-understandings of the companies in question as incorporating a global outlook and, as a result, global interests. There is an interesting twist to these notions in recent years. Transnational corporations who want to become "global players" these days, not only have to recognize their global corporate interests, but also responsbilities for the global public good. The globalization of culture and norms re-constitutes political and other social actors in the sense that they have to accept these norms in order to be recognized as "good global citizens," and the like.

Communication, Discourse, and Knowledge

The emphasis on communicative and discursive practices constitutes a final characteristic feature of social constructivist approaches.[2] If we want to understand and explain social behaviour, we need to take words, language, and communicative utterances seriously. It is through discursive practices that agents make sense of the world and attribute meaning to their activities. Moreover, as Foucault reminds us, discursive practices establish power relationships in the sense that they make us "understand certain problems in certain ways, and pose questions accordingly" (Diez 2001, 90). And further, "(a)lthough it is 'we' who impose meaning, 'we' do not act as autonomous subjects but from a 'subject position' made available by the discursive context in which we are situated" (ibid., referring to Foucault 1991, 58).

There are at least two ways in which the study of communicative practices might contribute to our understanding of globalization processes (see 4.). First, scholars have started applying the Habermasian theory of communicative action to international relations (Habermas 1981, 1992; Müller 1994; Risse 2000). They focus on arguing and reason-giving as an agency-centred mode of interaction which enables actors to challenge the validity claims inherent in any causal or normative statement and to seek a communicative consensus about their understanding of a situation as well as justifications for the principles and norms guiding their action, rather than acting purely on the basis of strategic calculations. Argumentative rationality means that the participants in a discourse are open to be persuaded by the better argument and that relationships of power and social hierarchies recede in the background. Argumentative and deliberative behaviour is as goal-oriented as strategic interactions, but the goal is not to attain one's fixed preferences, but to seek a reasoned consensus. As Keohane put it, persuasion "involves changing people's choices of alternatives independently of their calculations about the strategies of other players" (Keohane 2001, 10). Actors' interests, preferences, and the perceptions of the situation are no longer fixed, but subject to discursive challenges. Where argumentative rationality prevails, actors do not seek to maximise or to satisfy their given interests and preferences, but to challenge and to justify the validity claims inherent in them – *and* are prepared to change their views of the world or even their interests in light of the better argument.

Advocates of deliberative democracy on a global scale tend to emphasize arguing and persuasion as mechanisms by which cosmopolitan values can be furthered in an age of globalization (see David Held's contribution to this volume). While this work focusses on the normative potential

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[2] For an excellent review of the linguistic turn in international relations theory see Holzscheiter 2004.

of communicative rationality and persuasion for increasing the legitimacy of global governance, a more analytical approach to arguing and persuasion focusses on those institutional sites in the international system that allow for the contestation and exchange of ideas and normative beliefs. The various UN world conferences, for example, can be analyzed in a traditional way as simply representing inter-state negotiation platforms. But they can also looked at as arenas for global deliberation of issues of common concern involving the various public and private stakeholders. We can then investigate under which conditions these discourse arenas are actually suitable for increasing the legitimacy and problem-solving capacity of global governance in response to, but also as part of globalization processes.

The second way in which discursive practices can be studied with regard to globalization, does not so much focus on arguing and reason-giving, but on discourse as a process of meaning construction allowing for certain interpretations while excluding others. In other words, this work follows Michel Foucault rather than Jürgen Habermas (Foucault 1973, 1991, 1996; overview in Howarth, Norval, and Stavrakakis 2000; for an application to international relations see Litfin 1994) and focuses on discursive practices as means by which power relationships are established and maintained. Who is allowed to speak in a discursive arena, what counts as a sensible proposition, and which meaning constructions become so dominant that they are being taken for granted? The neo-liberal discourse on globalization, for example, had become so all-pervasive during the mid-1990s that it established itself almost as strong as Maggie Thatcher's TINA ("There Is No Alternative."). Of course, this discourse then gave rise to a counter-discourse put forward by the so-called "anti-globalization" movements (which is a misnomer insofern as these transnational social movements are part and parcel of a globalization process, only "globalization from below" this time). In sum, this constructivist emphasis on communicative practices contributes to alternative understandings of power relationships in the process of globalization.

The three contributions of social constructivism to the study of globalization

In sum, social constructivism as a meta-theory of social action and interaction does not as such produce a substantive "theory of globalization". Yet, there are at least three ways in which social constructivism contributes to a better understanding of globalization processes and its impact on the nation-states. First, accepting the mutual constitutiveness of agency and structure allows for a deeper analysis of the social construction of globalization than conventional and overly structuralist approaches. Second and related, emphasising the constitutive effects of international social order enables us to study how globalization processes shape social identities and interests of actors. And

vice versa! Third, focusing on communicative practices permits us to examine more closely how globalization processes are constructed discursively and how actors try to come to grips with its meanings.

In the following, I use these theoretical insights to discuss three substantive contributions to the study of globalization informed by a social constructivist ontology. The first stems from sociological institutionalism and adds ideational and social factors to our understanding of globalization. The second contribution emphasizes the discursive dimensions of globalization processes. Emphasizing communicative processes also enriches our understanding of the power dimensions of globalization. Last not least, constructivism contributes to a fuller account of global governance as a political response to globalization processes.

3.   **Sociological Understandings: The Globalization of Culture and Norms**

Contemporary understandings of globalization often focus on the transnationalization of economic production, the globalization of financial markets, and the like. It is thereby overlooked, however, that globalization processes entail a lot more than material and economic forces and equally include cultural phenomena and the spread of consensual knowledge as well as principles and norms. Long before globalization became a catchword in the social sciences and beyond, sociological institutionalists such as John Meyer and his colleagues at Stanford University pointed out against world systems theory of the Immanuel Wallerstein variety (Wallerstein 1974/1980/1989) that modernity does not only entail the global spread of capitalism, but also the global diffusion of cultural standards as well as collective understandings and identities (see e.g. Meyer 1987; Meyer, Boli, and Thomas 1987; Meyer et al. 1997; Thomas et al. 1987; Boli and Thomas 1997, 1998). They argued essentially that the history of modernity constitutes the gradual spread of Western cultural standards of rationality on a global scale. John Meyer and his colleagues pointed out, for example, that modern statehood as an institution entails a lot more than territory, control over people, and sovereignty. Rather, modern states come with a whole set of cultural understandings about how states and governments are supposed to look like, what constitute 'public' as opposed to 'private' affairs, and so forth. Moreover, they were able to show empirically that particular cultural scripts have been enacted worldwide in processes of state-building. E.g., any new state these days is supposed to have a ministry of science, irrespective of whether the country in question actually has a university or other

research institutions to speak of. The Stanford school showed that national school curricula world-wide follow certain cultural scripts prescribing what is appropriate to teach children at the various levels of educational systems. Calculus, e.g., entered elementary school curricula worldwide irrespective of whether the country actually was able to educate teachers in mathematics (overviews in Finnemore 1996b; Jepperson 2002; see also Finnemore 1996a).

John Meyer and his colleagues argued, therefore, that a world polity is in the making, based on Western cultural standards. Moreover and more recently, sociological institutionalists tried to substantiate empirically theoretical arguments about the emergence of a global civil society (see e.g. Keane 2003) by pointing to the emergence of global social movements as well as transnationally operating (International) Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) that are strikingly similar as to their organizational structures, material and ideational resources, and action strategies (see e.g. Boli and Thomas 1999; Ramirez 1987). This argument has been taken up in the meantime by scholars researching social movements who have increasingly began to focus on transnational movements and their activities (e.g. Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997; Tarrow forthcoming; Keck and Sikkink 1998).

Moreover, international relations scholars inspired by sociological institutionalism have pointed out that globalization not only entails the the global spread of capitalism and the global diffusion of Western cultural values and scripts, but also the emergence of global norms and behavioral standards enshrined in international institutions. Over the past twenty years, for example, we can observe what Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink called a "norm cascade" in many issue-areas of international politics (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). "Norm cascade" refers to the tipping point where international norms become global standards of appropriate behavior in the sense that a growing number of states subscribes to them. Once the tipping point is reached, international norms tend to exert constitutive effects on the states in the sense that it becomes the "normal" and appropriate thing to do to sign up to and to ratify the respective treaties. If you want to be a member of international society "in good standing", a civilized member of the international community, you better sign up to the treaty at this point.

The globalization of international legal norms can be observed across a whole variety of issue-areas in world politics. Today, there is not a single issue-area in international affairs which is not regulated by at least some international norms and rules. In the fields of international human righs (including gender and social rights) as well as in international environmental politics in particular, there has been a mind-boggling increase in international agreements and treaties. Of course, the emergence of many of these international norms is directly linked to the agenda-setting role of

transnational social movements, advocacy networks and INGOs (see e.g. Florini 2000; for the human rights area see Korey 1998). These norm cascades have resulted in a situation in which there is not a single state left in the international system today which has not signed and ratified at least one of the major instruments of international human rights law or international environmental treaties (for the human rights area see Liese 2004; Schmitz and Sikkink 2002; for the international environment see e.g. Haas, Keohane, and Levy 1993; Mitchell 2002). This further contributes to what sociological institutionalists call an emerging world polity insofar as human rights and of environmental protection norms not only set standards of appropriate behavior worldwide, but also constitute states in the world system as members of the international community. States which want to be "in" rather than "out" (or rogue states), are expected to subscribe to international human rights and environmental norms.

While the trend described so far pertains mostly to states as the main subjects of international law, a more recent tendency extends international norms as standards of appropriate behavior to the private sector. Once again, advocacy networks and global transnational movements have been at the origins of these developments by denouncing transnational corporations as violating human rights and damaging the global environment. Transnational campaigns such as the global mobilization against the sports firm Nike and its use of sweat shops and child labor in the Philippines and elsewhere were only the beginning of global efforts to raise consciousness that private actors such as multinational firms can violate human and social rights, too. These campaigns have led to the extension of international human rights and environmental norms to the private sector, the catchword being "global corporate social responsibility" as one aspect of a new global public policy (see Reinicke 1998; Reinicke and Deng 2000). Take the UN's Global Compact, for example: It asks multinational corporations to voluntarily subscribe to a list of international human rights and environmental standards and to regularly report on their progress in implementing these norms. While the Global Compact is entirely voluntary and does not entail any enforcement mechanism, other instruments of "Global Corporate Social Responsibility" use market-incentives to induce norm compliance or entail elaborate monitoring and rating mechanisms (see e.g. the Dow Jones Sustainability Index). Thus, we can currently observe a process by which private non-state actors are increasingly involved in and subject to the regulations of global norms of appropriate behavior. If you want to be a socially accepted "global player" these days, you better subscribe at least to some international human rights and environmental standards and you better report about your efforts at implementing these norms through changes in management and production rules. Thus, norms of corporate social responsibility are starting to exert similar constitutive effects on transnational cor-

porations as international human rights or environmental rules did on states about ten years earlier. We currently observe a mainstreaming of these norms into corporate practices which is again similar to the process by which states started instituting, say, specialized human rights agencies and commissions some time ago.

In sum, sociologist institutionalists and international relations scholars interested in the study of international norms and institutions have produced sufficient data to support the claim that a globalization of cultural standards, norms, and rules has taken place in parallel to the well-known globalization of markets. This process has taken occurred both informally through diffusion and emulation, but also more formally through international law-making and institution-building. It is noteworthy that this argument pre-dates the contemporary populist literature on "McWorld" and the Americanization/Westernization of global culture (QUOTES; BARBER?). This latter literature also argues that the diffusion of cultural values constitutes one important aspect of globalization. Yet, there is an important difference between the sociological institutionalist argument and the more popular literature on the globalization of Western (or US-American) values and cultural standards. Those who complain about the Westernization of culture around the globe suggest that the global diffusion of cultural scripts inevitably leads to cultural homogeneity and the erosion of local or indigenous values and understandings – in line with popular arguments about the effects of economic globalization. We are all going to eat at McDonalds, drink Coca Cola, listen to American Rock'n Roll, and watch Hollywood movies in the end – from Kampala to Shanghai to Paris.[3]

Sociological institutionalists, however, would disagree. Local values are not just being washed away by cultural globalization. Cultural differences continue to matter.[4] Rather, the more globalized cultural standards and institutionalized norms are incompatible or do not resonate with local standards, the more we will observe what sociologists called "decoupling" (Powell 1991; DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Jepperson 2002). You talk the talk, but you do not walk the walk. In other words, cultural scripts will be enshrined in standard operating procedures and institutional norms, because this is the culturally appropriate thing to do, if one wants to be or become a member of the global society or the world polity. But the actual social practice is likely to deviate from these standards. People will continue to enact their local scripts and follow local norms of appropriate

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[3] Of course, this only applies if you have access to electricity, if you have enough money to go to McDonalds occasionally, or if you are able to read and write…

[4] There is a whole literature on cultural difference which is impossible to review here. See, e.g., Robertson 1993; Drechsel, Schmidt, and Götz 2000.

behavior. Moreover, hybrid cultures are likely to emerge which incorporate some global scripts into the local habits, while rejecting others. "Glocalized" cultures are the likely result.

"Decoupling" also explains why it is that simply signing up to international norms and rules – by states and increasingly so by transnational corporations – does not necessarily lead to improved compliance of these norms (as a brief look into the annual reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Greenpeace, or Friends of the Earth will tell us immediately). Several studies have shown considerable variation in the degree to which states comply with international norms and rules, even with those treaties that they have signed and ratified including obligatory reporting mechanisms (see e.g. Liese 2004; Keith 1999; Raustiala and Slaughter 2002). Unfortunately, sociological institutionalism is not particularly good at explaining the variation in the extent to which states – and private actors – comply with these norms. This school of thought is so much concerned with demonstrating the structural homogeneity of corporate actors including states in the contemporary world system that it has little to offer about the degrees of decoupling. Focus on the global dissemination of cultural scripts and norms has led to a somewhat a-political approach to the study of international standards and their diffusion (see Finnemore 1996b on this point). In other words, politics and norm contestation has to be brought in order to explain variation in the degree of norm compliance. A comparative study of the domestic compliance with international human rights norms showed, for example, that transnational as well as domestic mobilization is necessary to pressure governments "from above and from below" toward rule-consistent behavior (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999; Risse, Jetschke, and Schmitz 2002).

This study also demonstrated that communicative processes are a crucial part of processes of norm diffusion and implementation. This begins with the agenda-setting phase for emerging international norms during which framing processes and other strategic constructions play a crucial role in order to persuade actors that something has to be done about the respective global problem. Strategic constructions such as "naming and shaming" are also crucial when it comes to stigmatizing violators of international norms. In sum, we need to focus on communicative processes if we want to understand the micro-foundations of cultural globalization. This leads to another contribution of social constructivism to the study of globalization.

4.   **Globalization as Communicative Practice: Discourses and Counter-Discourses**

Irrespective of their various theoretical differences and disagreements, social constructivists tend to stress the significance of communicative practice and language as the processes by which meanings are constructed, interpretations are given to social phenomena, and, ultimately, social order is being established. As argued above, there are two ways in which the study of communicative practices can be brought to bear on globalization. One follows primarily a Foucaultian line and views the discursive construction of meanings as a process by which power relationships are established. The other approach follows essentially a Habermasian concept of communication and views discourses as reasoning processes of challenges and counter-challenges to arguments and justifications.

Starting with a Foucaultian concept of discourse, one has to keep in mind the intimate relationship between meaning construction and power. It is important to note that power is understood here as a social structure rather than an interactive relationship in which somebody establishes her will against others (a Weberian understanding of power, cf. Baldwin 2002). Rather, the "power of discourse" refers to a structure of domination and subordination in which meanings and interpretations impose themselves on the subjects by defining how certain problems are to be viewed and which questions are to be asked (for an excellent review of these various concepts of power see BARNETT/DUVALL in IO, GET QUOTE). In a way, discourses establish structures of ideational "soft power" without which systems of rules cannot function (on "soft power" see Nye 1990; Nye 2004).

Take the notion of "globalization" from such a critical discourse-oriented perspective, for example (see also Steger 2003). First, as the word itself implies, it is about universal rather than regional, national, or local processes. Thus, everybody is affected, no matter where you reside on the globe. Something is going on globally, we are all part of it, and it concerns everybody. But are we all "affected," and by what? Even in the global North, not everybody is immediately and directly affected by the trillions of US dollars moved daily through the world financial centers. At least, the causal mechanisms by which the world's capital markets affect the lives of ordinary citizens around the globe are more complex than the social construction of "globalization" seems to imply.

Second, "globalization" implies some sort of interconnectedness of everybody with everybody else, at least in theory. The term and the discourse accompanying it seem to suggest the absence of hierarchies in global networks of communication and information. What about the winners and losers of "globalization?" What about the global North and the global South? What about cul-

tural globalization as a process of Westernization (see above) or even Americanization (see chapter by G. John Ikenberry)? What about simultaneous processes of fragmentation and increasing divergences? The globalization discourse also suggests a whole range of simultaneous economic, technological, political, and cultural processes that are all lumped together as "globalization." But does it really make sense to talk about "global civil society" as part of the same overall process as "global production networks?" As if there is one big causal factor behind it all?

Third, there seems to be something inevitable and irreversible about "globalization." One might discuss how and under what condition the process can be politically managed and how much political autonomy states continue to possess under "globalization." But the discourse is no longer about radical alternatives to "globalization" (remember the 1970s and the development discourse about "self-sufficiency and autonomous development" in response to structural dependency?). Today, we discuss "managing globalization" rather than altering its course radically (and what is "it" anyway?). Where does politics come in here? Is "global governance" nothing more than a clean-up process to smoothe over some negative externalities of globalization?

Fourth, globalization processes appear to come without actors. They are all structure and no agency, just anonymous forces that decide our fate. Discourse theorists remind us, however, that references to anonymous forces constitute rhetorical constructions which often serve to cover up underlying power structures. What about U.S. power in all of this? To what extent does "globalization" coincide with American hegemony in the world system? What about the structural power of capital and of transnational corporations in this process? What about international organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization? To what extent does the "globalization" discourse represent a strategic construction by powerful actors in the world system?

To be sure, this is not to suggest a conspiracy theory of globalization that would simply replace a structuralist view of global processes by an equally problematic "agentist" approach according to which global forces can be traced back to some concrete evil (economic) power interests of individual actors. Conspiracy theories serve to simplify a complex world, but, unfortunately, they rarely provide good causal explanations. Social constructivists would also have difficulties buying into a (Marxist) analysis by which discourse simply constitutes a super-structure which reinforces an underlying economic and material base, e.g., transnational capitalism.

Rather, the main task of a critical de-construction of the globalization discourse is to uncover the structure of power as a structure of domation and subordination that this discourse itself establishes and reproduces. This might help the interests of transnational corporations as a side-

effect (no doubt about that). But to simply argue that globally oriented capitalists are the sole sources of a globalization discourse would mean to reduce the complex story of social and inter-subjective meaning construction to an almost mono-causal account. Rather, the constructivist reading of the globalization discourse presented here shows some similarities to a Neo-Gramscian approach to the international political economy, as represented in International Relations theory by Robert Cox and others (Cox 1986, 1987; Cox and Sinclair 1996; Gill 1993). Neo-Gramscians analyze international power structures as configurations of economic forces, (political) institutions, and ideational constructions ("discourses" in my usage). But unlike traditional Marxists, they would insist on the relative autonomy of institutions and ideas from underlying economic configurations.

The critical analysis of the "globalization" discourse presented here also applies to the so-called "neoliberal discourse" which many have identified as the dominant discourse of globalization processes. Of course, this discourse is all about market liberalization, de-regulation, and the global integration of markets. It contains some of the same ingredients – inevitability, irreversebility, anonymous forces etc. – as the globalization discourse itself. Yet, the "neoliberal discourse" also serves as a good example how a discursive construction of reality which some already took for reality itself, has generated its own counter-discourse in the meantime. Transnational social movements started challenging the assumptions behind the neoliberal and monetarist constructions of globalization. Through a process of de-constructing and re-framing, they established an alternative construction of global processes.

It is ironic, of course, that some have called these activists "anti-globalization" forces. To some extent, the transnational social movements challenging neoliberal globalization have been as interconnected and networked and as dependent on modern information technologies as the forces they try to challenge. If interconnectedness, network organizations, and modern communication technologies are characteristics of globalization processes, "anti-globalization" movements are part and parcel of them. Which only serves to show, once again, how vaguely defined and unclear the concept of "globalization" remains to this day.

The main achievement of activists and transnational social movements opposing neoliberal economic globalization has been to open up the discursive space of the meaning structure constituted by "globalization" and to contest some of its hitherto dominant interpretations. At this point, we can move from a Foucaultian emphasis on the "power of discourse" to a Habermasian focus on the "power of the better argument." While a dominant discourse establishes structural power in the sense that it defines how the world does and ought to look like, what are the relevant questions to be asked and who is considered a legitimate and authoritative voice, it is always open to agency in the

sense that communicative practices and justifications can be challenged. To the extent that the globalization discourse as identified above contains universal truth claims, it is open to contestation. E.g., the claim that economic liberalization and market integration benefits everybody from the global North to the global South, has been successfully challenged by transnational activists. These groups contested almost every single claim by globalization proponents and, thus, to establish a counter-discourse. They suggested an alternative vision of the world that included alternative causal knowledge claims and alternative views of a justice and fairness in the global order. This counter-discourse succeeded in persuading enough audiences in the North and the South of the globe so that we can no longer speak of neoliberalism as the "dominant discourse" of globalization.

The establishment of a (neoliberal) globalization discourse and the rise of a counter-discourse focussing on global justice can be better understand if we take the mutual constitutiveness of agency and structure into consideration – the mantra of social constructivism. While discourses establish systems of meanings and interpretation and, thus, a structure of power, these communicative structures are being produced and re-produced by agents. The agents are not free-wheeling autonomous subjects who can change structures of power at will (no methodological individualism here!), but they are also not communicative robots that must always reproduce the dominant discourse. Rather, their communicative practices not only reproduce structures, but also (re-) interpret them. Thus, the ability to change and to contest dominant discourses is built into communicative practices, as Habermas reminds us.

A social constructivist reading of globalization as the discursive construction of interpretations, challenges to these interpretations and to established meanings, thus, provide a better understanding of the contested nature of these processes than conventional readings that concentrate only on the material forces at play. Moreover, a social constructivist understanding allows us to "bring politics back in", i.e., to challenge overly structuralist accounts of globalization that leave no room for agency and for political change. At the same time, it helps us to avoid voluntarist accounts so as if global social and material structures can be altered at will, "if we only want to."

5. **Deliberative Global Governance as a Response to the Legitimacy Deficit of Globalization?**

A final contribution of social constructivism to the study of globalization processes concerns their normative implications and particularly the question how these processes can be subjected to political steering. The emphasis on the constructed nature of globalization discourses implies, of course, that globalization does not mean the end of politics, but its transformation (see e.g. Beck 1997; Beck 2002). *Global Governance* has become the catchword for efforts at dealing with the political consequences of globalization and subjecting them to political intervention (see e.g. Commission on Global Governance 1995). More recently, some scholars have suggested Global Public Policy and tripartite policy networks – so-called public-private partnerships – to steer globalization processes politically and to include private actors – companies as well as advocacy networks alike – in these processes (e.g. Reinicke 1998; Reinicke and Deng 2000; for a critical review see Börzel and Risse forthcoming). The idea is that the inclusion of stakeholders is likely to make global governance both more legitimate and more effective in terms of enhancing its problem-solving capacity. The theoretical underpinnings of these ideas build, once again, on Habermasian notions of communicative action and discourse ethics (see e.g. Habermas 1992, 1996) which are then used to develop the concept of deliberative democracy.

Its proponents claim that deliberation constitutes a significant means to increase the democratic legitimacy of governance mechanisms, particularly in situations in which democratic representation and/or voting mechanisms are not available options (see particularly Held 1995; Wolf 2000; Bohman and Regh 1997; Elster 1998; Joerges and Neyer 1997; for the following see Risse forthcoming). Deliberation is based on arguing and persuasion as non-hierarchical means of steering to achieve a reasoned consensus rather than a bargaining compromise. The general idea of this literature is that democracy is ultimately about involving the stake-holders, i.e., those concerned by a particular social rule, in a deliberative process of mutual persuasion about the normative validity of particular rules. Once actors reach a reasoned consensus, this should greatly enhance the legitimacy of the rule thus ensuring a high degree of voluntary compliance in the absence of sanctions. As Ian Hurd put it, "(w)hen an actor believes a rule is legitimate, compliance is no longer motivated by the simple fear of retribution, or by a calculation of self-interest, but instead by an internal sense of moral obligation…" (Hurd 1999, 387). Such an internal sense of moral obligation that accepts the logic of appropriateness behind a given norm requires some measure or moral persuasion. Advocates of deliberative democracy argue, therefore, that deliberation and arguing not only tackle

the participatory deficit of global governance, but also increase voluntary compliance with inconvenient rules by closing the legitimacy gap.

However, institutional solutions in transnational governance to increase the deliberative quality of decision-making face obstacles which need to be addressed. There are several trade-offs between deliberation, accountability, and legitimacy to be considered. First, selecting the relevant stake-holders for transnational rule-setting processes is difficult. It is often unclear who the stake-holders are and whom they represent. While the actors involved in trisectoral networks rarely face serious internal accountability problems (see above), external accountability remains an issue. Deliberation requires participation of those in the policy-making process that are potentially affected by the rules. Take the World Commission on Dams, for example, a trisectoral body designed to develop rules for the construction of large dams. It was set up institutionally by the World Bank as a deliberative body to maximize arguing and learning. It produced a policy report, but there is little agreement in the literature and the policy world alike whether it actually achieved its goal of reaching a reasoned consensus that would allow the World Bank to construct a sustainable policy toward large dams without antagonizing the various stakeholders (See, e.g., Khagram 2000; KHAGRAM NEW BOOK; Dingwerth 2003).

Second and related to the first problem, decisions about selection of members in deliberative bodies with policy-making authority are about inclusion and exclusion. Whom to include, whom to exclude, and who decides about inclusion and exclusion represent, therefore, most contentious processes in the establishment of trisectoral public policy networks. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that specific stakeholder interests can usually be organized and represented much easier than diffuse stakeholder interests.

Third, once the stakeholders have been selected, how can deliberation and arguing be insured so as to improve the quality of the negotiations? Specific institutional settings are required that enable actors to engage in the reflexive processes of arguing. These settings must provide incentives for actors to critically evaluate their own interests and preferences, if the arguing process is supposed to go beyond simply mutual information and explicating one's preferences to others. At this point, a tradeoff between transparency and argumentative effectiveness in deliberative settings has to be considered. Many negotiation systems show that arguing and persuasion work particularly well behind closed doors, i.e., outside the public sphere (see Checkel 2001b). A reasoned consensus might be achievable more easily if secrecy of the deliberations prevails and actors are not required to justify their change of position and the like in front of critical audiences. Behind closed doors, negotiators can freely exchange ideas and thoughts more easily than in the public sphere where they

have to stick to their guns. Yet, transparency is usually regarded as a necessary ingredient for increasing the democratic legitimacy of transnational governance. If we can only improve the deliberative quality of global governance by decreasing the transparency of the process even further, the overall gain for legitimacy and external accountability might not be worth the effort.

This leads to a final point, namely potential tensions between accountability and deliberation. Negotiators – be it diplomats or private actors in trisectoral networks – usually have a mandate from their principals to represent the interests of their organizations and are accountable to whoever sent them to the negotiating body. As a result, there are limits in the extent to which they are allowed to engage in freewheeling deliberation. What if negotiators change sides in the course of negotiations because they have been persuaded by the better argument? Of course, it makes no sense to consider negotiators as nothing but transmission belts of their principals' preferences with no leeway at all. But it does raise issues of accountability, if negotiators are so persuaded by the arguments of their counterparts that they change sides. At least, one would have to require that they engage in a process of "two level arguing," i.e., of trying to persuade their principals that they should change their preferences, too.[5] It is not enough to institutionalize deliberative processes in multilateral negotiations including trisectoral public policy networks. There needs to be a communicative feedback loop into the domestic and other environments to which negotiating agents are accountable. Otherwise, one would sacrifice accountability and legitimacy for efficiency. "Two level arguing" might also be necessary to overcome the tension between effectiveness of deliberation in secrecy, on the one hand, and ensuring the transparency of the process, on the other.

6.   **Conclusions**

I have argued in this chapter that social constructivism contributes to our understanding of globalization in several significant ways. First, an emphasis on norms and cultural understandings identifies the global diffusion of cultural scripts and norms as part and parcel of globalization. Yet, this globalization remains incomplete in terms of both its global reach horizontally and its vertical penetration into national and/or local cultures. As result, we do not observe increasing cultural homogeneity across the globe, but varying degrees of hybrid and "glocalized" cultures linking the different local systems of meanings to the global in various ways.

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[5] "Two level arguing" is analogous to Putnam's "two level games," see Putnam 1988. I thank Mathias Koenig-Archibugi and David Held for alerting me to this point.

Second, social constructivism emphasizes the discursive construction of globalization. A Foucaultian perspective demonstrates how globalization discourses constitute power structures of domination and subordination. This view allows us to critically examine the various systems of meanings involved when we talk the "globalization talk." At the same time, a Habermasian perspective on discourse as reasoning introduces transformative potential into the alleged inevitability of globalization. Transnational social movements have successfully challenged the dominant neo-liberal view of globalization and have introduced a counter-discourse focussing on fairness, justice, and legitimacy.

Finally, if we treat global governance as a political response to globalization to enhance the legitimacy and problem-solving capacity of multilateral institutions, social constructivism helps us to critically examine some of the claims put forward by proponents of deliberative democracy on a global scale. A Habermasian perspective, once again, allows to discuss some of the trade-offs involved in making global governance more legitimate and more effective.

In sum, social constructivism does not offer yet another theory of globalization, if a theory of something as unspecified is possible at all. Yet, it serves as a critical perspective that allows students of globalization processes to challenge the conventional wisdom in the scholarly as well as the wider public discourse on these questions. Social constructivists are likely to share the approach of critical theorists asking about the winners and losers of globalization. They will also share the scepticism of those pointing to the fragmented and uneven nature of many processes identified with globalization. Last not least, social constructivists are likely to point out that globalization as a dominant discourse in world politics tends to reify existing power structures.

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